

OECD Country Note

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

in the

United Kingdom

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purposes of the OECD Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for the United Kingdom is an output of the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*, a project launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998. The impetus for the project came from the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers assigned a high priority to the goal of improving access and quality in early childhood education, in partnership with families, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). The goal is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.

2. The United Kingdom is one of twelve countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Australia, Belgium (Flemish and French Communities), Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United States. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches toward the education and care of young children.

3. The scope of the review covers children from birth to compulsory school age, including the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the review has adopted a broad, holistic approach to the study of early childhood policy and provision. Consideration has been given to the roles of families and communities on children's early learning and development. In particular, the Review investigated concerns about *quality*, *access* and *equity* with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulations; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; and funding and financing.

4. As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team for an intensive case study visit. After each country visit, a short Country Note is written that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. The present report for the United Kingdom will be one input into the final OECD Comparative Report that will provide a review and analysis of ECEC (early childhood education and care) policy in all 12 countries participating in the review. A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998).

The United Kingdom's participation in the review

5. The United Kingdom was the eighth country to be visited in the Review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in the United Kingdom was prepared by researchers at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood, University College Worcester (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Guided by a common framework accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important output of the review process, because they provide a state-of-the-art overview and analysis of policy and provision in

participating countries. Following authorisation by the issuing countries, they will be placed with the Country Notes on the OECD website.

6. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of an OECD Secretariat member and three experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (Appendix 1) visited the United Kingdom from 1 to 10 December, 1999. The ten-day visit was co-ordinated by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). In the course of the visit, the team interviewed many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice and had the opportunity to observe a number of examples of early childhood programmes for 0-6 year olds in England and Scotland (Appendix 2). The review team focused primarily on England, although the team visited Scotland for one day and had one session with a representative from the Welsh Office. A representative from Northern Ireland was not able to attend a scheduled meeting due to political changes underway at the time.

7. Discussions revolved around six main issues:

- the ECEC context, major policy concerns, and policy responses to address these concerns;
- the roles of national government, decentralised authorities, and other social partners, and the institutional resources devoted to planning and implementation at each level;
- feasible policy options that are suited to the British context;
- the impact, coherence and effectiveness of different approaches;
- innovative policies and practices including their potential for replication;
- types of data and instruments that exist, or should be developed, in support of ECEC policy-making, research and evaluation.

Structure of the Report

8. The Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in the United Kingdom. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, the observations of the review team, and materials collected during and after the visit. In addition to the present introduction which forms Chapter 1, the structure of the report is as follows:

- Chapter 2: *Context of ECEC in the United Kingdom*. The evolution of ECEC in the United Kingdom is described and also the demographic, labour market and social policy contexts. In addition, we select for comment some traditional elements of British society and education to give the reader some understanding of the contextual background for policy-making for children.
- Chapter 3: *Overview of current ECEC policy and provision in the United Kingdom*. The reader will find here a summary of information provided in the *Background Report* of the United Kingdom, supplemented by data from other sources. Because of the brief nature of the overview, it has been possible to describe only the broad features of the system.
- Chapter 4: *Issues relating to policy and practice* outlines the more important issues related to policy and practice in ECEC that were identified by the reviewers in the course of studying the British situation. Six issues were chosen for comment: (1) views of children and families;

(2) system co-ordination and collaboration; (3) access and equity; (4) staffing; (5) approaches to early learning; and (6) quality assurance and inspection.

- Chapter 5: *Conclusions*. This concluding chapter provides some brief remarks and suggestions that policy makers in the United Kingdom may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision.

Acknowledgements

9. Members of the review team would like to thank all those who participated in the review visit in England and in Scotland and gave generously of their expertise and time. We appreciated the hospitable, open and informative meetings that were held throughout the review process and the extensive documentation that each group provided. The site visits breathed life into policy and left us with fond memories of places where staff, parents and children are turning possibilities into realities. Very special thanks to Tony Bertram, Chris Pascal, and Michael Gasper from University College Worcester and to Patrick Curran from DfEE, the National Co-ordinator for the project at the time of the visit. They provided extensive background information, arranged our meetings and visits, cheerfully explained countless confusing details, and worked tirelessly to make our visit an extraordinary experience for all of us.

10. Throughout the Country Note, the analyses and suggestions offered are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a review team—no matter how well briefed—in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. While all the members of the team are experienced as researchers and policy analysts in the field of ECEC, they are clearly influenced by their own cultural perspectives and histories. A ten-day fieldwork period is limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. The survey method employed relied heavily, therefore, on cross-checking approaches and further feedback from experts in the United Kingdom.

11. The facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received every help from the ministries, and from researchers and practitioners in the United Kingdom, they have no part in any shortcomings, which this document may present. To mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the Country Note will be read in conjunction with the UK Background Report, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

12. The term *British* is used in this report to denote the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; Great Britain includes England, Wales, and Scotland.

13. In the United Kingdom, provision for young children is organised under the broad rubric *Early Years*, with historical distinctions between *education* and *care* settings. A glossary of terms denoting the major forms of provision follows:

- *Nursery school*: A state-funded school normally providing 2 to 2.5 hours of pre-school education for 3s and 4s during the regular school year. Some nursery schools are full-time.
- *Nursery class*: A class serving children 3-4 years of age and is located in a state-funded primary or infant school.

- *Early Years Unit*: A unit serving children 3-5 within a state-funded primary and infant school on a part- or full-time basis during school terms.
- *Reception class* or *Class R*: The first class of a state-funded primary, first or infant school, serving children 4-5+. Full-time places (9-3:30 during school terms only) are provided. Scotland does not have Reception classes.
- *Special school*: A school serving children with special needs from three years of age and upwards. The school may be a day or boarding school operating during the regular school terms.
- *Opportunity Group*: A service offered by the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) that provides free, additional support for children with special needs. May also be offered by Social Service Departments (SSD) or Health Departments.
- *Pre-schools/playgroups*: Occasional, sessional, or all-day pre-schools or playgroups serving children 2-5, run by parents, a non-profit organisation or by a for-profit business.
- *Private nursery schools/pre-preparatory schools*: Run by private companies or trusts, these schools serve children 3-5+ on a fee-paying basis.
- *Independent schools*: Run by private companies or trusts, these schools serve children from three years of age and upwards and operate on a fee-paying basis.
- *Before and after school club*: Activities for children three and older operating before and after school hours.
- *Holiday club*: Activities for children when school is not in session
- *Local authority day nurseries*: Locally-funded centres for children from birth to five years of age who are considered to be at-risk of educational failure.
- *Private day nurseries*: Nurseries run by employers (*workplace nurseries*) or private companies, providing part time or full day sessions to children from birth to five years of age.
- *Parent-toddler group*: Informal group for parents and children under five.
- *Childminder*: Caregiver who provides full- or part-time care for children in her own home.
- *Nanny/au pair*: Caregiver who provides full- or part-time care for children in the family's home.
- *Combined nursery/family centres*: Centres that offer both early education and day-care for children birth to five, sometimes with extended day and full year options.
- *Early Excellence Centres*: Designated by the Government as models of exemplary practice, these centres offer a range of services, including full-day care for children birth to five, drop-in facilities, outreach, family support, health care, adult education, and practitioner training.

14. The currency of Great Britain is the Pound (£). In June, 2000: 1 British £ (GBP) = 1.52 US Dollar (USD); 1 British £ (GBP) = 1.58 Euro (EUR).

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT OF ECEC IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Evolution of ECEC in the UK

The State sector

15. ECEC in the UK has evolved as separate systems of “education” and “care,” with often competing interpretations of the aim and purpose of services and differing definitions of the child. Public provision of primary school education in Britain dates from 1649 when republican puritans set up 60 schools in Wales. Public funding of schooling ended with the restoration of the monarchy, and schooling was maintained solely by the voluntary sector until 1833 (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

16. Infant and nursery schools trace their origins to New Lanark in Scotland where, in 1816, Robert Owen, a Welshman, established “the Institution for the Formation of Character.” Owen was a social reformer who believed that children could never thrive in schools that fostered passivity and obedience:

He wanted infant schools where children could be protected from their untaught parents and brought up in favourable surroundings as soon as they could walk. Teachers must never beat or threaten children, should always display a pleasant countenance and kind manner, and should teach the laws of nature through things rather than books. Here Owen was echoing the advice of Rousseau. A night school was also established at New Lanark where parents could be transformed into rational creatures. (Cleverley & Phillips, 1986, p. 106)

17. In 1870, publicly-funded education became compulsory at age five, but children as young as two were admitted to state primary schools, especially when women were needed to work in local industries. Local authorities could waive statutory admissions policy, as needs arose. The propriety of having very young children enrolled in formal educational settings has been an ongoing theme in ECEC discussion in the UK. In 1873, the first publicly-funded kindergarten was established in Salford. It provided nursery education, baths, meals rest, and parent education (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Others followed, but the dominant form of provision remained the state primary school. In 1901, nearly half of the three year olds in England and Wales were enrolled. However, when His Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) indicated, in 1905, that didactic schooling was inappropriate for young children, the numbers of children in such settings were significantly reduced.

18. During the First World War (1914-18), more than 100 public day care centres were established. Margaret McMillan created an open air nursery in Deptford in 1913. The centre served children ages one to six,. Parliament passed the Fisher Act in 1918, enabling local authorities for the first time to make provisions for day nurseries or to assist nurseries sponsored by the voluntary sector. Nonetheless, many more young children continued to enter state primary schools. This initiative effectively marks the beginning of the separate development of care, health and education in the UK. McMillan stressed the importance of cleanliness and fresh air, and “like her contemporary, Maria Montessori, [she] developed a

physiological, sensorial pedagogy in which young children learned through their bodies' physical actions on objects" (Beatty, 1995, p. 134).

