



Country profile: France

A report for the cross-European programme *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*



Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood



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Introduction

The programme

Working for Inclusion is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children is helping to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion. Taking place from February 2009 - January 2011, the programme encourages and facilitates discussion and debate over the role of the early years workforce. It will enable greater, more extensive and effective dialogue between local and national governments, education and qualification providers, employers, practitioners and policymakers.

Programme partners

The programme is led by Children in Scotland in partnership with:

La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy
Nordland Research Institute, Norway
Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland

Research

The programme encompasses research, which offers a clear picture of early years services and their workforce across the EU and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion. In addition, country profiles of Scotland and the UK, Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary have been produced. This data will contribute towards policy development at EU level as well as Scotland and the rest of the UK. The research is led by Professor Peter Moss and Dr John Bennett.

Study visits

Study visits in the four partner countries will address four key themes relating to poverty and social inclusion and the early years workforce. These visits will form the basis of a report on each theme, published by Children in Scotland on the project website (www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi), and publicised throughout member states at local and national levels.

Each partner country will provide the context for exploring particular key challenges within the early years workforce:

- Working with the child as an active agent in their own learning (Italy)
- Working with diversity, in particular ethnicity, language, disability and gender (Scotland)
- Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas (Norway)
- Exploring the role of the pedagogue in working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups (Poland).

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Glossary of key terms

Main services

Relais d'assistantes maternelles (child-minding networks): These networks are co-ordinated by professionals, who are often *éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (child educators). The goal is to facilitate interchange between child-minders and parents in order to improve the quality of these services. The networks are formed of *assistantes maternelles agréées* (licensed family daycarers) controlled by the *Protection Maternelle Infantile* or PMI (Mother and child protection), a departmental agency that regulates child care issues.

Etablissements d'accueil de la petite enfance (centres for the reception of young children). Centres receiving children on a permanent basis are known popularly as *crèches*; centres providing day care on an occasional or temporary basis are known as *halte-garderies* (part-time day care)

École maternelle – education centre for children 3-6 years run by the Ministry of Education

Main occupations

Puéricultrices (children's nurses), educated to bachelor degree level, have been until recently the lead contact personnel in the *établissements d'accueil de la petite enfance*. *Éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (child educators) are increasing in number and have special responsibility in the *établissements* for the social and cognitive development of young children

Auxiliaires de puériculture (nursing assistants)

Professeurs des écoles (school professors) are teachers in the *école maternelle*

ATSEMs – child assistants, educated to CAP or a secondary level certificate in early childhood, work as auxiliary staff in the *école maternelle*

The social context of early childhood

At a glance (all figures from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Factbook, 2009 or OECD in Figures, 2008)

Population: 64.3 million (including overseas territories); 61.7 million (metropolitan).
Total fertility rate: 1.98 ; Children in lone parent households: 11%
Employment rates: Men 68,6%; Women 59.4%. 21% of women and 5% of men were in part-time employment (both below the OECD average). Long-term unemployment at 40.4% is well above the OECD average of 29.1%.
GDP per capita at PPP \$32,686 (2007) (OECD average in 2007 was \$32,700)
Children 'at risk of poverty': 8% (all) of whom 33% are in lone parent families
Ratio of income of top 20% to income of bottom 20%: 5.5
Tax receipts as %GDP: 39% public expenditure on education as % GDP: 5.1% public expenditure on social protection as % GDP: 21.9%
Period of leave after birth: Up to three years, paid at variable rates according to eligibility for certain benefits. All employees are eligible for parental leave if they have worked at least one year for their employer before the birth of a child.

Government

France is a democratic unitary state, with three main levels of government: national, regional and municipal/communal. Decentralisation, confirmed by the constitutional reforms of 2003-4, has been ongoing since 1982 toward 22 administrative regions containing 96 departments (metropolitan France). There are also 13 territories outside metropolitan France. The executive branch of government is composed of the President, the Prime Minister and his/her government. At the moment, the centre right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) party is in power. With a GDP of \$2.865 trillion, France is the world's sixth-largest economy. It has substantial agricultural resources, a large industrial base, and a highly skilled work force. A dynamic service sector accounts for an increasingly large share of economic activity and is responsible for nearly all job creation in recent years. Real GDP increased 0.7% in 2008. According to Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

projections, 2009 GDP will decline by 3.3% (revised March 2009 forecast). Education is free, beginning at age two or three, and mandatory between ages six and 16. The public education system is highly centralized. Private education is primarily Catholic.

Demography

With a total fertility rate of 1.98 in 2007 and continued inward immigration, the population of France continues to increase. Like most European societies, it is an ageing population. France is also a multi-cultural society and is home to over five million citizens of African and Islamic descent. According to OECD figures, the metropolitan population of France in 2007 was 61.7 million inhabitants.

Employment of women

In 2007, the labour force participation rate was 59.4% for women aged 15-64. Of those, 21% (compared to 5% men) were in part-time employment. For mothers with a youngest child under six, the employment rate

The social context of early childhood

was 63.8% in 2007, and constituted 23% of all part-time employment. For mothers with a youngest child under three, the employment rate was 53.7%. Sole mother employment was 70% (the breakdown in full-time and part-time is not available).

