



## Re-Forming Education and Care in England, Scotland and Sweden

England and Scotland (in 1998) and Sweden (in 1996) transferred national responsibility for early childhood education and care (early years services) and childcare for school-age children (school-age childcare services) from welfare to education departments. We examine the extent of integration in each country and what it has meant for the relationship between schools and other services.<sup>1</sup>

### England

At the time of transfer early years services were poorly developed and fragmented. For example, they were divided between school-based provision (already the responsibility of the Department for Education) and 'childcare' services (the responsibility of the Department of Health). Levels of provision were low, with many types of provision and providers, mostly in the private sector.

Post-1998, the close relationship between education and care has been emphasised in official documents. For example, the National Childcare Strategy says "there is no sensible distinction between good early education and care". In practice, however, further integration has been limited. Moreover in late 2002 responsibility for early education and childcare services was again divided, this time between the Department for Education and the Department for Work.

Integration is most apparent in two areas. First, government funding for 'early years education' (for 3 and 4 year old children; compulsory schooling starts at 5 years) has been made available across all provision – schools, nurseries and family daycare - that meet certain conditions. These conditions include working with a new curriculum, the Foundation Stage, which also covers the first year of compulsory schooling and specifies 'early learning goals'. Second, regulation has been integrated and centralized: a national educational inspectorate regulates all educational and childcare services.

A recently-announced programme of 'children's centres' is intended to bring together care, education and other services – but in deprived areas only. Recently, too, legislation enables schools to adopt an extended role. For example, schools or their partner providers may establish childcare and other services. But there are no signs of an

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integrated 'whole day school' system developing.

With the introduction of a 'childcare tax credit' and many different funding streams, public funding has increased. But the funding of services is now more complex than before. Staffing and qualifications remain fragmented. For example, childcare workers are unequal in pay and training to teachers.

A major theme has been inter-agency collaboration, broader than early years, school-age childcare and schools. The Government has established a Children and Young Person's Unit which is developing an "overarching strategy for all services for children and young people". A Treasury-led initiative, Sure Start, funds local programmes in disadvantaged areas, bringing together childcare, health, family support and other services for children under 4 years and their families.

### Scotland

Reforms in Scotland have taken place in the context of devolution and with the re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament providing more time for debate and legislation.

England and Scotland still have much in common. For example, before transfer of responsibility in 1998, the structure and level of early years and school-age childcare services in Scotland were similar to England's. Both countries have increased funding for early years education, and the extent of further integration is most apparent in this area.

But there are important differences of emphasis and approach. Like England, there is a curriculum spanning 3 to 6 year olds. But the Scottish 'Pre-school Curriculum' is less prescriptive than the English Foundation Stage, offering a statement of good practice with no learning goals specified. Regulation of childcare remains within welfare, although integrated inspection is being developed with education.

An important and distinctive Scottish policy is the New Community Schools Initiative. The pilot programme, launched in 1998, is now being extended to all schools. The aim is a child-centred and integrated approach to education, health and family support. Developments often involve lifelong learning, with schools linked to, or the base for, early years, school age childcare and adult learning.

Another distinctive feature is that national responsibility for child welfare has been integrated within the education department, alongside schools and early years and school-age childcare service. There is a strong emphasis on inter-agency collaboration. A government report recommends

that all services, covering birth to 18 years (including education, child welfare, social work, health, leisure and recreation) should be regarded as a single unitary system. A Ministerial Task Force is driving progress on this integrated approach across all children's services.

### Sweden

Prior to 1996, integration was already far advanced. Most local authorities had brought together responsibility for early years services, schools and school-age childcare into one department. There was an extensive and well-funded system of early years services, already completely integrated. The integration of school-age childcare into schools, creating 'whole day schools', was already advanced, as was the transfer of 6 year olds from nurseries to school-based 'pre-school classes'. Team working in schools, involving pre-school teachers, school teachers and free-time pedagogues, was widespread. Clusters of services - early years, school-age childcare and schools - were increasingly managed by a *rektor*, who could come from any of the above professions.

Since the national transfer of responsibility from welfare to education departments in 1996, educational principles have been extended to early years and school-age childcare services. There is a universal entitlement to these services for children aged 1 to 12 years. All services now have curricula: one for early years services, another covering schools and school-age childcare. A period of free attendance for 4 and 5 year olds has been introduced. Most radical of all, training for staff in early years services, schools and school-age childcare services has been unified.<sup>2</sup>

### Conclusions

The integration process has differed considerably in the three countries, reflecting different histories, contexts and policy agendas. Sweden already had a coherent, developed system of universal services, in both welfare and education. 'Childcare for working parents' had been achieved and levels of child poverty were low. Neither was a major policy issue.

In these conditions, Swedish reforms have been educationally focused, aiming for a common approach across services, with shared understandings of learning, care and childhood. Integration is underpinned by a strong holistic pedagogical tradition, summed up in Sweden's pre-school curriculum: "the pre-school should provide children with good pedagogical activities, where care, nurturing and learning together form a coherent whole".

By contrast, the integration process in England and Scotland has taken place in the context of a strong welfare policy agenda focused on reducing high levels of poverty and increasing employment. Priority has been given to increasing 'childcare for working parents'. Traditions and policy principles that might support the integration of care and education are lacking. For example, there is no concept like 'pedagogy'; while policy is based on limited, targeted public intervention for childcare and universal

publicly-funded provision for education. A plethora of services and providers and a market-approach in care and education are further obstacles to developing integrated services.

The situation in Scotland is far closer to England than Sweden, with a strong welfare focus. However, there is a greater emphasis on social inclusion, as opposed to reducing exclusion. Programmes such as New Community Schools offer a more universalist vision.

### Learning from experience

In all three countries, integration has focused attention on compulsory schooling, and its relationship with other services. Is it possible to create a 'strong and equal relationship' (as recommended by the recent OECD report 'Starting Strong')? Or is what the Swedes call 'schoolification' more likely, with other services adopting a narrow, traditional school approach? In England and Scotland an 'equal relationship' has been made more difficult by a 'mixed economy' of public, private and non-profit services and some tension between the promotion of schools as community resources and market-oriented policies that emphasise parents' right to choose schools.

The experience of these three countries raises several other issues. Wide-ranging integration requires re-thinking as well as re-structuring. An inherently integrative concept like pedagogy supports rethinking and provides a strong foundation. Lastly, integration is made harder if the services involved have strongly differing values, principles and purposes.

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The *UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood* is a series of short, flash notes on early childhood and family policy issues. It seeks to answer various questions that policy makers have about the planning and implementation of early childhood and family policies. For further information and the electronic version of the *Briefs*, please check:

<http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/ecf/html/policy/ecbrief.htm>

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<sup>2</sup> See UNESCO Policy Briefs on Early Childhood No. 3, May 2002: *Integrating early childhood into education: The case of Sweden*.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.childreninscotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk)