



Country profile: Sweden

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



This report forms part of *Working for Inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*. It is a European Union-wide programme funded by the European Commission and supported by the Scottish Government.

www.childreninScotland.org.uk/wfi



Children in Scotland
every child - every childhood

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).

Contents

Glossary of key terms	5
Social context of early childhood	6
Demographic, social and economic	6
Government	6
Employment of parents	7
Tax and social expenditure	7
Leave policies for young children and their families	7
Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing	8
Historical overview (19th century to present)	9
Key concepts and important influences in ECEC	11
Key concepts and important influences	11
The structure of ECEC	12
Service organisation and provision	12
The governance of early childhood services	12
System financing	13
Data collection, monitoring and research	14
Access levels and strategies	15
Overall access levels	15
Access levels for different groups	15
Children with Additional Support Needs and rights	16
Strategies to promote inclusion	16
Conditions for quality improvement and assurance	17
Workforce	17
Other conditions of quality	18
Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school	21
Note on out-of-school services	22
Current developments and issues	23
Notes	24
Acknowledgments	25

Glossary of key terms

Main services

Förskola (pre-school) – centre for children from one to six years

Öppen förskola (open pre-school) – service for pre-school children accompanied by parent, family day carer or other carer

Familjedaghem – family day care for children from one to twelve years

Förskoleklass – class in school for six year olds

Fritidshem – out-of-school care and recreation, usually integrated into school

Main occupations

Förskollärare – pre-school teacher

Barnskötare – pre-school worker with lower level of qualification

Dagbarnvårdare - family day carer

Fritidspedagog – pedagogue working in fritidshem and school

Other terms

Havandeskapspenning – maternity leave

Pappadagar – paternity leave

Föräldraförsäkring – parental leave

Social context of early childhood

At a glance

Population: 9.2 million; **Density:** 22 inhabitants per km²; **Total fertility rate:** 1.85; **Children in lone parent households:** 19%

Part-time employed as % all employed: 40% (women), 12% (men); **maternal employment:** 72% (child under 3 years), 81% (child 3-6 years)¹

GDP per capita at PPP as % EU27 average: 122%; **Children 'at risk of poverty':** 9% (all), 20% (lone parent); **Ratio of income of top 20% to income of bottom 20%:** 3.5

Tax receipts as % GDP: 48.5%; **public expenditure on education as % GDP:** 6.2%; **public expenditure on social protection as % GDP:** 32%, of which 3% on family/children.

Period of leave after birth: 240 days per parent; 390 days paid at 80% of previous earnings (60 days for fathers; 60 days for mothers; remainder to be divided as parents choose) + 90 days at low flat rate

Demographic, social and economic

Sweden has a population of just over 9 million, with a density well below the average for the EU27, reflecting the country's large size with many sparsely populated areas, especially in the North of the country. The fertility rate is above the average for the EU but still below the replacement rate.

Swedish is the mother language for a large part of the population, around 8 million. In addition, the Minority Language Committee has formally declared five minority languages: Finnish, Sami, Romani, Yiddish and Meänkieli (Tornedal Finnish). Sweden has a history of providing refuge for asylum seekers, up to the present day; today, for example, Sweden has one of the largest exile communities of Assyrians/Syriacs, who have fled Iraq. This high level of immigration is reflected in the statistic that 12 per cent of the population being foreign born. This has increased the proportion of the population for whom neither Swedish nor the officially recognised minority languages are a mother tongue. In summary, Sweden has become more multi-lingual in recent years and a

substantial minority of children in Early Childhood Education and Care (17 per cent in pre-schools in 2008) have a mother tongue other than Swedish.

Sweden has a high level of per capita income by EU standards, about a quarter more than the EU average, and compares well on disadvantage and inequality. About one in 10 children live in poverty, well below the EU25 average, and the level of income inequality (using the income ratio of the 20 per cent highest and lowest in the population) is well below the average. Sweden is one of five member states where child poverty is below average *and* the risk of children being in poverty is lower than or equal to the overall population (SPC, 2008: 15, Table 1). Sweden is ranked second among EU member states for child well-being, and third in the world on the Gender Gap Index.

Government

Sweden is a unitary state, with three main levels of government: national, county (*Län*) and municipal (*kommun*). There are 21 counties and 290 *kommuns*; the latter vary greatly in size

Social context of early childhood

from large towns and cities to sparsely populated rural communities. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there has been strong decentralisation to *kommuns*, who today have the main responsibility for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, schooling, and welfare services.

Employment of parents

Employment levels are high among women with children below school age; nearly three-quarters of women with a child under three years are employed, while the employment rate for women with a youngest child aged three to six years is only slightly lower than for all women (OECD, 2007, Table 1.1).¹ Levels of part-time employment are high, among all workers as well as parents, and especially for women. Mothers are more likely than fathers to work part-time hours; 50 per cent of employed mothers with two children with the youngest being one to two years old worked part-time in 2005, compared to only seven per cent of employed fathers (Statistiska Centralbyrån 2007, cited in Haas, Duvander and Hwang, 2009).