Tax and social expenditure

France had a per capita income of \$32,700 in 2008, placing it in the median European range. Income inequality is likewise average for the EU. Taxation levels in France are above the European average. The country spends an above-average amount (proportionate to GDP) on both education and social expenditure (which includes old age, healthcare, disability, families and children, unemployment and housing).

Child and family poverty

As the relatively high birth rate in France may suggest, family policies are particularly generous in France. Expenditure on families with children is the highest among OECD countries, reaching 3.8% of GDP (the OECD average is 2.3%). The child poverty rate in France is about 8%, after the effect of fiscal transfers and social policies. Priority is generally given in the public crèche system to single mothers and to families in need. *Écoles maternelles* are encouraged to establish sections for children aged two and upwards in education priority zones.

Leave policies

Parental leave

At the birth of a first child, mothers in France have a right to 16 weeks of paid, job-protected *congé de maternité* (maternity leave), six of which is generally taken before the birth and ten weeks taken after the birth. From the second or later child, the maternity

leave is 26 weeks, with eight weeks to be taken before the birth and 18 weeks taken post-partum. The leave is also extended by at least eight weeks for multiple births. Since 2002, fathers are entitled to 11 days of paid, job-protected leave (*congé de paternité*). For many years, there was an unpaid parental leave until the child's third birthday, but this has recently been transformed into a three-year paid parental leave, known as the *Allocation Parentale d'Éducation* or APE. In order to facilitate women's transition back to employment, it is now possible to receive both the APE and a part-time job income for a limited period starting at least six months before the end of the APE. The current level of the allowance is €552.11 Euros per month. With the appropriate doctor's certificate, all employees have the right to take three days annual leave when their child is ill. Leave is extended to five days if the child is under one year or if the family has three children or more under the age of 16 years. No condition of duration of employment is required.

Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing

It is difficult to generalise about child-rearing attitudes as France embraces many populations: urban and rural; national and immigrant; highly educated and lowly educated; non-religious and religious, etc. In the above contrasting populations, the second group is more inclined to take the view that mothers should be at home with children if the male bread-winner earns enough for family needs. However, economic circumstances and the actual supply of services in a municipality have probably the most important impact on the child-rearing choices of families. In general, one can say that in France negative reactions toward placing a child in childcare services are few and equality of employment opportunity for women is considered very positively -

The social context of early childhood

although, *de facto*, male and female employment and remuneration rates differ. Early childhood services subsidised and monitored by the State or its institutions have the confidence of the population.

Historical overview (history of early childhood services in France)

In France, the *crèche* emerged with the industrialisation of the country, to meet the childcare needs of mothers working in factories in the urban areas. These *crèches* – or *salles d’asile* – were mostly initiated by philanthropists (including directors of factories) and *dames patronesses* (often Catholic). Their mission was twofold: to provide good health and hygiene to young children; and to provide moral education for both young children and their parents in working class neighbourhoods (see: Jean-Luc Noel and Luc Boltanski).¹ In parallel, there was the strong French tradition (royal and then bourgeois then modest people) of placing infants with *nourrices* (wet nurses) in the countryside (where a large number were dying). *Crèches* were also considered as a means of reducing the migration of babies.

Though the *écoles maternelles* (EM) – named *salles d’asile* in the beginning – have a similar origin (to take care of poor children whose parents were working in the factories), the development of the two sectors differs greatly. During the 3rd Republic (the 1880’s), when nation-building was strong, French governments were actively interested in the EM as a vehicle for creating the French Nation and disseminating the French language in all parts of the country. They were thus included very early in the French educational system and their number increased rapidly.

Crèches were considered much less important and left to the responsibility of charitable bodies. They became part of the ‘assistance publique’ only after WWII. Linked to the aim of reducing infant mortality, a ‘medical’ approach was adopted in the *crèches*, and in 1945 with the creation of the PMI, health staff were recruited into the *crèches* and a strong concern with hygiene and health practices developed.

From 1980 to 1983, a policy of

decentralisation was introduced – the ‘commune’ became responsible for the *crèche* sector, in cooperation with the State through the CAFs (Caisses des Allocations Familiales). In 1986, a ‘*contrat enfance*’ was introduced which financed municipalities to diversify and found not only *crèches* but also more family daycare (*assistantes maternelles*); part time *crèches* (*haltes garderies*); innovative services such as centres for babies and parents (*‘maisons vertes’*) (G. Neyrand 1995²); ‘*lieux d’accueil parents enfants*’ which parents with young children can attend on a sessional basis (B. Eme 1995³), and ‘*relais assistants maternelles*’ or childminders’ networks, linked to *crèches* where individual childminders can come freely with the children they are caring for.

CAF contributions to the municipalities cover not only the creation of places but also quality and so includes money for in-service training and for the creation of municipal early childhood coordinator posts (O. Baudelot & S. Rayna 2000⁴). Money can also be used to contribute to innovations such as “*actions ou classes passerelles*”⁵ in partnership with Ministry of Education. CAFs provide the money (about 40 to 60 % of the cost) to municipalities to stimulate quantity and quality of their provision. Recently this contract has grown into a more global one and has become a ‘*contrat enfance jeunesse*’ (without earmarking for young children). Municipal early childhood leaders are complaining, but as yet, there are few serious studies on the effects of this change.

An important decree on childcare was introduced in 2000, and revised in 2006 (promulgated 2007). The new decree authorised a new type of provision, micro-*crèches* (small groups of childminders working together out of the same apartment) and made the rules governing all *crèches* more flexible, especially for *crèches* in rural

Historical overview (history of early childhood services in France)

communities. The then minister, Philippe Bas, spoke of three 'levers' to improve the childcare situation in France: to increase the number of places; to diversify the types of services; and to strengthen quality in all services. The number of childcare places would be augmented to 362,000 places by 2012 at a cost of 440 million euros, with an operational annual cost of 371 million. For this to happen, 60,000 child-minders would have

to be recruited. Where diversification was concerned, the main measure was the authorisation of mini-crèches. A mini-crèche could receive between three and nine children, and have staff with childminder qualifications as the minimum requirement. In rural areas, one director could be responsible for two or three local crèches, while staff could be recruited as much on their experience as on formal qualifications.

Key concepts and important influences in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

During the 19th century and early 20th century, a strong health and hygiene tradition predominated in crèches in France, because of infant mortality concerns. This tradition remains until today: para-medical professionals, paediatric nurses and their assistants are the majority of the qualified professionals. In the late 1970s and 80s, crèches were further influenced by clinical work and studies on early separation (Spitz, Bowlby, etc) and today clinical psychology remains prominent in the crèche sector, with prevention goals still dominating over educational concerns.

More developmental concerns can also be seen during these decades, eg in 1965, thanks to the efforts of Irene Lezine, a new professional profile for crèches – *jardinière d'enfant* - was created in order to cater more adequately for the child's developmental needs. The crèches were also influenced by the social changes of May 1968 (Mozère, 1995)⁶. During the May events at the Sorbonne, students organized "crèches sauvages", which later were transformed into parental crèches. Likewise, the take-up of crèche places by more educated and rich families introduced more psychological views of the child and modified the representations

and practices of nurses, which was traditionally based on physical care. In 1973 the name *jardinières d'enfants* changed to '*éducateur/éducatrice de jeunes enfants*'. The Ministry of Sports and Youth are responsible for their training. They are a minority within the staff and are in charge of organising developmental activities. However, their profile is gaining respect, and since 2000 *éducatrices* have been allowed to become directors of small services, normally a post held by a paediatric nurse.

The *école maternelle* for children aged three to six is part of the primary school. Its primary purpose is to prepare young children for entry into primary school. The organisation of classes into age groups, the large numbers of children per group, the dominance of the teacher and instruction methods... all coincide to make the *école maternelle* a junior school. Because of unfavourable child:staff ratios (often reaching 28:1), the aims of more contemporary kindergarten models are difficult to pursue, for example the free socialisation of children, the agency and creativity of the child, learning through play and active experience, authentic setting language development and observing and listening to children.

The structure of ECEC

Overview

In France, a split system of provision is in operation: childcare for children aged between zero and three years is managed by the *Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité* (Ministry of Social Affairs, Employment, and Solidarity) while early education from age two to six years is managed by the Ministry of Education. The two sectors, childcare and early education, have traditionally been completely independent of each other. There have been a few moves to set up multi-purpose institutions, eg combined *crèches* and *écoles maternelles*, although economies and mutual learning could be achieved in this way.⁷

Main types of service provision

There are four main types of ECEC provision:

1. Family daycare (*assistantes maternelles*),
2. Centre-based care (*établissements d'accueil de la petite enfance*), both in the childcare sector;
3. The *école maternelle* for the early education of children aged three to six years and
4. *Out of school services (accueil préscolaire et centres de loisirs du mercredi)* for school-aged children.

The picture in the childcare sector is quite complex. Parental care (57% of children) and grand-parent/extended family care (5.1%) take most children in charge, followed by licensed family daycare (18.5%), and centre-based services (8.7%). This decentralised care system is managed and partially financed by the CNAF and the decentralised CAFs, and monitored by the *Protection Maternelle Infantile* or PMI, which is a departmental administration body regulating child care issues. Centre-based services take the form of *crèches collectives* (centre-based services run by municipalities, departments or non-profit

organisations); *crèches parentales* (parent cooperatives) are similar services where parents are involved in the daily management; *crèches familiales* linked with *assistantes maternelles* (family daycarers); *mini-crèches*, especially in rural areas (see above); *crèche d'entreprise* (company crèches, mostly in the public sector and in hospitals) *centres multi-accueil* (creches offering full-time, part-time and emergency places; often open longer hours and with different kind of personnel) and *haltes garderies* (centres providing temporary care for a number of hours) are among the most usual models in use. Some municipalities also have private *jardins d'enfants* open for two to six year olds. These vary in terms of opening hours and fees. Outside of school hours (and Wednesday afternoons) children may attend leisure time centres (*garderie* or *centre de loisirs sans hébergement*). *Halte-garderies* operated by municipalities and non-profit providers, offer part-time and occasional care, often for non-working parents or for parents who work non-standard hours.

Individual child care options include: *Assistantes maternelles agréées*, (literally "licensed maternal assistants"), that is family day care providers who care for one to three children in the provider's home on a regular basis. Most work directly for the parents, although some work within a family crèche network (*crèche familiale*). In-home caregivers (*garde à domicile*) work in the child's home and are not subject to the same regulations as family day carers.

Providers

In France, early childhood provision is predominantly public, but with nuances. In early education – and in schooling in general – the government sector delivers about 85% of *école maternelle* provision, the remainder being provided mainly by recognised non-

The structure of ECEC

profit bodies, especially by the Catholic system which is government dependent, that is, it is contracted and subsidised by the government to deliver services in accordance with state regulations (*sous contrat d'association avec l'État*).

In the childcare sector, the largest provider, childminders (*assistantes maternelles*) are paid directly by parents but constitute a semi-public service. They are licensed and regulated by the public PMI for periods of five years, are allowed to look after one to three children only, receive a minimum fee from parents, must undertake a minimum 120 hours of training and parents using their services receive tax relief. Likewise, the independent *crèches parentales* are highly subsidised by the public bodies and form part of the local childcare networks.

The governance of early childhood services

In France, childcare and early education fall under separate ministerial auspices. For children under three years of age, the *Ministère des affaires sociales, du travail et de la solidarité* (Ministry of Social Affairs, Employment, and Solidarity) and the *Ministère de la santé, de la famille et des personnes handicapées* (Ministry of Health, Family and Disabled Persons) develop the regulations for the different forms of non-school ECEC and define, with the national family allowance fund (*Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales - CNAF*), the goals and resources of the regional family allowance funds over a four-year period. The decentralised CAFs, (or *Caisses des allocations familiales*), are the key actors in supporting local policy development. Over the past 30 years, their priority has been to develop ECEC settings in partnership with the communes and non-profit associations, and sometimes with the *départements*. The *Direction Générale de l'Action Sociale* (General

Direction for Social Affairs) is the administrative unit responsible for non-school ECEC and is jointly affiliated to both ministries.

A sub-ministry focussing on youth affairs, (*Ministère chargé de la jeunesse*), works closely with the Ministry of Social Affairs in regulating and monitoring leisure-time centres and staff that serve children under 12 years.

In contrast, a single, universal model of pre-school education, the *école maternelle*, exists, and is available to all children aged from three to six years. The programme – fully funded and organised by the state – is part of the national education system, under the auspices of the *Ministère de la jeunesse, de l'éducation nationale et de la recherche* (Ministry of Youth, National Education, and Research). The Ministry of Education defines the curriculum, opening hours, and operations of the *école maternelle*. It recruits, trains, and remunerates the teaching staff and inspectorate. The physical infrastructure is the responsibility of the commune or municipality, including construction and maintenance of buildings, provision of class rooms and educational spaces and provision of pedagogical material. The municipality also provides *Atsems* (Agents Spécialisés des Écoles Maternelles) – teaching assistants with a vocational early childhood certificate to the *écoles maternelles*.

System financing

According to OECD Education At a Glance (2005), France invests 0.7% of GDP in early education services (the *école maternelle*), representing 11.7% of the education budget, but with 17.3% of education enrolments. Unit costs per child approach that of primary education but are considerably less than unit costs at secondary and tertiary levels. Public *écoles maternelles* (covering over 90% of the

The structure of ECEC

age group) are completely free except for meals, which, depending on municipal policies, are fully subsidised for families in need. Outside the school system, the financing of the ECEC system is relatively complex. Funding involves a number of different agents, direct and indirect grants to settings, as well as family subsidies and tax benefits. It is calculated that in centre-based care, families pay approximately 27% of costs, or about 12% of monthly income. The local CAF defines a family's contribution according to family income.

Staffing and training: The main contact personnel in the different service types are as follows:

In *crèches*, *haltes-garderies* and other services supervised by the PMI, staff were generally *puéricultrices* or children's nurses but increasingly, *éducateurs de jeunes enfants* are employed (less expensive, more available and with a more educational perspective). Assistant staff are *auxiliaires de puériculture*.

Écoles maternelles are staffed by *institutrices* and increasingly by *professeurs des écoles*, that is, the newer cohorts of teachers who have a basic three year university degree plus 18 months teacher training, allowing them to teach in both primary and early education. A weakness in this training – noted by the OECD review team – is that there is little specialised training in early childhood studies and pedagogy is relatively weak.

Data collection, monitoring and research

In France, data is collected on a regular and official basis on:

- The supply and distribution of early childhood services across the country.

- Enrolments and profiles of children enrolled (eg age, ethnicity, disability, class,).
- Care arrangements for children aged zero to 12 (ie who cares for them during the day, including out-of-school care).
- The workforce - numbers, qualifications, pay and profile (eg age, gender, ethnicity).
- Structural standards, eg ratios and group sizes (data collected by the Ministry of Education).

Monitoring is carried out at two levels in both sectors. The first level is by regular inspection, organised by the PMIs or municipalities in childcare and by national or *académie* inspectors in early education. The second level is through data collection and analysis by the line ministries, the CNAF and various other state bodies, researchers and NGOs. In the French system, data collection and analysis seem exemplary, but early childhood experts are concerned that the inspection of the *école maternelle* is carried out by primary school inspectors untrained in the early childhood field.

Where research is concerned, research from within the line ministries and their research bodies is strong (eg from the DREES (*Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques*)) but can be limited to government contracts judged for their practical contribution to the management of the system. Due to lack of funding, independent research is considerably weaker when compared, for example, with the UK where several high quality research journals in the early childhood field are published and a number of universities fund full-time university chairs in early childhood or in early development studies. Traditionally, teacher

The structure of ECEC

training colleges in France have not had a research mandate or been allocated funding for research. In the future, this may change as the teacher training colleges are now being

merged into the universities, which may allow the creation of more chairs and research in early childhood, if adequate funding follows.

Access levels and strategies

At a glance: Type of service and percentage of children enrolled

Home-based care	
Parental care	57%
Grand-parents, family care	5.1%
Domestic care	1.9%
Childcare services	Percentage enrolment
Licensed childminder	18.5%
Crèches	8.7%
Crèches familiales	1.9%
Unnotified childminding	1.4%
(Écoles maternelles)	21% of 2-year olds (2007)
Early education services	
Early education services	100% from the age of 3 years. C.
École maternelle	8% before age 3

Source :Estimations from data supplied by DREES

Admission criteria and procedures

The admission criterion for the *école maternelle* is simple: universal access is available to all resident children from the age of three years. In some of the education priority zones, children are admitted from the age of 30 months.

Childcare services are generally available on demand, particularly since the huge expansion of childminding in recent years -

from 70,000 *assistantes maternelles* in 1990 to nearly 290,000 in 2005, that is, a four-time increase in ten years. There are still notable shortages in the cities where *crèches* are the most popular form of childcare (because of the smallness of city apartments, childminders have difficulties in obtaining a license to practise). In theory, children from excluded groups, eg low income and ethnic minorities, generally receive first call on services, but waiting lists can be long and parents are obliged to enrol well in advance. As in other countries, parents from less educated backgrounds groups are less inclined to enroll their children in early childhood services.

Overall access levels

Access levels for French children to early childhood services are among the highest in the world: About 40% of children aged from zero to three years are enrolled, for at least part of the day, in childminder homes, *crèches* and early education services; and 100% of children are enrolled in early education (the *école maternelle*) from the age of three.

Children from low-income families

The child poverty rate in France is about 8%, after the effect of fiscal transfers and social policies. Priority is generally given in the public *crèche* system to families in need and costs are subsidised for these families. The *écoles maternelles* offer free universal coverage to all children from the age of three years and were (before the economic recession) encouraged to establish sections for children aged two years and upwards in education priority zones. Most *écoles maternelles* in urban areas offer a full day service, with late afternoon services supplied by different bodies.

Children with additional support needs and

Access levels and strategies

rights

Although inclusion is a stated aim of education in France, and attention is given to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the inclusion of children with additional support needs in mainstream early childhood groups has not been as widely practised as, for example, in Nordic or Italian pre-schools. According to informants, the tradition was to treat disability in children at this age in the home and through the health services and medical institutes. Data on the issue are difficult to obtain, perhaps because a number of ministries and bodies, which gather data in different ways, are involved.

Since 2001, an inter-ministerial policy has been put into place to employ *auxiliaires de vie scolaire* or AVS (school assistants) to provide assistance to special needs and other children to participate more fully in class activities. Different medico-social structures participate in this effort, especially the CAMSP

(*les centres d'action médico-sociale précoce*) or centres for early medico-social action, which provide advice and support to parents and the *écoles maternelles*. In March 2009, almost 13,000 AVS were employed, accompanying more than 43,000 children.

Ethnic and bilingual children

About 6% of preschoolers and elementary school children in France are non-French nationals, mostly from the Maghreb, West and Central Africa, and from Turkey, Portugal and other countries, but many more second language children – increasingly from Central and Eastern European countries – attend the *écoles maternelles* in urban areas. Districts of concentrated disadvantage are treated as priority education areas (*zones d'éducation prioritaire* or ZEPs), and their *écoles maternelles* receive extra posts and funding. Zones with a minimum of 20% immigrant children generally can open classes for young children from the age of two years.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

As the concept of quality is contested and differs widely from country to country, we have selected a number of criteria to examine, in particular, the training, qualifications, pay and work conditions of staff:

The workforce at a glance: (at least 50% of staff in centres must have professional diplomas)

Type of provision	Title of lead staff & assistant	Pre-service education required	Qualification level
Family daycare	Assistante maternelle (Day-care parent) Un-qualified worker	120 hours training and certification	Certificate
Crèche	<i>Puéricultrice</i> (child nurse)	Nurse or mid-wife diploma (Bacc. + 3) + 1 year specialisation	State diploma (Bachelor level)
	Éducateur de jeunes enfants (educator)	3 years in post Bacc. in special training centres	Tertiary university diploma B
	Auxiliary staff	A one-year formation with on-the-job training	Professional diploma level
École maternelle	Professeur des écoles (teacher)	3-year university degree + 2 years professional education, two-thirds of which will be a practicum and one-third tertiary level (training college) education. Secondary vocational level certificate in early childhood studies	Equivalent: Master's degree
	ATSEM (child assistants)		CAP Certificate

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

The main contact personnel in the different service types are as follows:

In *crèches*, *haltes-garderies* and other services supervised by the PMI, staff are generally *éducateurs de jeunes enfants*, *puéricultrices* (children's nurses) assisted by *auxiliaires de puériculture*. *Puéricultrices* have nurse or midwife qualifications plus 1.5 years of specialisation and *Éducateur de jeunes enfants* are trained (for three years post baccalaureat) in a training centre. *Auxiliaires de puériculture* study one year post BEPC. All public settings must follow the official staff qualification requirements. A minimum of 50% of staff are required to have a diploma of *puéricultrice*, *infirmière*, *éducateur de jeunes enfants*, or *auxiliaire de puériculture*. A quarter of the staff need to have qualifications related to health, social work, or leisure, and a quarter of the staff is exempt from any qualification, as long as the employer provides support for them to perform their work. *Écoles maternelles* are staffed by *professeurs des écoles*, that is, the newer cohorts of teachers who have a basic three-year university degree plus 18 months teacher training, allowing them to teach in both primary and early education. As the *école maternelle* is part of the primary school system, teachers are trained primarily for primary school teaching. As a result, certification (specialised training) in early childhood studies and pedagogy is relatively weak. Candidates for primary school teaching are recruited by public examination, open to candidates with a three-year university degree. They are trained for a further 18 months as *professeurs des écoles*. (The older pre-school teachers, *institutrices*, many of whom are still working in the system, were recruited at Baccalaureat level, followed by two years training). Widely publicised remarks from a recent minister indicate that he considered the qualification level for *école maternelle* teachers to be too high.

Work conditions and salaries

As with qualifications, work conditions and salaries vary depending whether one works in child care or education. *Professeurs des écoles* in *école maternelle* are State public employees (Cat. B/ Cat. A respectively). *Puéricultrices* (98% female) and *Éducateurs de jeunes enfants* (95% female) normally work for *collectivités locales* (communities) and non-profit associations as Cat B (public) employees, having the right to professional development and sometimes to management training. *Auxiliaires de puériculture* (more than 99% female) normally work for *Collectivités locales* as Cat C public employees, they are ineligible for regular professional development. All categories have a right to a state pension.

With few exceptions, staff work 35 hours (in France, minimum full-time hours per week), and receive official holidays. In childcare, staff work in shifts to cover full day opening hours. Career opportunities are limited, with no opportunity to move between childcare and education. In education, promotions are based mainly on seniority, always within the same professional band into which one was recruited. As a result, the workforce is very stable, particularly in early education where it is not unusual for a teacher to remain in the same school throughout her career. Some opportunities exist to be moved to another department, but strong justifications are needed, such as family reunion or responsibilities for one's children.

Workforce recruitment and evidence of shortages

There is no evidence of a shortage of workers for the *école maternelle*. On the contrary, candidates for the annual recruitment competition more than double the number of places available. In the childcare sector, some shortages are reported at the level of the

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different services but no real figures are available.

In regard to child-minders (*assistants maternelles*), 80,000 (out of a total of 290,000) will leave on pension between now and 2015. In parallel, the rate of replacement may decrease in coming years as the traditional recruitment pool, that is women of a certain education in their 40s who have completed the first stage of rearing their own children, is growing smaller because of the increasingly higher educational level of women. Already, some signs of a shortage can be seen, particularly in the cities; some families are obliged, because of the shortage of licensed places, to turn to non-licensed child-minders to look after their children. In both sectors, the ethnic origin of staff is more varied among auxiliaries and child-minders than among centre-based lead staff. To our knowledge, there is little discussion about the issue and no policy exists to right the balance.

Trade unions and other workforce organisations

The Association nationale des puericultrices/teurs (ANDPE) the Fédération nationale des éducateurs de jeunes enfants (FNEJE) and the *Syndicat National Unitaire des Instituteurs, Professeurs des écoles et PEGC* (SNUipp) are the main trade unions for the ECEC sector. Information about the extent of trade union membership is not available. Many *école maternelle* teachers are also members of the professional association AGEEM (*Association Générale des Enseignants des Écoles et classes Maternelles publiques*).

National standards

Child-staff ratios

In the *école maternelle*, there are no national regulations for staff-child ratios. In general,

the number of children per class has decreased over the years: from 30 in 1980, to 26 in 2007. In urban areas, however, child ratios are often greater, making it difficult for teachers to adopt a play-based methodology or to encourage child agency. In ZEPs (*zones d'éducation prioritaire*), schools receive additional posts and funds in order to reduce the child-staff ratios to maximum 25 children. In calculating ratios in mainstream *école maternelle*, one needs to take into account the presence of ATSEMs – sometimes one per class but more usually shared by classes.

In the *crèches*, the required staff-child ratio is 1:5 (for children who do not walk), and 1:8 for toddlers (children who walk). In the *jardins d'enfants*, the ratio for children over three years is 1:15 children. In family day care, licensed childminders are allowed to take in a maximum of four children. In all instances, buildings and apartments are continually supervised for their health, safety and appropriateness for educational work with young children.

Curricula for children 0-6 years

All *crèches* (private as well as public) are subject to national regulations, based on legislation developed by the responsible ministries, (in particular, the decree number 2000-762 of August 1st, 2000.) Each *crèche* should formulate a *projet social* and a *projet éducatif*, but a curriculum is not proposed. Article two of this decree establishes the qualifications required for personnel working in the public *crèches*:

All pre-schools follow the same national curriculum (current version 2002, 120 A5 pages long) focussing on five areas: oral language and introduction to writing; learning to work together; acting and expressing emotions and thoughts with one's body; discovering the world; and imagining feeling

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and creating. To assess children's learning, competencies have been identified in each of these areas, which children are expected to acquire at a level appropriate to their age. Three different learning cycles (*cycles d'apprentissage*) are proposed to children in the *école maternelle*, corresponding to each year: three to four, four to five and five to six years. To facilitate the transition from preschool to primary, the final year (age five to six years) is part of the cycle of *apprentissages fondamentaux* (foundation learning), which bridges the last year of *maternelle* and the first two years of elementary school. Ministry of Education evaluation tools are used by teachers to follow the progress of children, particularly in French language, in each of the cycles. Because of the tradition of the *école maternelle*, their primary school training, and the large numbers of children in their care, teachers use predominantly direct instruction methods to 'deliver' the curriculum.

There is no curriculum for childcare settings although services are required to develop a *projet d'établissement* including a description of the care, development and wellbeing of the children; services offered, special measures for children with handicaps or chronic illness and competencies and backgrounds of the professionals. Family *crèches* need also to outline plans for the training plan for assistants, the professional support provided and the monitoring of children. The *projet d'établissement* translates to a global vision of education and a child's development. Components include the *projet pédagogique*, translating these goals into practical daily activities; the *projet social*, situating the setting within the political, economic social and cooperative framework of the local area, reinforcing the centre's place in promoting social integration and civic engagement and preventing exclusion and inequality. The *projet d'établissement* also addresses how the

setting works with other partners – policy makers and other agencies.

Licensing and inspection

The national agency *Protection maternelle et infantile* (or PMI), under the auspices of the *Conseil Général* of the Department, has responsibility for licensing and monitoring services for young children outside the school system (including *crèches*, *assistantes maternelles*, *haltes-garderies*... Regulations set out in *Décret* 1/8/2000 and *Arrêté* 26/12/2000 address capacity, building requirements, parent role, adult/child ratio, group size, staff qualifications and affiliations. The reform of childminding since the year 2000 has led to a progressive professionalisation of the field. All childminders are required to be licensed by the PMI, although some remain outside the system. Most parents recognise, however, that licensing provides an assurance of safety and quality for children, so recourse to non-licensed childminders is relatively rare (1.4% of children only). Today, the law clearly defines the obligations of the childminder and her employer (parents of the child). It requires that the childminder looks after no more than three children and demands double the number of training hours (formerly 60 hours, now 120 hours). Payment is to be calculated on an hourly basis (formerly it was on a daily basis) and there are stricter obligations on the PMI (*Protection maternelle infantile* - the sponsoring agency) to regularly inform, support and train. All licensed *assistantes maternelles* are covered by social security, with replacements and annual holidays being taken into account. The organisation and operation of the *école maternelle* is regulated under the *Code de l'Éducation Décret*, 6/9/90, while *Arrêté* of 25/1/02 governs schedules and curriculum. *École maternelle* programmes are supervised by the *Inspecteurs de l'Éducation Nationale*

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(IEN). Within the framework of achieving national policy objectives in education, the *inspecteur d'académie* has the mission of defining educational policy for primary schools, including the *écoles maternelles*. An inspector in charge of the primary schools evaluates each teacher through observations and discussions about once every three to four years. The national agency *Protection maternelle et infantile* or PMI, under the auspices of the *Conseil Général* of the Department, has responsibility for licensing and monitoring services for young children outside the school system (including *crèches*, *assistantes maternelles*, *haltes-garderies*, CLSH, etc).

Attention to children's outcomes

The assessment of outcomes is considered an essential task in the French *école maternelle*. The Ministry of Education has made available a battery of assessment ideas on its website to assist teachers (<http://eduscol.education.fr/D0101/evaluations.htm>). Different departments and academies also publish their own assessment instruments. In general, these instruments consist of competences that should be acquired in the five different areas of the curriculum, such as oral language and introduction to writing, learning to work together, acting and expressing emotions and thoughts with one's body, discovering the

world and imagining, feeling and creating. The competences recommended in each domain can be quite detailed and are often used by teachers in the form of check-lists. One such checklist available on the web is 35 pages long! Assessment results for each child are carried out two or three times a year and communicated to parents. Discussions about the overly technical nature and lack of reflection in such an approach are rare, possibly because the rich theoretical tradition of the *école maternelle* has eroded over recent years.

Family and community involvement

In the *école maternelles*, the *loi d'orientation* of 1989 recognised parents as members of the education community and encouraged their participation in school life. Parents are formally represented on the elected school council (*Conseil d'école*), but they are not involved in decisions about curriculum (made solely by the Ministry of Education) or about pedagogy, which remains the sole responsibility of the teaching team. Parents, whose schedules allow it, can also have regular contact with teachers at the beginning and end of the day. Formal parent-teacher conferences take place at least once a year, but on the whole parental outreach, consultation and involvement are weak.

Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school

In France, the transition between the *école maternelle* and primary school is eased by the fact that these institutions often share the same building and the same understanding of education. Teachers and children from each section meet regularly, and a pre-primary class can easily arrange to visit their future classroom in the primary school. The Ministry of Education has elaborated a common basic learning cycle (*cycle des apprentissages*

fondamentaux), that begins in the last year of the *maternelle* and continues into the first two years of primary school. In addition, all teachers in *école maternelle* have been trained as primary school teachers, so children in the *école maternelle* are well accustomed to primary school organisation, discipline and instruction methods. Whether this is suitable for young children is rarely discussed in France.