19. The Second World War (1939-45) also led to a dramatic expansion in nursery places, as well as other "family friendly" policies that encouraged women to assume jobs vacated by men who had joined the Armed Services. However, after the War, women were expected to return home, and most nurseries were closed. It was left to local authorities to determine whether funding would continue and whether programmes would be administered by Health or Education. The multiplicity of arrangements that characterised provision in the UK was thus further complicated by local decision making. Social Service Departments, which arose in the 1970s, served children thought to be "at risk," while Health Departments primarily focussed on children with disabilities. Education served the children that remained (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Family allowances also began after the war, replaced in 1975 by the Child Benefit, a direct, monthly payment to parents that provides a safety net of support for all children born in the UK.

20. In 1967, the Plowden Report recommended part-time, child-centred provision for children in need but not for children whose mothers simply wanted to work. During this time, the majority of three and four year olds receiving services were in infant classes in primary schools. As late as 1988, the Government maintained that parents were primarily responsible for the care of young children.

The voluntary and private sector

21. Before compulsory public schooling, endowed charitable schools and benevolent foundations existed for certain groups such as the sons of the clergy, guild workers, or the military. Others, such as the Thomas Coram Foundation, established in 1739, were interventionist in nature, supporting "poor children of the parish," "foundlings," and hospitals (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 6).

22. Little voluntary or private sector ECEC provision existed until after 1950. The children of parents who had to work were looked after by childminders, friends or relatives; those who could afford it sent their children to a pre-preparatory school attached to a private junior school or hired a nanny or au pair. In the 1960s and 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, day nurseries expanded rapidly, as increasing numbers of women entered the workforce. These facilities offer full-time care and education for children birth to age five but typically serve children under age three.

23. Parents, especially mothers, set up local playgroups that, over time, were organised into national charities that could receive partial funding from government grants. The largest of these is the Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA), formerly known as the Pre-school Playgroup Association (PPA). In 1987, two thirds of the PPA settings were set up by community or church groups and approximately a third were privately run. The number of playgroups grew dramatically during the 1970's and 1980's but began to decline in the 1990's, as the birth rate fell and alternative forms of provision became available. Most now employ paid workers and no longer have voluntary status. In a recent survey of parents' use of early years services, Prior and his colleagues (1999) estimated that 59% of provision for three- and four-year olds is now in the State maintained sector, approximately 30% in the private sector, including some for-profit PLA settings, and 9% in the voluntary community sector, some of which are not in the PLA. Most playgroups are characterised as "sessional" (offering care/education for a few hours each day) or "occasional" (open several times a week during the school year); however, some offer extended day and holiday provision (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

24. Most children under three in out-of-home care are with childminders, who provide for children in their own homes. The 1948 Childminders and Nurseries Regulation Act, subsequently amended by the Health Services and Public Health Act, 1968, required childminders and other providers to register with

local authorities, and some local authorities began to offer limited training. The National Childminding Association (NCMA) was formed in England in the 1970s; similar associations exist in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A survey of childminders in England suggests that, for every registered childminder, there are 16 who are unregistered, and some of these do not offer high quality care (NCMA, 1987). Since 1991, the number of registered childminders has decreased, with a 10% decline reported in 1999 alone.

25. This social history has resulted in several features that are distinctive in the United Kingdom. First, for well over 100 years, very young children have been admitted to state primary schools, with children as young as two being admitted to formal school settings, especially when the employment of women was essential to the local economy. Admission to formal compulsory schooling occurs at age five in England, Scotland and Wales, and at age four in Northern Ireland, which is the earliest school starting age in Europe. Secondly, there has been a longstanding debate over the type of curriculum that is appropriate for young children, with some arguing, in the tradition of Owen and the MacMillans, that children need a child-centred, play-based curriculum and others wanting to stress academic skills from an early age. This debate continues into the present. A third feature is that, until recently, the system has been characterised by diversity and lack of co-ordination. State, private and voluntary sectors offer both different and overlapping forms of early years provision. Administratively, early years services have been spread across departments at the national level and overseen by different departments within local authorities. Moreover, decisions regarding early years provisions have been made mainly by local politicians, with a resulting proliferation of local forms. For example, some local authorities have tried to provide for children under two, while others have not; some have supported family-based provision over group care, and, in some areas, care has been primarily state-supported, while, in others, it has mainly been privately funded. Finally, the strong tradition of voluntary and home-based care for children birth to age three seems to inhibit consideration of other forms of provision and funding mechanisms for this age group. Since 1997, the Government has developed a wide-ranging plan of action to reform the early years system, an effort that is unprecedented in the history of ECEC in the UK.

Demographic background

26. In 1997, the UK had an estimated 59 million inhabitants of which there are approximately 29 million men and 30 million women. The fertility rate is 1.7, and children under four years of age currently constitute 6.3% of the total population. Table 1 depicts the number (rounded) of children under six at this time:

Table 1. Young Children in the UK

Age Range	# of Children
0 -1	714 600
1	736 200
2	720 300
3	736 400
4	763 100
5	762 100
6	792 100

Source: 1998 Census for the United Kingdom

27. Since the early 1960s, the UK population has grown increasingly more diverse, due to the immigration of peoples from former Commonwealth countries. The immigrant population includes people from India (15%), the Caribbean (9.1%), Pakistan (8.7%), Africa (3.8%), Bangladesh (2.9%), Hong Kong (2.8%), and from Mediterranean countries, including Italy, Greece, Spain, Malta, Cyprus, and Turkey. 15% of the immigrant population has emigrated from Ireland (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Racial, ethnic, and linguistic minorities comprise 6% of the population; one in every 15 Britains is a Muslim, and increasing

numbers of children are bi-racial or from mixed ethnic heritages. At present, all ethnic groups in the UK have a disproportionately larger number of young children than the base population (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). Some ethnic minorities, especially those of Pakistani, African and Caribbean origin, experience higher rates of infant mortality.

28. While 7% of children were reared in lone parent families in 1972, 20% were in 1996 (Social Focus on Families, 1997). The UK has the highest proportion of lone mothers in Europe; 23% of all families are lone-parent households (Eurostat, 1998). Divorce rates have risen (from 12.9% in 1986 to 13.8% in 1996), but remarriage rates are also on the rise. The number of children born out of wedlock has increased from 31.8 per thousand in 1987 to 40.7 per thousand in 1997. Survey evidence suggests that 50% of 16-17 year olds use contraceptives (General Household Survey, 1989), yet the UK has the highest teenage birth rate in Western Europe. In England, there are nearly 90 000 teenage conceptions a year, including 2 200 to girls aged 14 or under (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

Labour context and the employment of women

29. Currently, the overall UK economy is extremely strong (OECD, 2000). Ten years ago, the UK had one of the lowest rates of maternal employment in the European Union, but, since that time, the percentage of women with children under five in the workforce has increased from 32% to 51%. Women are expected to account for 0.9% million of the projected 1.2 million rise in the labour force in the next seven years (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). In the UK, maternity leave is granted for 40 weeks with payment at 90% of earnings for six weeks and a flat rate for an additional 12 weeks. With Britain's signing of the European Social Contract, leave policies became statutory. Today more than two thirds of employed mothers return to work after maternity leave, representing a 50% increase in the last 12 years (Daycare Trust, 1999a). Only 40% of lone parents in the UK are employed, but new policy initiatives are expected to raise this figure to 80%. Four of five non-working mothers say they would work if the childcare arrangements of their choice were available (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

30. The UK has the second highest rate of part-time female employment in the European Union, after the Netherlands. The Government considers that each child care "place" can be used statistically by three children because parental choice and work patterns mean that many parents use facilities part time or not at all. However, the fact that increasing numbers of parents work hours outside the Monday through Friday, nine to five work week, exacerbates the need for non-standard care. Parents, particularly mothers, who are likely to work during the evenings, early mornings, and weekends often rely on informal or unregulated care during these times. In the forthcoming 'The State of Working Britain,' Susan Harkness reveals that both men and women are working longer hours than they did only ten years ago: "In 1998 some 84% of men and 45% of women worked more than 40 hours per week and...30% of men and 10% of women worked more than 50 hours, compared with 24% for men and 4% for women in 1988" (cited in Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 14). British men work longer hours and have fewer holidays when compared with men in other European Union countries; fathers with children under the age of ten work an average of 47 hours per week.

Families and the social policy context

31. The Treasury Inquiry of 1998 reported that approximately one out of every three children in the UK (4.3 million) is living in poverty, defined as less than half the average income in the UK; in 1968, it was only one child in ten. While incomes in the highest quartile have doubled, those in the lowest have risen only 15%, and children are disproportionately represented in the lowest quartiles. The Government has pledged to halve poverty rates in the next ten years and to eliminate child poverty by the year 2020.

Recent social policy initiatives aim to encourage employment, combat social exclusion, decrease poverty, and ensure that young children are prepared to take their place in the workforce of tomorrow.

Governmental structure

32. The British Government has three branches: The *legislature*, the *executive*, and the *judiciary*. The *executive* includes: the *Government*, which comprises the Cabinet and other ministers responsible for national policies; *government departments*, responsible for administering national programmes; *local authorities*, responsible for providing services in local areas; and *public corporations*, responsible for particular nationalised industries. Local authorities provide public services, such as education, housing, social services, and police and fire services. It is estimated that approximately 25% of public spending is channelled through local authorities.

33. Since devolution, Parliaments have been established in both Wales and Scotland, although Scotland has primary legislative powers, but Wales does not. The Welsh Office has moved to Wales, and 60 Assembly members sit on committees for education, health, social services, etc.

CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN THE UK

34. Over the past three years, the Government has led a massive effort to improve, expand, and integrate the diverse forms of early years provision for young children. In order to better understand the substantial progress that has been achieved in recent years, as well as the challenges that remain, this chapter surveys the array of early childhood services in the UK, with a particular focus on England. The chapter discusses recent developments with regard to: access; quality; regulation and inspection; staffing; curriculum; family engagement and support; funding; and data collection, research, and evaluation. A final section provides a brief overview of recent policy initiatives in the field. The review team visit corresponded with a dynamic period of change. At all levels of the system, the team encountered enthusiasm for the unparalleled attention and resources that have been accorded to young children and families. In this chapter and the ones that follow, the review team wishes to acknowledge the great strides that have been achieved in this policy area in a very short period. Through our observations and analyses, the team hopes to support further improvements to the system.

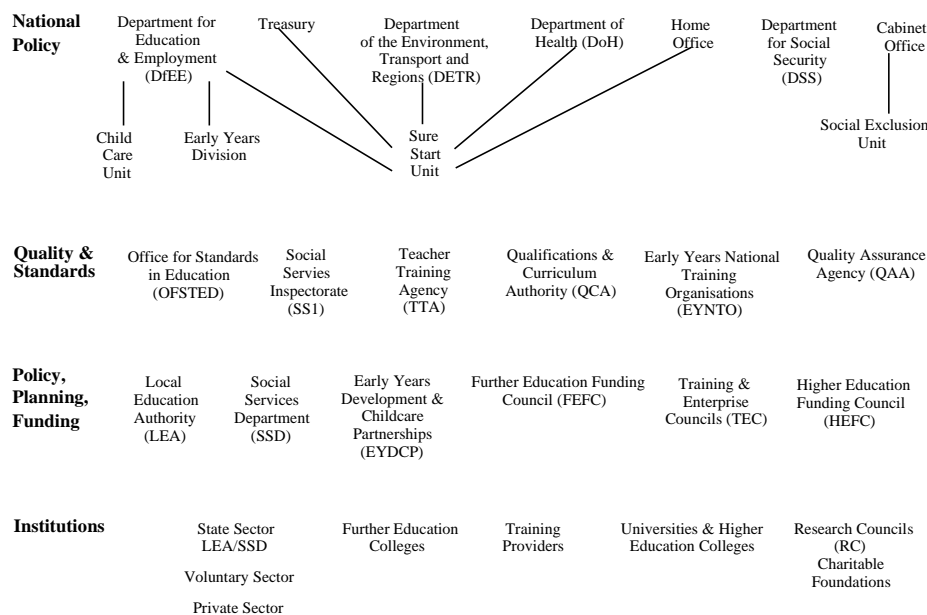
Current forms of ECEC services

35. In the English governmental structure, policy matters relating to the provision of early education and care have been overseen by a number of departments. These include: the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), the Department for Social Security (DSS), the Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR), the Department of Health, the Treasury, the Home Office, and the Cabinet. In Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, responsibility is shared by the education and social welfare ministries.

36. ECEC provision in the UK retains the long-standing distinction between care and education, but recent policy initiatives, which emphasise integration, aim to pull these systems together. Historically, services for children birth to age three have been the province of the Department for Social Security (DSS), while the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) has governed programmes for children 3-5. The Government recently consolidated “care” and “education” giving the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) primary responsibility for the early years in England. Nonetheless, other departments continue to work on issues that affect children. Within the DfEE, the Childcare Unit, the Early Years Division, and the Sure Start Unit collaborate in addressing early years issues and concerns. The organisational structure of ECEC services in England appears in Figure 1.

37. In the past, governmental departments used different methods to determine levels of participation in the various forms of provision. The development of a plan for comprehensive and co-ordinated data collection has only recently become a priority. Available evidence suggests that a majority of children birth to age three, whose parents are employed or in training, are cared for by childminders and the private sector. Three- and four-year olds increasingly attend settings in the maintained sector. Compulsory schooling begins at age four in Northern Ireland and at age five in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Figure 1. Organisational structure of ECEC services in England



Source: Bertram & Pascal, 1999

Provision for children birth to three

38. Care arrangements for children under the age of three are in high demand and short supply. Until recently, children in this age group were not eligible for state funds unless they qualified for special services or were considered to be “at risk.” This has changed with the introduction of the Childcare Tax Credit, described below. In addition, some local education authorities provide *Opportunity Groups* for children identified with special needs in this age group. Playgroups and pre-schools for children 2-5, available in some areas, are sponsored by community and voluntary groups, by parents, or by private businesses. Most run for four hours or less, although a few now offer full-day provision.

39. In most cases, the cost of services for children birth to three is incurred by parents. The types of available provision for this age group include: (1) *private day nursery* (in a private day nursery or workplace site); (2) *local authority day nursery*; (3) *childminder*; (4) *nanny/au pair*; (5) *friend/ neighbour*; (6) *relative*; and (7) *parent-toddler group*. Most offer year-round part- or full-day provision with extended day options. Although the Child Care Unit is now housed in DfEE at the national level, nurseries, childminders, and nannies usually are the responsibility of social service departments at the local level. Children of working parents birth to age three are primarily cared for by childminders (Prior et al., 1999). Centres offering both care and education, called *combined nursery/family centres*, are on the increase. They are jointly sponsored by Local Education Authorities and Social Service Departments. As part of a new Government initiative, the *Early Excellence Centres* (see discussion that follows), offer drop-in care, outreach, family support and adult education, and serve as models of exemplary practice.

Provision for children three to five

40. Recent policy initiatives have dramatically altered the picture of provision for children aged three to five in the UK. Since September 1998, free part-time early education (a 2.5-hour session, five times a week during the school-term) has been available for *all* four year olds, and targets have been established to ensure provision for all three-year olds by 2002 in Scotland and by 2004 in England, with a target of 66% coverage by 2002. In England, the priority will be to expand provision for three-year olds deemed in need. In 1999, the primary providers of early education for three- and four-year olds were the local education authorities (about 59%), followed by the private sector (about 30%), and the community and voluntary sector (about 9%) (Prior et al, 1999). All providers are entitled to government funding, if it can be shown through an OFSTED inspection that curricular goals are being adequately met. In recent years, there has been a noticeable decline in enrolments in the voluntary sector, which traditionally has sponsored more play-oriented activities for children (DfEE, 1999c).

41. Currently, there are several types of early education provision.¹ *Nursery school* is a state-funded school usually providing 2-2.5 hours per day of pre-school education for three- and four-year olds during the regular school year. A *nursery class*, serving children three to four years of age, located in a state-funded primary or infant school, usually operates on a part-time basis. An *Early Years Unit*, serving children three to five years of age, also functions within a state-funded primary and infant school on a part- or full-time basis during school terms. A *Reception class or Class R*, for four- and five-year-old children, is seen as the first class of a state-funded primary, first or infant school, and full-time places (9:00-3:30 during school terms only) are provided. Scotland does not have Reception classes. A *special school*, serving children with special needs aged three and older, may be a day or boarding school operating during the regular school term. All of the above are funded by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). Finally, *Opportunity Groups* are also intended to provide additional support for families and children with special needs in this age group.

42. Types of provision operating outside the maintained sector are run by community or voluntary groups, private, for-profit businesses, employers, or parents themselves. These include: *pre-schools/playgroups*, *private nursery schools/pre-preparatory schools*, *independent schools*, and *private day nurseries*. With the exception of the private day nurseries, which operate year round, all are open during regular school terms. Recent reforms to be implemented from September 2001 require all early education and care settings to undergo OFSTED inspection, and OFSTED will develop new inspection formats for this new work.

43. DfEE registers independent schools as being 'efficient.' Independent schools are inspected by OFSTED, normally every five to seven years. This 'registration visit' is needed to maintain the independent school's registration with DfEE. In recent years, for some independent schools, this OFSTED inspection has been subsumed by inspections carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, who use a model approved by OFSTED.

44. Another type of registration is for the receipt of the nursery education grant. To obtain this grant, all settings including independent schools must register with their local education authority's Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships. DfEE then channels the grant through the partnerships to the registered settings. These settings are inspected by OFSTED every 1-2 or 2-4 years depending on the quality of the provision found in the previous inspection.

1 . The reader is referred to the terminology section in Chapter 1 for a list of the main forms of ECEC provision in the UK.

45. The 1998 survey of parents' use of early years services for three- and four-year olds revealed that 98% of four-year olds and 93% of three-year olds participated in some form of early years education (Prior et al, 1999). In general, rates of participation were found to be higher among white, middle-income families. Regardless of the employment status of their parents, three-year olds tended to be in playgroups or pre-schools, older three-year olds in state nursery classes, four-year olds in state primary and infant school Reception classes (these do not exist in Scotland), and five-year-olds in primary and infant school year one classes.

46. Children attend state-sponsored programmes free of charge. However, 97% of nursery classes, 68% of special schools, and 67% of reception classes required some financial contribution or fee payment from parents for meals, snacks, fees, or trips and outings. The provision of early education places for four-year olds and increasing numbers of three-year olds promises to make part-day pre-school education available to children regardless of family income.

Child care for children three to five

47. Since early education places for three- and four-year olds are typically part time and available only during the regular school terms, "wrap around" child care is required to meet the needs of parents who are working or in training. Most forms of care are provided by the private sector. These include: (1) the *private day nursery* serving children from birth to five and offering part-, full-, and extended day care; (2) the *day nursery* serving children birth to five who have been identified as "at risk"; (3) the *childminder*, who offers full-day or wrap around care in her own home; and (4) the *nanny/au pair*, who provides full- or part-time care for children in the family home. Another common form of child care is that provided by friends, neighbours, and family members. Other types include: *parent and toddler groups* (birth to five), *before/after school clubs* (three and older), and *holiday clubs* (three and older). Approximately half (48%) of the parents surveyed in 1998 reported that they wanted more childcare options during the summer holiday (Prior et al., 1999). Current data seem to indicate that most out-of-school child care is provided by relatives, childminders, and mother-toddler groups (Prior et al., 1999).

Combined education and care

48. A focus of recent policy has been development of care and education centres. These are jointly funded and regulated by local education and social service departments. *Combined nursery/family centres* offer day care and early education for children birth to five. Early education is typically provided only during school terms, while day care facilities operate year round. Other services, including drop-in care, family support, and adult education, may also be offered. *Early Excellence Centres* provide integrated or networked education and care services for children and families. Full day and extended day services are generally offered year round, while early education for children three to five years of age follows the school term schedule. Other services often provided include drop-in facilities, outreach work, family support, health care, adult education and training, and practitioner training. Table 2 depicts the types of settings that are provided by the maintained, voluntary, and private sectors.

Table 2. ECEC service provision by sector

Provider	Local Education Authority	Local Authority Social Services	Voluntary Sector	Private/Independent Sector	Joint LEA/Social Services Department
TYPES	Nursery School	State Day Nursery	Voluntary Pre-schools or Playgroups	Centre Based:	Combined Centre
OF	Nursery Class in Primary School		Parent & Toddlers	Private Day Nursery	Family Centre
SETTING	Early Years Units in Primary School (not Scotland)		Friends, neighbours, relatives	Nursery School	Early Excellence Centre
	Reception Class in First, Infant, Primary School (not Scotland)		Community Nursery	Pre-Preparatory School	
	Special School			Pre-school or Playgroup	
	Opportunity Groups			Workplace Nursery	
	Before/After School Club			Independent Schools	
	Holiday Club			Before/After-school Club	
				Family Based:	
				Childminder	
				Au Pair/ Nanny	

Source: Bertram & Pascal, 1999

Quality assurance and inspection

49. Until recently, regulation of early care and education settings in England has been handled in two ways: 1) providers of state-funded *early education* in the maintained, private, voluntary, and independent sectors were inspected by OFSTED, with different procedures followed, depending on whether provision was in the maintained school sector or in the other sectors, and 2) *day-care* providers in the private, voluntary, and independent sectors were inspected by local social service department under the Children Act 1989. There are providers of early education which are not funded by the state and, therefore, not inspected by OFSTED.

50. The previous Government had supported a voucher approach for the provision of nursery education, believing that market forces would drive quality and meet demand. Standards in care provision varied across the country, and it seemed problematic that local authorities were responsible for both the delivery and regulation of services. In current Government policies, there is a clear intent both to expand provision and to maintain diversity, while encouraging partnership as a way of improving services. After

substantial consultation and deliberation, it was announced in August 1999 that the regulation of early years care and education would be consolidated under national standards in a new arm of OFSTED. Standards will include registration, inspection, investigation and enforcement. It is also envisaged that the central functions of OFSTED will be supported by a regional and local network that will employ the existing Social Service officers currently responsible to conduct the day to day regulation of providers.

51. This new framework requires primary legislation which was introduced in the current Parliamentary term. Primary legislation to create at the national level a new body responsible for inspection of services currently regulated by local authorities has also been introduced into the new Scottish Parliament.

52. OFSTED is a non-ministerial government department set up in England as a regulatory body independent of the Department for Education and Employment. Its inspection reports for schools are published in the newspapers and on the web regularly. This policy, we were told, had created a perception that the approach was one of “naming and shaming,” although the vast majority of reports refer to good quality work in schools. There has been concern in the education and care professional community, as well as within DfEE, that this approach not be extended to early years settings. Rather there is a clear intent, as one professional suggested, “to bring people along” through self-evaluation, action planning, improvement, and validation. The Government is attempting to provide clearer guidance on what constitutes good quality early childhood services through the publication of a series of quality guidelines, the development of an early years curriculum framework, and a cohesive quality inspection framework (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

53. The recently established Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) in England (described below) are now required to submit a plan for linking national standards with local improvement initiatives, and self-evaluation and action planning have become prominent features of local initiatives. It also appears that child outcome data will play a part in evaluating the efficacy of programmes and approaches.

Staffing: Classifications, qualifications, staff-child ratios, and salaries

Job classifications and qualifications

54. Although the aim of recent initiatives is to bring care and education together, staffing continues to be bifurcated along “education” and “care” lines. There is a range of job classifications in early years work, and training and qualification schemes, staff-child ratios, and salaries differ across the education-care divide. A *qualified teacher* has a three-year degree and a one year Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) or a four-year degree in higher education. Only about 20% of the early years workforce has acquired graduate level qualification. A *nursery nurse* or qualified classroom assistant has two years post 16 specialist training.

55. There are no training requirements for *childminders*, *nannies*, and *au pairs*, although some local authorities have begun to require 5-15 hours of training for childminders. Fully half of the staff in nurseries, playgroups, after-school clubs, breakfast clubs and holiday play schemes have no training requirements, and, increasingly, *classroom assistants* hired to assist qualified teachers in Reception classes are untrained. Playgroup staff members who work with parents and volunteers are called *playgroup workers*, while before- and after-school clubs and holiday play schemes employ *playworkers*. Table 3 reports results from the LGMB Workforce Survey 1999 estimating the number and percentages of childcare workers in England.

Table 3. Childcare workforce in England

Childcare Workers	Number Employed	%	Volunteers	%	Total Workforce	%
Nursery Workers	51 190	15	7 000	16	58 190	15
Pre-school Playgroup Workers	80 440	24	33 540	77	113 980	30
After-school Workers	13 550	4	2 120	5	15 670	4
Holiday Play School Workers	3 340	1	680	2	4 020	1
Child-minders	93 300	27			93 300	24
Nannies	100 000	29			100 000	26
Totals	341 820	100	43 340	100	385 160	100

Source: HERA 2 Report, 1999, p. 3

56. The table reveals that more than half the child care workforce (57%) consists of childminders and nannies who work in home-based settings. Pre-school and playgroup workers constitute another 33%, with the remainder (approximately 10%) working in nurseries, after school clubs, and holiday play schemes. It is presumed, however, that expansion and improvement of these settings are what is most needed to meet the childcare challenge. Approximately 13% of current childcare workers work in the voluntary sector.

Ratios and salaries

57. In general, those working in education settings are paid at a higher rate than those working in child care. Qualified teachers have the highest average salaries (£17 per hour) and those working in child care have the lowest rates of pay of any sector (Daycare Trust, 1999a). It is noteworthy that private nursery schools, pre-school/playgroups, and opportunity groups have more favourable staff-child ratios than Reception classes.

58. Table 4 compares ratios, qualifications and remuneration by type of provision. A qualified teacher and usually a classroom assistant staff the Reception class, but ratios are not mandated, and Reception classes can be quite large (e.g., 1:30). Beginning in 1999, the Government began to provide funding in areas of greatest need, as a first step toward reducing ratios to 1:15. Scotland has no Reception classes, but all local authority classrooms for three- and four-year olds have a ratio of 1:10.

59. One type of qualified classroom assistant is a nursery nurse. However, many classroom assistants are now recruited from the pool of parents or from the local community. The Open University is in the process of developing a course of study for classroom assistants. Most of the lowest paid workers in the field are expected to benefit from the recent enactment of the minimum wage. That is, the low end of the salaries listed in Table 2 will rise to £3.60 per hour, but many still lack health care and paid holidays (Daycare Trust, 1999). As more mothers enter the workforce and universal provision expands to include children three years of age, there is a growing need for more and better qualified staff. As described below, the Government is taking steps to address some of these staffing issues.

Table 4. Ratios, required qualifications, and remuneration by type of provision

Type	Ratio (hourly)	Teacher qualification	Hourly rate
Nursery School	1:10	Trained nursery teacher; Nursery nurse	£17 £5.50
Nursery Class	1:13	Trained nursery teacher; Nursery nurse	£17 £5.50
Early Years Unit	1:13		As above
Reception Class	1:15 (projected; currently not regulated)	Qualified teacher; Classroom assistant	£17 fixed by school
Private Nursery School, Pre-preparatory School	1:8	Qualified practitioner* (at least half the staff)	£17 for teacher £2.10-£10.00 for other staff dependent on qualifications
Independent School	Must register if over 5		
Opportunity Group	1:4	Qualified teacher; Nursery nurse	£17 £5.50
Pre-school/Playgroup	1:8	Qualified practitioner* (half must be qualified)	£17 £2.69
Private Day Nursery	1:3 (0-2) 1:4 (2-3) 1:8 (3-5)	Qualified practitioner* (at least half qualified)	£17 for teacher £2.10 - £10.00 for other staff
Local Authority Day Nursery (for children at risk)	1:1 - 1:6 dependent on age of children	Nursery nurses; Childcare workers (at least half must be qualified)	£3.95 - £10.28
Childminder	1:3 (0-5) 1:6 (5-7)		£1-3 per child per hour
Nanny			£3
Before and After School Club; Holiday Play Scheme	1:8	Half required to have childcare training	£3 - 5

* These practitioners must have a minimum level of qualification but do not have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Source: compiled from Bertram & Pascal, 1999 and the Daycare Trust pay estimates for 1997. In 1999 a national minimum wage of £3.60 was introduced.

Curriculum

60. With the Education Reform Act 1988 the previous government established a National Curriculum for all schools serving children ages 5-16. Since no comparable framework has existed for settings serving children birth to five years: “a key priority of the Government is...the development of a nationally recognised framework and guidelines to allow providers to develop appropriate curriculum for under fives” (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 36).

61. A Foundation Stage in England was introduced by the Government in September 2000. This stage encompasses children from age three to the end of the Reception year which immediately precedes Key Stage 1 and 2 in England (QCA, 1999). Reception classes for this age group have become the new entry point into state-funded education. Initially, “desirable learning outcomes” were formulated, but the “Excellence in Schools” White Paper mandated the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to review these alongside the review of the national curriculum. Subsequently, the QCA worked with members of the early years community to formulate Early Learning Goals. The Goals are not a curriculum,

but they are intended to help early years practitioners to prepare appropriate curricula. With encouragement from early years professionals, the QCA prepared more specific guidance to accompany the Early Learning Goals in Summer, 2000.

62. The Early Learning Goals affirm the importance of play but also set out ambitious academic expectations for children to achieve by the end of the Reception year, when they are about five years of age. The Goals are divided into six areas: personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; mathematics; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development. The Goals state what children should be able to do in each area by the end of the Foundations Stage.² They are intended to ensure that practitioners address literacy and numeracy from an early age. Baseline assessments in personal, social and emotional development, language and literacy, and mathematics are now given when children in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland enter statutory schooling (at age 5/5+). The QCA will consider changes to existing schemes for the baseline assessment in England in accordance with the new Goals.

63. In 1998 the Government introduced the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) and in 1999 the National Numeracy Strategy (NNS). These initiatives apply to all primary schools and are intended to guarantee that high percentages of students achieve at expected levels by age 11. This emphasis is also reflected in the Early Learning Goals. Many people with whom we spoke expressed concern that early learners might experience too much pressure from these downward influences.

Family engagement and support

64. The Government has developed new policies to provide more support so that working parents can better meet the demands of work and family. Both maternal and parental leave policies are now statutory and in line with the minimum standards of the European Union. The Childcare Tax Credit will help parents pay for child care, and the expansion and improvement of childcare services promise to make it possible for more parents to seek employment. The Government is also encouraging early years providers to work with parents in support of young children's education and care (QCA, 1999).

65. In some governmental policies, parent-school relationships are clearly-defined. Schools are required to have written home-school agreements with families: "Parents are invited to sign the agreement after their child's entry to school. These agreements remind parents of their legal obligations in terms of school attendance, make expectations clear on discipline and set out how schools will implement national homework guidance" (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 57). In return, schools will keep parents informed on their children's progress and make other relevant information available.

66. Government initiatives in support of parents are Childcare Information Services (CIS) and the Child Care Link pilot that was initiated in December 1999. The former are intended to operate as resource and referral services in each local authority area to advise parents regarding quality child care and the range of choices available. The latter is a limited pilot that will link databases and signpost local childcare information services, but they do not have to be located on local authority premises or be run by local authority employees. Information is to be made available in a number of languages.

2. Regarding literacy, it is expected that most children by age 5/5+ will be able to: hear and say initial and final sounds in words, and short vowel sounds within words; link sounds to letters, naming and sounding the letters of the alphabet; read a range of familiar and common words and simple sentences independently; write their own names and other things such as labels and captions and begin to form simple sentences sometimes using punctuation; and use their phonics knowledge to write simple regular words and make phonetically plausible attempt at more complex words (QCA, 1999, p. 27).

Funding

67. The annual cost of child care for two children, one in pre-school and one of school age, has been calculated at approximately £6 000 per year. Average fees for child care in England vary by the age of the child, by type of provision and by locale. Places for infants cost £125, toddlers £120, children 2-3 £110, and children 3-5 £108 per week. Fees are generally higher in London and in the south and lower in the north (Daycare Trust, 1999a). Most private day nurseries, however, charge the same regardless of whether a child is two or five. Childminders make individual contracts with parents.

68. In 1997, it was estimated that 93% of the cost of child care was incurred by parents (Daycare Trust, 1997). However, since that time, the Government has committed to making child care more affordable. It will invest as much as £8 billion to expand and improve services for young children and their families (Daycare Trust, 1999a).

69. Free part-time pre-school for all children four years of age is now state supported. Each four-year-old is entitled to a two-and-a-half hour session five times a week during the school term. This entitlement is currently funded by the Under Fives Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) and through a grant under the Nursery Education and Grant Maintained Schools Act of 1996. In addition, starting in 1999, additional funds have been allocated to increase the number of free early education places for three year olds. These funds are being distributed first to local education authorities that serve the most economically disadvantaged children. It is anticipated that part-time provision for all threes will be achieved by 2004 in England and by 2002 in Scotland. Expansion of services is being supported by direct funding to the LEAs (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

70. Parents are primarily responsible for funding child care, although, arguably, childcare workers are also subsidising the provision of care through their low wages (Daycare Trust, 1997; Zinsser, 1987). Some financial assistance is also provided by the Government. The new Childcare Tax Credit subsidises out-of-home child care for those who qualify and is likely to make childcare more accessible for low- and middle-income families (see below). Moreover, between 1998 and 2003, the Government will commit £470 million for planning and development in the private and voluntary sectors but will not itself provide care; about half the projected places will be on school premises.

71. Each local EYDC Partnership is responsible for doing a Childcare Audit and crafting a plan for expansion of childcare places. The Government then provides grants to support these places, including monies for training and quality assurance schemes and for funding Childcare Information Services. Grants also may be provided to ensure that a provider is able to stay in business (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). National Childcare Strategy funds can be supplemented by monies made available through the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). Under NOF, £170 million from the National Lottery will be used between 1999 and 2003 to create childcare places for 865 000 children throughout the UK (DfEE, 1999c).

Data collection, research, and evaluation

72. Several developments in the field of data collection favour greater systemic co-ordination. In the past, data were collected in different ways by different departments (e.g., counting places or pupils) and kept in different locations. As a consequence, datasets could not be easily or usefully compared. This problem is now being addressed. Moreover, the new Early Years Census and The Day Care Survey, both initiated in 1999, promise to provide complete statistics on education and care provision for children birth to five. A pilot of a new more comprehensive early years annual census that combines the Early Years Census and Day Care Survey is expected to be launched in 2000. In addition, a project entitled "The 2000 Review" aims to co-ordinate information on under fives gathered by different departments. OFSTED data

are also becoming available to a wider group of potential users, and, with its new arm, data should become available on all early years settings. The collation of elements of the local Childcare Audits done by the EYDCPs should enable DfEE to provide more precise estimates of childcare provision and use.

73. The DfEE circulated a consultation paper in July 1999 which asserted the importance of developing a strong knowledge base to inform policy. The Department has emphasised the value placed on research and evaluation with plans to double its research budget (to £10.4 million) by 2002. Much of this work will be carried out by academics in the early years research community who have a strong national and international reputation for high quality work. Current DfEE research priorities for early childhood, which are expected to frame government-sponsored research and evaluation in the foreseeable future, include (Bertram & Pascal, 1999):

- An evaluation of the effects and effectiveness of all new early childhood programmes;
- An evaluation of the cost effectiveness of different types of early childhood provision and early intervention programmes;
- Research to establish difference in the take up of early childhood services by people of different social background, gender, ethnicity, abilities, and special needs;
- Research to provide comparative international evidence of the impact and effectiveness of different early childhood strategies;
- Research on training, qualifications, recruitment and supply of early childhood practitioners;
- Research on the relevance of ICT to pre-school teaching and learning methods.

74. As one means of forging closer alliances between policymakers and researchers, researchers have been seconded to work in the DfEE, and DfEE officers have been seconded to work in research centres. The Department of Health has adopted an alternative strategy, funding a number of research centres, such as the Thomas Coram Research Unit, as a way to develop a long-term programme of research. A strong thrust across departments has been the development of “evidence-based” policy. As one example, all recent early years policy initiatives have evaluation components. Current examples include the Early Excellence Centre Evaluation (Pascal, Bertram et al., 1999; Bertram & Pascal, 2000), the Sure Start evaluation (currently under development), and the EYDCP evaluation (SWA Consulting Ltd.).

Recent policy initiatives

75. Since 1997, the Government has spearheaded sweeping reforms in an effort to extend and enhance the delivery of early childhood services in the United Kingdom. The reforms signal a commitment to develop a comprehensive child and family support structure, yet, as one DfEE administrator explained, it is one that has been “bolted onto the long-standing system.” Recent initiatives include but are not limited to the following: statutory maternity and parental leave, Childcare Tax Credit, the National Childcare Strategy, Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP), the Sure Start Programme, the Early Excellence Centres Programme, Education Action Zones (EAZ), Health Action Zones (HAZ), and new approaches to ratios, staffing, qualifications and training. Each of these initiatives is briefly described below.

Statutory maternity and parental leave

76. In December 1999 major changes in maternity and parental leave policies took effect. Paid maternity leave was increased from 14 to 18 weeks, with the possibility of extending to a total of 40 weeks, and paternity leave was adopted for the first time. A parent now qualifies after one year of full-time employment rather than two. Mothers receive 90% of their salaries for the first six weeks and a flat rate for an additional 12 weeks. Parents are also entitled to 13 weeks *unpaid* leave from the time the child is born until age five, and they may take off work in times of family crisis or loss of child care. When parents in low-income families take parental leave, they are also entitled to claim additional funding to supplement their income during the leave period. These policies essentially bring the UK in line with the minimal standards on maternity and parental leave set by European Union Directives.

The Childcare Tax Credit

77. The Working Families Tax Credit is part of a welfare reform effort to make work pay for low-income families. It replaces the previous Family Credit that excluded the lowest income families. It has been estimated that up to two thirds of all families in the UK will be able to take advantage of the new Childcare Tax Credit of the Working Families Tax Credit. To qualify, a parent with children aged 0-14 must work 16 hours per week or more. Children 0-8 must be in registered care, and children 8-14 (or 16 with special needs) must be in approved care. The maximum amount of credit is £70 per week for one child and £105 per week for two or more children (Daycare Trust, 1999a). The actual amount paid will vary by number of children, family income, and childcare costs, but amounts decrease as income increases above a family income of £90 per week (Daycare Trust, 1999b). The credit is expected to encourage providers to register, as well as to increase the wages of those providing services. (It is anticipated that the rise of the minimum wage to £3.60 per hour also will raise the wages of the most poorly paid childcare workers). The programme was launched in October, 1999. A DfEE official reported that, by December, 1999, over 400,000 Childcare Tax Credit applications had been received.

The National Childcare Strategy

78. Launched in May 1998, the National Childcare Strategy is a central feature of the Government's plan to expand employment, improve education, and support families. In a 29 March 1999 speech, Margaret Hodge, MP and Parliamentary undersecretary, DfEE, stated that the Government plans to invest £8 billion to expand and improve childcare services for young children and their families (Daycare Trust, 1999a). The Childcare Strategy is a comprehensive approach to service delivery, including plans for expansion, funding, dissemination, and improvement of child care for children from birth to three and out-of-school provision for children under 14 (under 16 for children with special needs). Places for up to one million children are to be created by 2003. Due to the high rates of part-time maternal employment in the UK, each child care place is expected to be used by three children. The Childcare Tax Credit to help parents pay for care and the minimum wage are part of the Childcare Strategy. In addition, Childcare Information Services (CIS) are being established by the Partnerships in each local authority, and efforts are underway to improve the existing childcare system through the development of an integrated training scheme and uniform regulatory practices. The clear intent is to address issues of quality, affordability, and accessibility (Daycare Trust, 1999a).

79. Wales has a similar plan of action. The Welsh strategy, written in both Welsh and English, is outlined in two documents, *National Child Care Strategy in Wales* and *Guidance for Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships in Wales*.

Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships

80. In England, the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCP) function in local authorities as the primary mechanism by which the provision of universal education for 3s and 4s and the Childcare Strategy will be realised. The Partnerships consist of representatives from the maintained, private, and voluntary sectors, local education, health, and social services, employers, trainers, New Deal for Lone Parents advisors, and parents. Members of the partnership serve on a voluntary basis. Their role is to assess the current provision of care and education in local areas, to develop plans for future expansion, and to raise quality. Working in co-operation with its partner Local Education Authority, each local Partnership draws up an annual Early Years Development and Childcare Plan which takes into account the Children's Services Plans and Reviews previously developed by the local authorities. The EYDCP plans are linked to national targets for the provision of early education places for three and four year olds and are required to address the need for expansion and improvement of child care provision in their area. The Plans need to address issues of quality, diversity, affordability, and accessibility across the range of services and provide parents with access to information through local Childcare Information Services (CIS).

Sure Start

81. The Sure Start programme is overseen by an interdepartmental unit that includes ministers from seven governmental departments, including health, education, environment, and transportation. The programme heralds a shift in strategy from remediation to prevention. In the words of the DfEE ministers "Sure Start is at the centre of our commitment to eradicate child poverty within 20 years, by helping to break the inter-generational cycle of poor children's under-achievement and poverty of aspiration" (Sure Start, 1999, p. 2). £540 million have been allocated for Sure Start programmes in the United Kingdom over three years; £452 million will fund programmes in England.

82. At least 250 Sure Start programmes will be established in England. Programmes in 60 local districts were launched in January, 1999, and the second round of programmes were expected to start in June, 2000; the remaining 150 will come on board the following year. Sure Start programmes are area-based and include all children regardless of family income. The programme has five broad objectives: 1) improving social and emotional development; 2) improving health; 3) improving the ability to learn; 4) strengthening families and communities; and 5) increasing productivity of operations. Twelve Sure Start targets (embedded in the objectives) have been established to set goals and to measure the effectiveness of local implementation efforts (Sure Start, 1999).

83. The services provided by local programmes are expected to vary as they are adapted to local needs and goals. Core services include outreach and home visits, support for families and parents, support for good-quality play, learning and childcare experiences for children, primary and community health care, including advice about family health and child health and development, and support for children with special needs. Sure Start employs a partnership approach to service delivery. Public sector professionals jointly set priorities for addressing the needs of local children (Sure Start, 1999). Partners include health visitors, doctors, parenting advisers, childminders, play group workers and early years teachers, as well as private and voluntary sector workers, community organisations and parents.

The Early Excellence Centres Pilot Programme

84. The Early Excellence Centres (EEC) programme "is intended to provide a network...of early years providers demonstrating innovation in multi-agency, integrated early years services, high quality early education and child care for children up to the age of four years, and training for adults, bringing together education, health, adult education and community development" (Bertram & Pascal, 1999, p. 43).

Twenty-one centres have been designated in England and others are currently under consideration (see Box 1 for a description of an EEC the team visited). In the words of one DfEE official, the centres will serve as “beacons of excellence,” exploring what can be done to develop and disseminate alternative models of integrated service delivery.

85. In addition to developing high quality education and care for children to age five, centres will provide support, health advice, and adult education, promote interagency collaboration, encourage family involvement in the education of young children, minimise social exclusion, and provide training for early years practitioners. One official described it as “one-stop shopping.” An important component of the programme is dissemination of these approaches through outreach and training. The centres receive additional funding for three years from the DfEE to support development and dissemination efforts. Strategies have already been devised to evaluate the centres using a self-evaluation model (Pascal, Bertram, et al., 1999).

Box 1: Pen Green Centre for Children Under 5 and Their Families

*"What a good and wise parent desires for his or her own children,
a nation must desire for all its children."*

Public Statement of Staff Views, Pen Green (adapted from the Plowden Report)

The Pen Green Centre, located in Corby, Northhamptonshire, was started in 1983 when Corby was considered one of the four most economically deprived areas in the country. Margy Whalley (1994), the dynamic head of the centre, suggests that the history of the centre is "principally the story of how women and children carved out from granite-like bureaucratic structures a service which met *their* needs and also honoured those of young children by celebrating their existence" (p. 1).

Pen Green was set up as a community-based service that offered education, health and social services. It was staffed by a multi-disciplinary team and financed by the Local Education Authority, the Local Authority Social Services Department, and the Area Health Authority. In significant part, however, staff at Pen Green sought to do things differently, to work *with* parents not for them and to set up services that parents wanted.

Whalley explains how a teenager with a new baby might make her own choices about how to get involved:

"She might start to use the baby clinic which was run very informally with big cushions, sabbags, easy chairs and toys for the children. Volunteers were on hand to make coffee, health visitors were available to offer counselling and support; and digital scales were provided so that parents could weigh their own babies. She might then meet some other young parents and decide to join an Open University study group during the day; or she might work with the pack on 'Living with Babies and Toddlers' in the evening. She might later want company and different kinds of play provision and might join a parent and toddler session either run by nursery staff and community service volunteers or by nursery staff and parents. There, in comfortable, roomy surroundings, very young children get the chance to explore with clay, sand, and paint more freely than would be possible at home. In this way, parents decide how they use the centre" (p. 21).

There are four main strands to the services provided at Pen Green:

early education - day care for under-threes, parent-run playgroup, nursery for three- to five-year-olds.

family and community support - including a parent-run home-visiting scheme, after-school and homework club, youth club, family group/parents' group meetings, support for parents; support for men as carers; crèche provision; activities run by parents such as toy library and bookshop; drop-in child care; childminders' support, craft classes, aromatherapy, baby massage, etc.

health - baby clinic/vaccination clinic, well woman clinic, family planning, pregnancy testing, support groups, new baby group, etc.

adult-community education - women returners courses; Open University and UNL courses; adult basic education; writing/poetry groups; NVQ care and education of young children; community arts/drama. etc.

Recently staff and parents have undertaken what might be considered a fifth strand: research, training and development. Staff had been involved in action research for some time, but fully 85% of mothers and up to 60% of fathers are now involved in studying their children's development. Parents make diary entries, record their children's play at home on video, and meet regularly with staff and parents in study groups. In addition to this study of parents' involvement in their children's learning, other recent and current projects include a study of post natal depression and its impact on children's lives, a study of children's emotional wellbeing and the impact of transitions on children's lives, and a study of parents' involvement with babies and toddlers in their children's learning, all funded by Sure Start. An evaluation of cost effectiveness has been undertaken under the aegis of the Early Excellence Centres programme. Pen Green was designated an Early Excellence Centre in 1997.

Education Action Zones

86. An Education Action Zone is comprised of approximately 20 primary, secondary and special schools in a local area organised by an “Action Forum” of businesses, parents, schools, early years providers, the local authority, churches, colleges and other community organisations and agencies. The Action Forum submits a three-year action plan that includes goals, objectives and strategies for raising educational standards in the area. A zone is eligible for funding of up to £1 million a year, three-fourths of which will be committed by the Government. The funding provides opportunities for local coalitions to address problems in their communities in innovative ways. For example, an Action Forum may develop a reward scheme to attract skilled teachers, vary the National Curriculum, use ICT to support distance learning or homework support, change the conditions of employment, or lengthen the school day or year.

87. Targets or outcomes are of two types: pupil performance (e.g., improving literacy, improving numeracy, reducing the number of pupils leaving school) and achieving other educationally and socially desirable goals (improving attendance, improving access to pre-school education, preparing students for work, etc.) To date, 56 Education Action Zones have been established; an additional 17 are expected to be announced by the end of 2000 (DfEE, 1999a).

Health Action Zones

88. Health Action Zones (HAZ) are being established in England to supplement health provision within local authorities. The purpose is to address more directly health issues such as lead poisoning, asthma, and teenage pregnancy. A zone may work in conjunction with Sure Start or an Early Excellence Centre. By December 1999, 20 zones had been announced. These initiatives are also supported by government efforts to develop a number of local programmes aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy. In October 1999, DfEE also announced a programme of Childcare Pilots that will evaluate the efficacy of providing child care for teen parents so they can continue their education.

New approaches to ratios, staffing, qualifications and training

89. One of the main priorities of the Government is to make adult-child ratios in early years’ settings more consistent across the sectors. In August 1999, the Government began providing funds to local authorities in economically deprived areas in order to decrease ratios in Reception classes to 1:15 in those schools where this ratio is not already in place. Since that time additional funds have been allocated. A research project, the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva et al., 1998), has been undertaken at the Institute of Education, University of London to study a number of factors, including ratios, that are thought to be associated with quality child care and education. A review of international and national research on quality indicators such as staff-child ratios began in January, 2000. In addition, a research project to examine the effect of ratios in 50 day care settings is being undertaken by the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education.