Tax and social expenditure

Taxation levels are among the highest in Europe, tax receipts being just under half of GDP. The other side of this coin is high levels of benefits (including well paid parental leave) and of services (including ECEC); public expenditure on education, social protection and family and child benefits (within social protection) are among the highest in the EU. With Hungary, Sweden also shows the largest difference between 'at risk' poverty rates before and after social transfers (ie. benefit payments have a large impact on poverty rates) (Wall et al., 2009: Figure n.2).

Leave policies for young children and their families

Sweden was the first country to introduce parental leave in 1974 and today has one of the most developed systems in the world. Parents

may take up to 16 months (480 days) leave after a child's birth, but taking leave is greatly facilitated by a payment system that replaces 80 per cent of earnings for 390 days, followed by 90 days at a low flat rate. Of the 390 days of well paid leave, 60 days is only for the father, 60 days only for the mother and the remainder can be divided between parents as they choose. The system is very flexible: paid leave can be taken full time or in various part-time options (and extended accordingly), in one continuous block of time or several shorter ones, and at any time until a child is eight years old. In addition, fathers are entitled to 10 days paternity leave in connection with the child's birth. Parents can take up to 120 days of paid leave (at 80 per cent of earnings) per year in the case of a child or children under 12 years of age being ill (leave can be taken for older children, with a doctor's certificate). Parents are also entitled to work part-time (75 per cent eg six hours a day) until a child is eight years of age, but this is unpaid.

In 2004, about 80 per cent of fathers took paternity leave, for an average of 9.7 days out of the 10 days available. Almost all families use paid parental leave and, despite the possibility of spreading leave over a child's first eight years, the majority of parents take the main part of the leave before their child reaches the age of two. With an entitlement to an ECEC place for a child from 12 months, this means that leave and ECEC policy are closely coordinated (as paid leave ends, ECEC begins), and that most parents take leave during their child's first year, then enter their child into ECEC during the child's second year.

Ninety per cent of fathers of children born in 1998 have taken some parental leave, mainly starting when their children were 13 to 15 months of age. Mothers, however, still take most parental leave, although the proportion of total days used by men has been increasing. In 1987, fathers took about seven per cent of total parental leave days that year; by 2008, it had increased to 21.5 per cent. The introduction of a father's quota in 1995 (one month reserved for

Social context of early childhood

fathers) and its extension in 2002 (to two months) have both led to more fathers taking more leave, though the second month had a less dramatic effect than the first.

Leave to care for sick children is more often used by mothers, who accounted for just under two-thirds (64.4 per cent) of days taken in 2008. No official statistics are kept concerning whether parents working part time are using their entitlement to work reduced hours, or whether they were working in part-time jobs to begin with (Haas et al., 2009).

Current cultural attitudes to child-rearing

Over the years public attitudes towards ECEC have evolved, so that today the service is widely used for children over 12 months and positively viewed by most groups in society, with high levels of satisfaction among users. In an evaluation by Skolverket in 2007 (Barns omsorg), 93 per cent of parents reported themselves satisfied and pleased with pre-school; and most of their children attended for the amount of time that their parents wanted.

Current attitudes, and their change over time, are summed up in a recent UNESCO report:

Enrolling children from age one in full-day

pre-schools has become generally acceptable. What was once viewed as either a privilege of the wealthy for a few hours a day, or an institution for needy children and single mothers, has become, after 70 years of political vision and policy-making, an unquestionable right of children and families. Furthermore, parents now expect a holistic pedagogy that includes health care, nurturing and education for their pre-schoolers (Lenz Taguchi and Munkammar, 2003: 27).

As this quote implies, parents seem to favour home care (by both parents) until a child is around 12-15 months of age, after which age they see entering pre-school as a positive move offering benefits to the child. There is also widespread acceptance that women with children can work and that fathers should take an active role in childrearing, as shown in leave policies designed to encourage and support paternal use and continuing discussions and initiatives from governments of left and right to increase sharing of care among parents. The centre-right government elected to office in 2006 recently introduced an economic incentive - 'gender equality bonus' (*jämställdhetsbonus*) - for families to divide parental leave more equally between the mother and the father.

Historical overview (19th century to present)

1854: first crèche opened in Kungsholmen in Stockholm, to provide care and protection for children of poor working mothers. Early crèches run by foundations and churches.

1890s: first kindergartens (*barntädgården*) opened, providing part-time pre-school education for middle-class children from three years of age.

1904: first public kindergarten opened at Froebel Training College in Norrköping, for all children and with low or no fee.

1932: Alva Myrdal proposes the 'bigger nursery' (*storbarnkammare*), public provision that was of high quality with well educated staff, to provide for children of all working mothers without stigma.

1943-4: first state operating grant for ECEC and for Training College; Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and National Board of Health and Welfare given primary responsibility for ECEC and its expansion.

1950s: "decade of the Swedish housewife" (Korpi, 2007: 19). Crèches were questioned and men wanted women back in the home after the war; while kindergartens/ playschools were not questioned, part-time attendance being widely viewed as good for children.

1960s: fast growing economy and labour shortages met by migrant labour and employment of women. Expansion of day care centres and family day care and improved maternity leave.

1968-72: National Commission on Child Care (*Barnstugeutredningen*). "The Commission's report was the first extensive official document on the goals, organisation, content and practice of early childhood education, and laid the foundation for pre-schooling in the latter part of the 20th century." (Lenz Taguchi and Munkammar, 2003: 11). The Commission proposed a pedagogical approach (dialogue pedagogy), ways of working (team work) and a

type of integrated provision (the 'pre-school', combining day care centres and kindergarten).

1974: introduction of paid parental leave.

1975: Pre-school Act (*Förskolelagen*). Every six-year-old entitled to 525 hours per year of state-funded pre-schooling to be provided by *kommuns*.

1970s: start of rapid expansion of ECEC, the coverage rate for children more than trebling between 1975 and 1990.

Mid-1980s: Shift from centralised to decentralised regulation, from governing by rules and guidelines to governing by goals. System becomes more decentralised, with role of *kommuns* growing, liberal and heterogeneous, giving more choice.

1990-91: *Kommuns* become responsible for employing school teachers and have increased autonomy for decisions about staff, including pay rates. Local Government Act gives *kommuns* more freedom, including budgetary; many use this to integrate responsibility for pre-schooling and schooling into one department. Earmarked funds for early childhood services replaced by general block grants, giving *kommuns* more control over expenditure. Legislation allows parents to enter six year olds into school; *kommuns* given to 1997 to provide places in preschool classes in schools for all six year olds. Unions for teachers, preschool teachers and free-time pedagogues merge.

1995: *kommuns* legally required to provide for children with employed or studying parents or children with additional needs from 12 months of age, within three months of application.

1996: Responsibility for ECEC and free-time services transferred to Ministry of Education and Science (from Ministry of Social Affairs). Support for *kommuns* that had not yet integrated preschool and school administration

1998: Preschool curriculum introduced.

Historical overview (19th century to present)

Kommuns must provide preschool classes in schools for all six year olds. Curriculum for the compulsory school system revised to include preschool classes and free-time services.

2001-2: entitlement to (part-time – 15 hours/week) ECEC extended to children from 12 months of age with non-employed parents or parents on parental leave. Education of pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues integrated into single framework. *Kommuns* agree on maximum fees for pre-schools recommended by government (*Maxtaxa*).

2003: Introduction of universal free provision (525 hours/year) for four and five year olds.

2008: proposal to reform preschool teacher education; extend free period of pre-school attendance to three year olds in 2010; introduce 'child care allowance' for parents *not* using publicly-funded pre-schools.

Key concepts and important influences in ECEC

Key concepts and important influences

Swedish ECEC is based on the twin concepts of early education as the first stage in lifelong learning and of 'education-in-its-broadest sense'. The integration in 1996 of ECEC into the education system was driven by the former idea. While the latter integrative concept is expressed in the 1998 pre-school curriculum which states that "the pre-school should be characterised by a pedagogical approach, where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole" (Ministry of Education and Science, 1998: 14).

More specifically, a government report on "Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden" summarised the basic principles of pre-school education as:

Continuous learning and development in close interaction with the surroundings; children learn the whole time and with all their senses. Play and theme-oriented work. Play is of fundamental importance for children and constitutes the basis for pre-school activity. Thinking, imagination, creativity, language and cooperation are developed. Through theme-oriented work, children have more opportunities to understand inter-relationships and contexts and test their own theories about their surroundings.

Linkage to the child's own prior experiences and knowledge. To learn something new, children must be able to relate it to what they already know, have experienced and are interested in. The pedagogical importance of care. Care is of pivotal importance to the child's sense of well-being, and thus a precondition for development and learning. Care also has a pedagogical element, especially for younger children, since it provides experiences and knowledge through which they learn about themselves and the surrounding world.

Development in groups. The child group is an asset for learning and development. Children need to experience joy together, and adults or toys cannot replace the child's need for other children. Children who are recognised and validated by adults as individuals function well in groups (Regeringskansliet, 1999: 50-51).

A third important concept is democracy. The pre-school curriculum states that "democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school...all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values" (6).

There have been many influences on ECEC in Sweden, but the pedagogical work of Reggio Emilia is particularly important. This is recognised in a recent government-published book, written by a (now retired) senior official, which also identifies some of the reasons for this relationship:

(Reggio Emilia's philosophy and pedagogy) contains the fundamental characteristics which are also part of Swedish pre-school pedagogy – the child as an active, competent and exploring being, project and theme-oriented working approaches and the democratic perspective on the child's acquisition of knowledge and learning. The Reggio Emilia inspiration is based on respect for the child, a being with many resources, and curious, a child with a hundred languages, with his/her own dynamics and desire to learn (Korpi, 2007: 66).

Many pre-schools work with Reggio Emilia inspiration, and are supported in this work by the Reggio Emilia Institute based in Stockholm.

Other influences on current pre-schools include Montessori and Steiner.

The structure of ECEC

Sweden has a completely integrated system of ECEC for children from 12 months to six years (72 months), covering access, funding, workforce, provision, regulation and curriculum. In August of the year children turn six years, nearly all children enter school, spending a year in a pre-school class before compulsory school age, which is seven years.

Service organisation and provision

Main types of service provision

The main type of provision in Swedish ECEC is the pre-school (*Förskola*), an 'age integrated' centre taking children from 12 months to six years. The pre-school is open all year and all day, with opening hours fitted to meet the needs of working parents. They can vary in size, from one to six groups of children, but with three to four groups probably most common.

In addition, there is family day care (*Familjedaghem*), which also offers all year and full-day provision; and 'open pre-schools' (*Öppna förskolan*), which offer part-time activities to children (mostly under three years) accompanied by a parent or other carer.

The proportion of children attending ECEC who are in family day care has fallen steadily over the years, and was only 4.3 per cent by 2008 (Skolverket (2009), *Beskrivande data om förskoleverksamhet, skolbarnsomsorg, skola och vuxenutbildning, 2009 – Skolverkets rapport 335*; <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/1664>). Between 2000 and 2008, the number of family day carers fell from about 10,500 to 5,100. Pre-school is most common in cities, family day care in small or sparsely populated *kommuns*. The number of open pre-schools has also fallen markedly from a peak of around 1,600 in 1990 to 447 in 2004, after which they increased gradually to reach 476 by 2008.

These forms of provision cover children up to six years (ie. around 72 months), while compulsory

school age remains seven years. Six year olds used to be in pre-schools, but since the early 1990s they have moved into another form of provision, the pre-school class (*Förskoleklass*). These are available for 525 hours/year, and with a very few exceptions are located in schools. *Kommuns* have an obligation to provide these classes for all six year olds, and parents overwhelmingly choose to send their children to them; children attending these classes use the care and recreation services (*fritidshem*) in their schools.

Providers

ECEC services, including family day care, have usually been provided by *kommuns*, ie. the public sector. Since 1991, when independent pre-schools were permitted, there have been growing numbers of independent services. However, this development has been slow and municipal pre-schools still account for the great majority of children using ECEC (82 per cent of children in pre-schools in 2008 compared with 88 per cent in 1996). Moreover, most independent pre-schools are not for-profit, with parent and staff co-operatives and other non profit organisations the most common form (10 per cent); most of the remainder, 7.5 per cent, are run for profit.

The governance of early childhood services

National level

Sweden has had an integrated system of ECEC for several decades, and responsibility for the system was originally in the welfare system, with the Ministry of Social Welfare. In 1996, together with care and recreation services for schoolchildren, responsibility for ECEC was moved into the education system, specifically the Ministry of Education. In the School Division of the Ministry, 20 people work on issues concerning pre-schools and schools. They adopt a one to sixteen years perspective, rather than specialising in pre-schools or schools, co-operating on all questions.

The structure of ECEC

The Ministry has a strategic role, defining goals and principles for policy development. A key role in implementation is played by the National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*). The role of *Skolverket* is to support actively the implementation of policy goals and principles, with a focus on development and evaluation:

The Agency steers, supports, follows up and evaluates the work of municipalities and schools with the purpose of improving quality and the result of activities to ensure that all pupils have access to equal education ...The Agency addresses principal organisers, school managers, school heads, and teachers within preschool and school age childcare, compulsory school, upper secondary school and adult education. Pupils and parents are sometimes target groups for the Agency. An important mission is to give evidence based feedback and analyses of the situation in Swedish education system to the Government ... The Agency establishes frameworks and guidelines for how the education is to be conducted and assessed using goal documents, syllabuses, tests, grading criteria and general guidelines

(*Skolverket*, 2008)

Local level

In the decentralized system of governance in Sweden, *kommuns* play a central role in implementing policy and delivering services. As already noted, they are the main providers of ECEC services; they also play a major role in interpreting and implementing national policy, for example the pre-school curriculum, and for supporting the development of local services. They determine working conditions, eg pay rates, and standards, eg group size and adult: child ratios. Most *kommuns* today have a department responsible for ECEC services and schools.

System financing

Unit cost per child per year (2006):
pre-school – SEK 105,000 (€9,535);
family day care – SEK 84,300 (€7,655)²
(Korpi, 2007: 83)

Proportion of costs paid by parents (2006):
pre-school - 8%;
family day care -10% (ibid.)

Costs for a 2 year old as % gross earnings of average production earner: 6%
(Immervoll & Barber, 2005)

Funding comes from two sources: *kommuns* and parents.³ Since 2003, four and five year old children receive 525 hours per year of free attendance (to be extended in 2010 to three year olds). For the remaining costs, there is an upper limit on what parents pay – a 'maximum fee' (*maxtaxa*). The maximum fee is related to income and the numbers of children from a family attending ECEC. Families pay three per cent of income (up to a maximum of SEK 1,260 (€114) a month) for the first child attending; two per cent (maximum SEK840 (€76) for the second, and one per cent (SEK420 (€38)) for the third. No family pays more than SEK 2,280 (€206) a month, no matter the number and age of children using services (including leisure time services for children at school).

This funding system means that costs for children under four years are relatively low, and even lower for children over four.

The well paid system of parental leave provides a high subsidy to parents providing home care for children in the first year or so. From July 2009, a further benefit has been introduced: a childcare allowance that each local *kommun* can decide whether or not to introduce in their area. The allowance has been set at a maximum of SEK 3,000 (€272) per month for each child between one and three years of age. To be

The structure of ECEC

entitled to the maximum benefit, parents should not use the public ECEC system, so parents can get the allowance if they work full time but make private arrangements for childcare. The purpose of the childcare allowance is to increase choice for parents, between using publicly-funded ECEC, making private childcare arrangements and staying at home.

Data collection, monitoring and research

Skolverket collects and publishes statistical information on services in the education system, including ECEC, on a regular basis; this includes numbers of children attending by age and type of provision; type of provider; group size; numbers and qualifications of staff; and public expenditure.

In addition, Skolverket undertakes focused studies of the education system. Recent studies of ECEC have included an evaluation of the effect of changes in funding between 2001-2003 (free hours of attendance and the maxtaxa); and two evaluative reports on pre-school reforms, published in 2004 and 2008.

Access levels and strategies

Attendance at formal ECEC services (EC, 2006):

Birth to 3 years: 44% (27% attend 30 hours a week or more);
3 to 6 years: 92% (58% attend 30 hours a week or more)

Attendance at informal ECEC provision:

birth to 3 years: 4% (2% attend 30 hours a week or more)

Attendance rate at formal services for children under 3 years by educational level of mother (2005):

low education=52%;
medium education=56%;
high education=47%

Attendance rate by area for children 1-6 years (2004): Highest regional rate:

61%; lowest regional rate: 52%

Overall access levels

All children, whether or not their parents are employed, are entitled to a place in pre-school or family day care from 12 months of age. Before 12 months of age, children are assumed to be cared for at home by parents taking parental leave; in 2008, there were only eight children under 12 months of age enrolled in ECEC services in the whole of Sweden. The number attending grows rapidly after 12 months of age: in 2008, attendance at pre-schools (which account for most provision) was 46 per cent for one year olds, 86 per cent for two year olds, 90 per cent for three year olds, and 93 per cent of four to five year olds; family day care provided for another 4.3 per cent of one to five year olds (Skolverket, 2009).

Very few children under three years of age use informal provision; attendance rates at formal provision are more than ten times higher.

Access levels for different groups

Attendance rates are high for children under and over three years, especially if account is taken of the very few children under 12 months attending ECEC services. The entitlement to provision and the reforms to funding have increased

accessibility for all children. The proportion of one to six year olds attending ECEC services increased from 68 per cent in 2000 to 77 per cent in 2005, with more than 95 per cent for four and five year olds.

ECEC services, which are a universal entitlement from 12 months of age, are widely available across the country and in all types of area and recent reforms (eg extending entitlement to pre-schools to all children; the maxtaxa (maximum fee); and free periods of attendance for four and five year olds) have increased access further. The Skolverket evaluation of these funding reforms notes a reduction in differences in attendance between different types of area. In 1998, the proportion of children aged one to five years attending ECEC varied from under 50 per cent in small and rural *kommuns* to 65-70 per cent in large cities and metropolitan areas; by 2004 this gap had closed markedly, to around 70 per cent for the former and just under 80 per cent for the latter, ie from over 20 percentage points (in 1998) to less than 10 (in 2004) (Skolverket, 2007: Figure 1). The reforms, therefore, seem to have had a strong impact on reducing inequalities in access between different areas of the country.

Over the same period, there has also been

Access levels and strategies

convergence in attendance rates among different social and ethnic groups. In 1999, children with higher educated parents (ie with tertiary level education) were more likely than other children to attend pre-schools. By 2005, this had changed and there was only a small difference in attendance by parental level of education; the highest level of attendance at formal services was actually for children whose mothers have medium level education, the lowest for children whose mothers have high level education, but the spread is quite small.

Skolverket, in its assessment of funding reforms notes a reduction in the impact on attendance of other 'background factors', including parental occupation and foreign background of children. In 1999, about 60 per cent of children with parents who were unemployed or had a long-term illness were attending pre-school; by 2005, this had risen to around 90 per cent. In 1999, children with foreign-born parents were less likely to be at pre-school, but these differences had disappeared by 2005. A major reason for this convergence is because pre-schools are now an entitlement for children with non-employed parents; they are accessible to all children. This led Skolverket to conclude that "the (funding) reform has above all led to an increase in the availability of pre-school for children whose parents are on parental leave with younger siblings, but also for children whose parents are unemployed" (Skolverket, 2007: 18-19).

The other side of increased attendance, following the extension of entitlement, has been a drop in unmet demand. Between 1999 and 2002, the proportion of parents who wanted an ECEC place but did not have one halved – from four per cent to two per cent. The main fall in unmet demand was for parents who were unemployed, on parental leave, or had a long-term illness (ibid: 20).

Children with Additional Support Needs and rights

Children with disabilities or psycho-social

challenges have a priority right for ECEC services and are well represented and integrated in services.

Strategies to promote inclusion

Through its welfare state and other policies, Sweden has achieved relatively low levels of poverty and inequality and made its ECEC services widely available and affordable. It has promoted inclusion, first and foremost, through universal rather than targeted strategies.

The pre-school curriculum emphasises the need for measures to make pre-schools inclusive. Children who need 'more support than others should receive this' and the task of the pre-school involves 'passing on a cultural heritage – its values, traditions and history, language and knowledge – from one generation to the next'

As already noted, nearly 19 per cent of children in pre-schools do not have Swedish as their mother tongue and the Pre-school Curriculum says that pre-schools should provide these children with the opportunity to develop both Swedish and their own first language. However, in practice this opportunity is often not provided. A report by Skolverket - "Many languages – many possibilities" (2002) – concluded that the support for mother tongue in the pre-school had greatly decreased. In 2008, only 21 per cent of children who did not have Swedish as a first language received first language support, compared with about 60 per cent back in the 1980s. This suggests that the municipalities have some difficulties to live up to this right for the children to have mother tongue support.

In legislation passed in 2005 (*Kvalitet I förskolan*, Quality in the pre-school), the Government stated that the multi-cultural perspective in the Pre-school Curriculum should be made clearer to strengthen children's linguistic and identity development, especially for children whose mother tongue is not Swedish.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Workforce

Structure and education (basic and ongoing)

Type of provision	Title of lead staff	Pre-service education	Qualification level
Förskola/ Förskoleklass	Förskollärare – pre-school teacher	3.5 years @ university	ISCED 5
	Barnskötare – pre-school worker with lower level of qualification	3 years @ upper secondary level	ISCED 3
Familjedaghem	Dagbarnvårdare - family day carer	No initial education required; most municipalities have special introductory training of about 50–100 hours	None

The workforce, like government responsibility and provision, is integrated with two main types of workers for pre-schools, both qualified to work with children under and over three years. Pre-school teachers – *Förskollärare* – have a graduate level education in university. Since reforms in 2001, they have been educated within the same framework as school teachers and free-time pedagogues, all of whom share 18 months of studies, the remaining time being given over to specialist training, for example in work with particular age groups. On graduation, all students are qualified as teachers, but each has a distinctive profile or professional orientation. The *barnskötare* is educated at an upper secondary level. In 2007, 52 per cent of the staff in pre-schools were pre-school teachers, up from 51 per cent in 2002 (Skolverket, 2008b).

Both types of worker also staff school-based pre-school classes – *förskoleklass* – but most of the staff in these classes (69 per cent) are pre-school teachers. These classes and their staff

often form part of mixed-age 'work units' (*arbetslag*), which group children aged six and older (up to eight or nine years of age) and which operate with multi-professional teams of pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues.

Family day carers require no initial education though it is recommended that they complete a training course and most *kommuns* have instituted special training of about 50–100 hours as an introduction to the family day care occupation. Just under two-fifths of family day carers have been educated as *barnskötare*, around a third have another child-related education, and a quarter have no relevant education.

There is no minimum or national requirement for professional development or other further training. However, the need for such development is well recognised by *kommuns* for pre-school and school workers, though less so for family day carers.

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

Work conditions and support

Pay, hours and other conditions are determined by *kommuns*. Although educated to the same level, pre-school teachers (and free-time pedagogues) earn about 12 per cent less than school teachers (the median monthly earnings in April 2009 were SEK 24,000 and SEK 26,000 respectively) (www.skolporten.se). The working hours also differ. In particular, the school teacher's working week includes 10 hours of non-contact time, to be taken as and where they wish.

The pay on average for *barnskötare* and family day carers are almost the same, at around SEK 20,000 per month. They work 40 hours/week.

Career opportunities for pre-school teachers include becoming: pedagogical leaders (*pedagogisk ledare*) (ie with pedagogical responsibility for a group of pre-schools, similar to the Italian *pedagogista*); principals (*förskolechef or rektor*) of pre-schools and of schools (in 2003, according to the National Agency for School Improvement, 24 per cent of school rectors had a pre-school background); and moving into the university sector to work on teacher education courses. Some, and this is increasingly common, study for doctorates.

It is also becoming more common that the *barnskötare* study to become pre-school teachers, often at the initiative of *kommuns* who need more of these workers. *Barnskötare* may also work in leisure-time centres and as a pupil assistant in school.

Workforce profile

The ECEC workforce is overwhelmingly female, with men accounting for just under three per cent of pre-school workers. The proportion has remained the same since the 1980s. Some attention has been given to this issue in the past, from time to time, but currently there is no policy to increase the number of men working in this area.

Workforce recruitment and evidence of shortages

Following the reform of teacher education in 2001, when education for pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues was integrated within one framework, some shortages developed in recruitment for pre-school teachers and free-time pedagogues. Students in the new system could enter courses without deciding beforehand on their future specialised area of work, and many decided during the course to opt for school teaching rather than pre-school or free-time work, reflecting the higher status of school teaching and the rather better pay and work conditions. The supply of pre-school teachers and free-time pedagogues coming off initial training courses therefore fell, creating some recruitment difficulties.

At the same time, the demand for staff has increased; for example, the number of pre-school workers increased by 5,000 between 2004 and 2005 due to additional government funding to improve staffing levels. In 2006, Skolverket forecast an increase in pre-school staff from 76,200 in 2004 to 93,900 in 2009 due to more children in the population and a sustained staffing ratio.

Trade unions and other workforce organisations
Most teachers and free-time pedagogues working in pre-schools and schools are members of the same trade union (the Swedish Teachers Union - *Lärarförbundet*). The trade union plays an active role, both in representing the interests of its members and in supporting professional development.