Out-of-school services

Out-of-school services are provided in urban areas when the pre-schools (and schools) are no longer in operation. On Wednesdays, after-school, and during short vacations, *Centres de Loisirs Sans Hébergement* (CLSH – non-residential leisure centres) serve about 280 000 of the 2.2 million children aged three to six (about 13%). 53% of CLSH are operated by non-profit associations, 42% by the communes, and 5% by businesses, the CAF or individuals. They are open about 100 days per year. These centres and activities are taken in charge by qualified animators (*animateurs*).

After-school care, linked to recreational activities and guided home-work, is increasing required by working parents. These activities are taken in charge by the municipality or local associations. Links with the school and the teaching staff are weak.

Current issues and development

According to the experts consulted, the following are some of the issues that need research and further examination.

In the childcare sector

The tradition of medicalising and psychologising centre-based services continues to undermine attention to the learning and socialisation needs of young children. In this regard, the creation of the profession, *éducateurs de jeunes enfants*, has had a positive impact on understandings and approaches to young children.

A tendency in recent years to expand and diversify the childcare sector, without taking into account the findings of international research. For example, the recent push since 2000 to expand the child-minder network (which now accounts for over half the licensed, non-parental care in France) has raised little opposition in France, even though

international research indicates that centre-based care is generally of more benefit to young children (EACEA, 2009). In addition, several surveys suggest that centre-based care is the preferred mode of care of most French parents. The policy of diversification (but not of diversity), suggests that the State may be adopting a less expensive means of care, with less qualified personnel, justified (as is usual in these situations) as offering greater diversity and choice to parents. Diversity issues may be insufficiently addressed. Although much can be said in favour of the French approach to diversity (equal treatment for all with preferential treatment for low-income groups), the fact is that diversity exists and may need addressing through more inter-cultural programming. The failure to integrate more successfully children from diverse backgrounds may be reinforced by prevailing mono-cultural education models, in which the views of parents and diverse communities are not taken into account.

In the early education sector

In recent years, the official view of the *école maternelle* as part of the primary education system has been strongly reinforced through high child:staff ratios, the lack of comprehensive services, a common training of primary and early childhood staff, with early childhood specificities receiving minor attention and the introduction of a curriculum and learning standards in the *école maternelle* but without the necessary formation of teachers to practice a pedagogy of listening and observing, of care and upbringing as well as instruction.⁸

Studies by Jarousse, Mingat, Richard (1992) showed a positive effect on achievement, especially in French and mathematics, from early enrolment in the *école maternelle*. More recent studies by the French Ministry of Education show equally good effects, including

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for two year old children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Caille, Rosenwald, 2006). Yet, research by Florin (2006) indicates that the current reception of young children at the *école maternelle* is not ideal for cognitive and language development, while the 2007 report of the Haut Conseil de l'Éducation suggests that the *école maternelle* should share responsibility for the mediocre achievement levels of French schools. Overall, there is reason to believe that the formal approach of the *école maternelle* may not always be effective for children from low-income and second-language backgrounds. More independent research is needed on this subject.

The child:staff ratios in the French *école maternelle* make it difficult for teachers to adopt appropriate pedagogical practice with the young children in their care or to give sufficient attention to individual children.

Notes

¹ Luc, Jean-Noël: historien français spécialiste d'histoire de l'éducation et auteur de *L'invention du jeune enfant au XIXe siècle. De la salle d'asile à l'école maternelle*, Paris, Ed. Belin. Il est professeur à l'université Paris IV-Sorbonne Boltanski, Luc (* 1940) is the leading figure in the new "pragmatic" school of French sociology. He is a professor at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris and author, with Laurent Thévenot of: *On Justification. The Economies of Worth*, 2006, Princeton University Press.

² G. Neyrand (1995) *Sur les pas de la maison verte*,

³ B. Eme (1995) *La croisée des liens*

⁴ O. Baudelot et S. Rayna (2000) *Coordinateurs et coordination municipale de la petite enfance, pari*, INRP

⁵ L. Dupraz (1995) *Le temps d'appivoiser l'école*, Paris, La Fondation de France
T. Estienne (2007) *Les classes passerelles de la ville de Roubaix, un accueil des enfants de deux*

ans à l'école, in S. Rayna et X. Belan (coord) *Quel accueil demain pour la petite enfance ?* Toulouse, Eres

S. Rayna (2007) *Des passerelles entre familles et école* (article paru en italien dans la revue *Bambini*)

⁶ MOZÈRE L. (1995) *Le printemps des crèches*. Paris : l'Harmattan.

⁷ The *classe passerelle* (transition class) for children 2-3 years was one example of co-operation, but their creation is currently less favoured by municipalities. These classes were developed mostly in disadvantaged, immigrant areas and are staffed by an educator and a primary school teacher

⁸ It is excellent to have a curriculum and learning standards for the age group, but pedagogical practice needs also to be appropriate. Independent analyses of practice in the *école maternelle* point to the predominance of cognitive goals and an emphasis on preparation for school rather than on peer socialisation and the agency of the child.

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