90. The Government has expressed its intention to create “a learning society” in which people, regardless of status or qualifications, continue learning throughout their lives. Learning opportunities will be supported through open and distance learning, flexible modes of study, modular courses, work-based study, and access to funding (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). As part of this broader initiative, the Government aims to establish a coherent training and qualification system in the field of early education and care. The Early Years National Training Organisation (NTO) was constituted in November 1998 as one of 75 NTOs set up to improve the knowledge and skill of workers in each sector. The NTO includes everyone, except teachers, working in the early years (0-8) field. It is a division of the Council for Awards in Children’s Care and Education (CACHE), which advises on all issues pertaining to the training and qualifications of

staff, except for teachers and those with graduate level (and above) qualifications. It is working with the QCA to develop a “climbing frame” that will link care and education training schemes nationally. The Government also has increased funds for training childcare workers. The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), now replaced by the Learning and Skills Council, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), and the Standards Fund are providing training for childcare workers. The Further and Higher Education Colleges, PLA, Montessori Training Colleges, and the NCMA are as well (Bertram & Pascal, 1999).

91. Although the approaches to ECEC taken in England and Scotland share common features, they also differ in some important ways. Some of the key differences are highlighted in Box 2.

Box 2: OECD Briefing on Pre-school Education and Childcare in Scotland

National policy and planning: A Minister for Children and Education was appointed in 1999, and a Children and Young People Group was created within the Scottish Executive. To provide advice to Ministers at a Scottish level, a Scottish Childcare Board was appointed. This advisory body has been meeting every two months or so. Meetings have usually been chaired by the Minister for Children and Education. Board members include academics, people from a range of organisations, and parents.

Local policy and planning: Local authorities have been given the lead role in developing pre-school education services in their area. They have been asked to convene local childcare partnerships, but partnerships should not be dominated by them. Unlike EYDCPs, these are not statutory. ‘Audits’ of supply and demand for childcare and local childcare plans will not be approved by the Scottish Executive—they belong to the partnerships—but the Executive will be analysing them to draw together a Scotland-wide picture. Childcare plans are not approved by the Scottish Executive as a condition for release of funds.

Access to early years services

- It is expected that universal provision for three year olds will be achieved sooner than in England. Each “place” is a 4.5 hours of pre-school education over the school day. There is no skew toward areas of deprivation for pre-school as there is in England.
- At present, local authorities have a power but not a duty to provide nursery schools and classes. An Education Bill was recently presented to the Scottish Parliament that will propose a duty on local authorities to secure pre-school education for eligible children in their area.
- More generous staff ratios (i.e. less children per member of staff) in local authority pre-school provision and lack of Reception classes make staff ratios a less difficult issue in Scotland.
- There is one in-take of primary school children that takes place in August of each year.

Curriculum for children 3-5

- The “Curriculum Framework for Children 3-5” is not statutory (although HM Inspectors of Schools use it as a basis for inspection), and there are no early learning goals.
- The framework emphasises learning through play. Five key aspects of children’s learning and development are highlighted: emotional, personal and social development; communication and language; knowledge and understanding of the world; expressive and aesthetic development; and physical development and movement.

Quality assurance and inspection

- There is no mandatory baseline assessment in Scotland.
- There will not be one regulatory body for both care and education settings as in England.
- Work is underway on a self-evaluation guide based on performance indicators for use in all early years centres.

Scotland’s Early Years Best Practice Initiative: The response from a post-1997 consultation was against a centre based approach for disseminating good practice (as in the Early Excellence Centre programme in England). Partly, this was connected to resources—funding was only available for two centres in Scotland. However, there was also concern over the effect of selecting a very small number of centres and labelling them “excellent”. Respondents enthusiastically supported an initiative, which would raise standards and promote a holistic approach to the delivery of care and education services. This is the aim of the Early Years Best Practice Initiative, which is shaped around national periodic events (three per year for 1999 and 2000) in which examples of good practice and innovation in all sectors are presented and discussed. These national events are supplemented by local seminars.

CHAPTER 4: ISSUES RELATING TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

92. In a recent book on child care provision and staff training in the European Union, Oberhuemer and Ulich (1997) described provision in the United Kingdom in terms of a diverse and fragmented system of child care and education services, with split administrative responsibility (education, health/social services) both at the national and local level. Indeed, it was widely recognised within the UK that the early education and care system was characterised by a lack of co-ordination and coherency, a situation exacerbated by competition among departments at the national level and by competition for clients at the local level.

93. Given this quite recent history, it is noteworthy that impressive strides have been made toward creating a co-ordinated service delivery system. Indeed, the Government has set in motion a comprehensive plan of action in a remarkably short period of time. At the same time, devolution of decision making and planning through Sure Start and the local Early Years Development and Child Care Partnerships (EYDCP) has created new opportunities for participation in local decision making and new expectations for demonstrating the quality and effectiveness of the services provided. Acknowledging these substantial achievements, the review team noted six issues that seemed to warrant further consideration:

- Views of children and families
- System co-ordination and collaboration
- Access and equity
- Staffing
- Approaches to early learning
- Quality assurance and inspection

Views of children and families

94. Understandings of children and of childhood differ across time, and across cultures and nations (e.g., Cleverley & Phillips, 1987; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Woodhead, 1999). In Britain, current policies seem to emphasise the importance of children's participation in early childhood settings so as to prepare them for school. A school-based agenda has begun to shape early education, such that early childhood is treated primarily as a stage to prepare children for subsequent school achievement, and less as a specific stage with its own unique learning approaches and windows of opportunity. Programmes that are tied to attainment targets cannot respond adequately to the multiple needs of children at risk or release

sufficiently the inner creativity of young children. In addition, a predominantly school-readiness approach does not fit well with mainstream British research or with the practices of the new Early Excellence Centres.

95. The review team also noted that discussions often centred on parents', especially lone mothers', responsibility to work and on their obligation to raise children who will be successful learners. In home-school agreements, for example, parents are expected to sign a contract that affirms their legal obligations to ensure that their children attend, and their support of disciplinary procedures and homework. We interpreted this approach as somewhat coercive and noted how it contrasted with the stated intent of the Early Childhood Education Forum (1998) to premise relationships on mutual respect and a willingness to work together: "Partnership can and should take different forms, but it is essentially about two equal, though often very different, parties coming together with a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and a willingness to work together...Partnership implies a two-way process with knowledge and information flowing freely both ways" (p. 49).

96. It is significant that parental leave is now available to men for the first time, and yet, in general, men work long hours—an average of 47 hours per week. Instead of integrating care and education to facilitate every day life for both children and parents, part-time early years provision is supported; mothers are expected to work part time or to patch together childcare arrangements. In these constructions, the two-parent nuclear family is the tacit norm. As Bruner (1980) indicates, these are arrangements with very real consequences for people's lives. Fathers are likely to be less involved with their children, and mothers are likely to be channelled into jobs that are poorly remunerated, with few, if any, benefits and limited opportunity for advancement. Moreover, families that are constituted in other ways may be seen as deviant or dysfunctional when the two-parent family is implicitly idealised.

System co-ordination and collaboration

97. The present government has made a strong commitment to bringing coherence to the diverse array of sectors and services that comprise early education and care in the UK. A keystone of government policy has been the concept of "joined up" thinking—the expansion and integration of education and care and the joining up of education, health, adult training, and family support at national and local levels. Already examples of successful joined-up thinking can be seen. The Early Excellence Centres, for example, encourage integrated provision of education, health, and social services, as well as special education and family outreach. The review team witnessed a host of creative approaches to collaboration at Pen Green in England (Box 1) and Greengables, a centre we visited in Scotland (Box 3). The team also was impressed by the teamwork and careful consultation of the Early Childhood Education Forum, a consortium of the major national organisations concerned with early years provision. In sum, the commitment of a broad array of stakeholders to the co-ordination of services for children and families was evident. However, issues were raised with regard to: (a) the continuing division between education and care; (b) the complexity of funding arrangements; and (c) the decentralisation of responsibilities.

Box 3: Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre

Situated on a housing estate in Edinburgh Scotland, Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre provides a range of services and activities to area residents. Greengables Nursery School opened in 1975 as a place where community involvement and innovation were encouraged. Hours were extended in 1990. Today, the "Open Nursery" is a full-day (8 am to 6 pm) nursery school open 48 weeks per year, so that parents can work and take part in training courses. Work with parents has become central to the school's mission.

The adjoining family centre opened more recently, extending services to older and younger children and to the wider community. The centre houses classrooms, a crèche, meeting rooms, and a lounge area for people to meet and have coffee or tea. A café is open one morning a week. Centre staff aim to provide a support system through individual and group counselling and educational and recreational courses. These include adult basic education, computers, first aid, parenting, self defence, aromatherapy, reflexology, cookery, sewing, crafts, "aerobics for the terrified," and family literacy. The "little nursery" that is located in the family centre is a creche facility open from 9 am to 4 pm. The crèche provides care for children while their parents participate in centre or other activities.

The centre also sponsors activities for children (e.g., movement to music, instruction in violin and keyboard) as well as for parents and children (family swimming group, babies group for children who can sit alone, and a toddlers/toy library). A home link teacher visits parents and children under 3 in their homes and runs groups for parents and young children. Activities include a family swimming group, a heuristic play group for babies who can sit unsupported, and a toddlers' group. The home link teacher also provides individual and group support for parents experiencing difficulties with aspects of their children's behaviour.

One parent described her experience in these terms:

I go to the new building every morning before taking my son to nursery. He plays with the toys while me and other parents have a cup of tea and a chat. There is such a great atmosphere in the new building (that's what everybody calls it). It doesn't matter if you use the building everyday or if you're a newcomer. You always get a nice welcome.

Greengables is staffed by teachers, nursery nurses, a home link teacher, a social worker, a community education worker, and a clerical assistant.