Barnskötare join the Swedish Municipal Workers Union (Kommunal), the country's largest trade union.

Other conditions of quality

National standards (including staffing,

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

environment)

Standards are not set nationally, but determined by *kommuns*. However certain indicators, such as adult:child ratios and group sizes are monitored regularly by Skolverket. This monitoring shows that the average group sizes in pre-schools have slightly decreased over recent years and are currently around 17 children per group. The group size for younger children (under three years old) varies between 12 to 16 children and for three to five year olds between 15 and 22. There is also a tendency for group size to be larger in large urban areas and larger cities.

The number of children per worker in pre-schools was 5.3 in 2008

Evaluations by Skolverket show that there are variations between *kommuns* but especially between pre-schools within the same *kommun*. Pre-schools within the same *kommun* often work under different conditions, including variations in group sizes. Pre-schools situated in lower income areas often had more difficulties in doing their work satisfactorily than pre-schools in higher income areas because insufficient allowance is made for the additional resources they need.

Curriculum or national framework for services

Following the transfer of responsibility for ECEC from welfare into education in 1996, a Pre-school Curriculum was introduced in 1998. This is a short document, 19 pages in the English translation, and sets out in broad terms values, tasks, goals and guidelines for the pre-school to follow. Its brevity and broad approach leaves considerable scope for local interpretation and implementation. Emphasis is placed on democratic values, the child as active co-constructor of knowledge, the complexity of knowledge, connecting to the child's experience, development in groups and staff working in teams, and the pedagogical importance of care and play. Goals are defined in terms of what the pre-school "should strive to ensure", not targets

for the individual child.

Licensing and inspection

Kommuns are responsible for services in their area, most of which they manage. At national level, Skolverket is responsible for ensuring that national policies and goals are achieved, which it does through collecting information, evaluative and other reports, development work and general oversight.

The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (*Skolinspektionen*) was established in 2008 'to control whether the municipalities and the schools fulfil their responsibilities in relation to the regulations set out in the Education Act. The inspection also has to evaluate how well educational activities and schools are functioning in relation to the national objectives and the national curriculum. Above all the inspection controls if the municipalities and schools have systems for self-evaluation and strategies for self-improvement efforts.'

www.skolinspektionen.se/PageFiles/1854/SwedishSchoolsInspectorate2009.pdf?epslanguage=sv
The Inspectorate may also conduct evaluations that focus on a particular area, for example, a particular service or subject.

Inspections include the preschool system in a *kommun*, but not individual preschools, ie. the inspection is at the *kommun* level and covers how the *kommun* works with preschools, quality systems, how the curriculum goals are fulfilled, how they follow the regulations in the Education Act etc Inspectors meet and interviews groups of staff, heads of preschools, parents, *kommun* administrators and heads, and members of the responsible political board. They also inspect how the *kommun* fulfils its supervision of independent preschools. There is a separate report written on the preschool system.

Quality control

According to the Municipality Law (*kommunallagen*), the work of pre-schools

Conditions for quality improvement and assurance

should be evaluated by the municipality and the staff. Since 2005, pre-schools run by kommuns must, like schools, produce annual quality reports. Pedagogical documentation is also an important method for evaluating and improving pedagogical work. The first edition of the Preschool Curriculum emphasised the role of pedagogical documentation:⁴

The activities of the pre-school should be planned, implemented, assessed and developed in relation to the goals set up in the curriculum... By documenting pedagogical activity, activities in the pre-school can be made more explicit and thus provide an important basis for discussion and assessment of the quality of activities and the need for development (3).

The two evaluations of pre-school conducted by Skolverket show developments in the use of documentation. The 2004 evaluation found that the use of documentation has become more common - but that it was often used by pre-schools to show parents how they work, not by the staff in order to develop the activities, as emphasised in the curriculum. The 2008 evaluation noticed a change in using documentation, with an increased awareness of its value for evaluating pedagogical activities. Today pre-schools more often use

documentation for joint reflection among the staff, as a basis for improving pedagogical work, professional development, evaluation of activities and formulating goals of their own, as required by the curriculum.

The development of interest in and use of pedagogical documentation is related to the strong influence of Reggio Emilia, where the practice of pedagogical documentation originated, and the role of the Reggio Emilia Institute.

Attention to children's outcomes

There are no defined national goals for children to reach during pre-school and no national system of child assessment. The Pre-school Curriculum does, however, outline goals: what values, capabilities and skills pre-schools should 'try to ensure' that children develop.

Family and community involvement

The role of parents has been relatively weak in the Swedish pre-school. The pre-school curriculum devotes a section to 'Pre-school and home' and emphasises the need for co-operation and for parents to have the opportunity 'to be involved and influence activities on the pre-school'.

Relationship and transitions between ECEC and school

During the 1990s, the transition from pre-school to school shifted from seven to six years, as six year olds on the whole entered pre-school classes in schools. Pre-schools and pre-school classes have similar staff – pre-school teachers and *barnskötare* – and though children in pre-school classes may be part of larger mixed-age ‘work units’, they will spend much time together in their own group, being gradually introduced to the larger unit. Furthermore, some pre-schools are located in or near schools and may be under the overall direction of the head of the school (the *rektor*).

Pre-school and school have separate curricula, but they are consistent in structure (being short framework curricula), with the intention that they should link into each other and take a common view of knowledge, development and learning.

The Pre-school Curriculum emphasises the importance of co-operation with the pre-school class and the school, and calls on the school to “try to establish good working co-operation with both the pre-school and after school centres to support the child’s all-round development and

learning for the future”. The work team in the pre-school should “exchange knowledge and experience with the staff of the pre-school class, the school and after school centre and co-operate with them”.

When ECEC was brought into the education system in 1996, the then prime minister, Göran Persson, stated that the pre-school should influence at least the early years of compulsory school. However, there is evidence of the relationship operating in the opposite direction, with some schoolification occurring where the school influences pre-school classes and pre-schools. Pre-school classes, Skolverket has found, often follow the school in their organisation of space and time and with a focus on subject knowledge. The 2008 evaluation of pre-school reform by Skolverket shows a tendency to prepare for schooling in the pre-school, with a focus on language and linguistic development at the expense of whole child’s development. Increased monitoring and assessment of children’s development and skills in pre-schools is also interpreted as evidence of preparing for schooling.

Note on out-of-school services

Children up to 12 years are entitled to a place in these services – or, as the Swedish term them, ‘free-time’ services. Mostly they are used by children in their first four years at school, ie in pre-school class and the first three grades up to 10 years of age; 10-12 year olds are far less likely to use them (though they may be offered ‘open free-time centres’). In 2006, free-time services were used by 79 per cent of six to 10 year olds but only 11 per cent of 10 to 12 year olds.

Nearly all of these services are now provided in schools, having been brought into schools, along with the free-time pedagogues who work in them, during the 1990s; previously they were housed and operated quite apart from school. Today, they usually form part of mixed age ‘work units’ (*arbetslag*), which each have their own premises and work teams and which provide for children over an extended school day - before, during and after school hours. The ‘free time’ part of these work units is staffed by pre-school workers (from the pre-school class) and free-time pedagogues, who form part of work teams and also work with school teachers during the school day; in general, school teachers do not work in free-time services.

Group sizes in free-time services are large, averaging 31 in 2005 (compared with 18 in the early 1990s).

Current developments and issues

Current developments

The government has introduced a childcare voucher (July 2009) and will extend a free period of pre-school attendance to three year olds (in 2010), the former to increase parental choice and the latter to better prepare children for school. To further this latter aim, and especially to enhance children's linguistic and mathematical development, the government has also proposed some changes to the Pre-school Curriculum. Skolverket has been asked to put forward proposals, including for elaborating the Curriculum in these areas.

The government is also proposing a reform to teacher education. To this end an inquiry was established and its report – 'Sustainable teacher education' – was published at the end of 2008. Amongst its proposals is that teacher education should return to being more specialised, with separate specialised education for pre-school (and other) teachers; and that pre-school teachers should take a shorter and a lower level course than other teachers, ie three years rather than four, and at Bachelors rather than Masters level.

The government elected in 2006 has given increased priority to 'freedom of choice', expressed in the title of proposed new legislation, ministry memorandum DS:2009:25 (The new Education Act for knowledge, the

freedom of choice and safety). The proposed legislation will define pre-schools as a distinct form of school; give pre-schools and schools common overall goals; and provide regulations for the management of preschools, preschool teachers and their pedagogical responsibility.

Defining pre-schools as a form of school emphasises that the preschool:

- is the first stage of lifelong learning;
- is an integral part of the educational system with the same overall objectives and goals as other forms of schools;
- must have heads with qualifications and teachers as in schools. It also gives the preschool status.

The pre-school has, from a historical perspective, been understood as a democratic right and as contributing to equalising conditions for growing up. It is not clear what consequences the renewed emphasis on individual choice will have on these long-standing goals.

This report was prepared with the assistance of Ingmarie Munkhammer, researcher and senior lecturer at the Luleå University of Technology, Department of Education, Sweden; and Christer Toftenius, Senior Administrative Officer, Swedish Ministry of Education and Research.

Notes

¹ The source for maternal employment is OECD 2007, Table 1.1, and not EU statistics as employment data for Sweden is not included in these statistics.

² Converted using exchange rate at 9 July 2009.

³ In some independent pre-schools, these sources are supplemented by the unpaid work of parents (Skolverket, 2006: 31)

⁴ This is no longer so. It was written in the foreword to the first edition of the curriculum, not any longer. It was also written in the bill to the Riksdag (Parliament). It is not in the binding ordinance. However it is in the Skolverkets proposals, commissioned by the Government to clarify the curriculum. There are also proposals for the new Education Act, must have and document quality development and work, no requirement for quality reporting any longer, neither for schools.

Acknowledgments

Children in Scotland would like to thank the programme researchers, Professor Peter Moss and Dr John Bennett.

We are also grateful to the Working for Inclusion team, led by Children in Scotland, for compiling this report.

This publication is funded by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013).

The Working for Inclusion programme is funded by the European Community Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity (2007-2013) and the Scottish Government.