The continuing division between education and care

98. Concerns were raised about the coherence and co-ordination of the government's strategy for ECEC. At the national level, a significant attempt to integrate policy for young children and families was made by transferring responsibility for child care services from the Department of Health to the DfEE. Although this has brought some coherence, administrative responsibility is still divided within the DfEE into the Early Years Division and the Childcare Unit, the latter housed within the employment division responsible for developing the National Childcare Strategy. The two administrative units are co-located and increasingly work together on the development and implementation of policy, sharing responsibilities across many areas. Yet, while Government policy stresses the close relationship between care and education, a disjointed view of early childhood services is evident in both the compartmentalisation of responsibilities and the distinct policy strategies adopted in the two sectors. For example, while early years provision is increasingly addressed as an entitlement for children, child care is a fee-paying service linked to parental employment.

99. The team also wondered why the focus of policy attention has been on early years provision for children ages three to five, with reforms such as the Foundation Stage excluding services for infants and toddlers. When we asked why a comprehensive early years strategy for children from birth on had not been

designed, we were told that infants and toddlers were in the “don’t go there zone.” As in many other countries, there seems to be an ambivalence toward ECEC for children under three that may be linked to societal views that very young children should be at home with their mothers. It also reinforces public opinion that programming for children under three is not “education.” Consequently, this age group has been relatively neglected by educationally-focused policies. The review team felt that this was a missed opportunity to formulate a comprehensive ECEC strategy that establishes early childhood from birth to six as the first stage of the education system, as in Sweden and Spain.

100. The administrative and conceptual divide between child care and early education is felt keenly in the field where local authorities and Partnerships struggle to meet the regulatory and funding requirements of the different initiatives in order to provide co-ordinated services for young children and families. Although some concerns were raised, the more integrated regulatory regime under development should help streamline the system. In some cases, obvious overlaps exist in the objectives and target groups of various programmes, suggesting the need to combine and co-ordinate initiatives. Yet, there is evidence that Government policy is moving toward a more integrated approach. Specific examples of integration include the Early Excellence Centres, the EYDCPs, joint training initiatives and degree courses for early years and childcare workers, and a range of co-located services such as before and afterschool clubs and holiday schemes, and playgroups on school premises.

The complexity of funding arrangements

101. The complexity of the funding streams, with several departments in control of different sources of funding, calls for a more coherent approach. Currently, there are more than 30 funding initiatives, and these have not been co-ordinated across or between departments. While there has been a very substantial increase in the amount spent on ECEC over the past few years, the multiple initiatives make it extremely challenging to calculate expenditures. The numerous public funding regimes also leads to confusion among local stakeholders, and the different mechanisms for funding nursery education and child care make co-ordination of education and care difficult. Although EYDCPs can apply for infrastructure funding, there is no national planned capital expansion programme for childcare. The indirect funding approach adopted for child care via tax credits, adds further incertitude about the long-term viability of projects. Services in low-income neighbourhoods which depend on income generation from poor parents are likely to be particularly vulnerable. In addition, because much of the funding tends to be short-term, long-term planning is hard to achieve, and expansion relies on the entrepreneurial ability of key local personnel. As a result of the complexity of the funding arrangements and the short-term nature of investments, making judgements about the long-term value of expenditures becomes a real challenge for policymakers.

The decentralisation of responsibilities

102. Another issue that emerged during the visit concerns the balance of responsibilities between the central and decentralised levels with regard to policy development and implementation. On the one hand, the great strength of the new British approach to early years has been the Government’s ability to orchestrate and fund at the national level a remarkably ambitious plan of action. Goals and objectives of various initiatives are clearly defined, and written guidelines support local authorities in implementing new policies. On the other hand, the reforms are perceived by some in the field as top-down and outside-in, especially when pre-determined outcomes are expected. Such issues concerning decentralisation were repeatedly raised as we met and talked with representatives from local and national organisations and from the Welsh and Scottish governments. Several representatives of local authorities also expressed the wish for more devolution of power and decision making to the community level. Several of our correspondents

indicated that decentralised authorities were not given enough flexibility to adapt national initiatives to local needs and circumstances and that the Government held “tight reins” when implementing new policy.

103. The Partnerships signify the Government’s determination to decentralise planning to the local level and to build from the bottom up. Many people expressed to us their belief in and commitment to this work, and agreed that the Partnerships have been successful in bringing together former competitors from the private, voluntary, and state maintained sectors and in overcoming historical divisions between education and care. Partnerships also have given communities the freedom to innovate in ways that have not been possible before. Again, some felt that the Partnerships have not been delegated enough authority. They expressed frustration that their agenda was pre-set by the Government and narrowly defined to focus on meeting nursery entitlements, setting targets for childcare, and stimulating local childcare development. Some also confided that the workload had been enormous and that the pressure on the unpaid members of the Partnership and on the local authority officials was overwhelming. Members of the Early Childhood Education Forum, for example, expressed that this level of intensity simply could not be sustained. Despite efforts to collaborate with a range of stakeholders, many people mentioned that it was difficult to get parents involved, and teachers and children do not seem to be included in many early years discussions. In spite of these challenges, the Partnerships were generally perceived as innovative and important mechanisms for bringing coherence to local early childhood policy development and planning.

Access and equity

104. It is clear that the Government is making an unprecedented effort to tackle long-standing inequities in access to childcare and early years services. However, serious concerns persist, to which our attention was drawn on several occasions, in the areas of: (a) access to early years provision; (b) access to childcare; and (c) access for children in need of special support.

Access to early years provision

105. The early years entitlement has helped to overcome disparities in access to nursery education across local authorities, and all children now have access to free ECEC from the age of four. However, “universal provision” in England covers only a two-and-a-half hour session per day, compared to four-and-a-half hours in Scotland. In contrast, the norm in most European countries is three years or more of full-time, publicly-funded early childhood services prior to beginning compulsory schooling at age six (OECD, 1997). The decision to support part-time provision has serious implications for children and their families. First, it is now seen as practical and cost-effective to fulfil the nursery entitlement through provision in primary schools.³ As a result, all four-year olds are in schools in England, and most attend Reception classes where the child-staff ratios may reach 1:30. This raises understandable concerns about the quality of children’s early learning environments. Second, as we will discuss later, the limited nursery entitlement also places pressure on teachers to focus on curricular goals and attainment testing. Third, a policy preference for school-based, part-time provision does little to support working parents, even those in part-time work. Plans to expand part-time early years provision for three-year olds raise similar issues. In practice, many three- and four-year olds will need to be cared for in ‘wrap around’ child care arrangements in order to accommodate their parents’ work schedules. Moreover, access to child care services is dependent on parent’s ability to pay fees, though the Childcare Tax Credit targeting low-income families and those in training, may help disadvantaged families obtain needed supports.

3. Prior to 1980, free-standing nursery schools offering two years of provision (sometimes full-time) were a preferred form of provision due to their distinct nursery ethos for children.

106. If, for three- and four-year olds, the focus has been on providing access to educational services, for the under threes, the Government has clearly taken an employment-oriented strategy toward increasing female labour force participation. While the National Childcare Strategy seeks to encourage growth of quality provision for children from birth to age 14 with working parents (see next section), there are no plans to expand the early years entitlement to include all children under three, as in Sweden or Finland, in order to ensure that all children have a right to quality, affordable, early childhood provision. There is little educational support for children under three years, unless the child has been identified as having special needs. In this respect, the Sure Start initiative is important as it seeks to provide integrated child care and early education, as well as allied services, for children under four who live in disadvantaged areas.

Access to child care

107. Affordability is currently a major criterion of access to childcare since most of the cost is expected to be covered through parental fees. Parents, especially mothers, may defer employment, because they cannot afford the cost of care. In England, 60% of lone mothers are unemployed, a much higher rate than in countries with more developed ECEC systems. In some cases, families may only be able to afford childcare because staff, overwhelmingly women, subsidise the cost of care with their low wages. Another solution is for families to place their children in informal arrangements with no regulation or monitoring of quality. That such a large percentage of low-income parents in Britain use such arrangements raises issues of equity. The Childcare Tax Credit is expected to subsidise fees for parents, raise staff wages, and encourage unregistered childminders to become part of the system. It is too early to know what the impact of this policy will be, but it will be important to monitor its effects in the coming months.

108. There is currently a shortage of affordable, quality private or voluntary childcare places for children under three. Yet, women are entering the workforce in record numbers and are expected to represent the major growth in the labour force in the coming years. Supply has not kept pace with the increasing demand for formal arrangements, in part because centre-based provision for under threes is more expensive to provide. The 10% drop in the number of childminders in 1999 is also a concern, because it suggests that there also may be a future shortage of family day care places for this age group. The quality of provision is a further concern given the fact that staff working with the youngest children tend to have the lowest qualifications and poorest working conditions. The National Child Care Strategy intends to expand provision for this age group but only through indirect funding mechanisms, assuming that the private market will expand to meet demand. A major question is who will care for very young children, if the Government does not take a more direct role in addressing the shortage of provision?

109. In addition, officials and others with whom we spoke called attention to variability in service provision across regions. We were told, for example, that a parent could rather easily find child care in some cities, while, in other parts of the country, child care could be virtually non-existent. In particular, the trend toward supporting private provision through demand subsidies, rather than direct support to services, has led to a shortage of provision in low-income and rural areas, where private and voluntary sector provision finds it difficult to survive. The decrease in the number of registered childminders is also a concern, since family day care is the primary provider of supervised care in rural areas. We learned that there is also a need for more flexible arrangements to meet the demand for care in the evenings and on weekends. The review team was informed that many parents, especially mothers, are working non-standard hours. The childcare needs of this constituency appear to be an important area of public concern.

Access for children in need of special support

110. As the recent OECD economic survey has shown, economic trends in the UK have been very favourable (OECD, 2000). Yet, poverty levels have tripled in the last 15 years and children are disproportionately represented in the poorest families. Currently, almost 20% of children are living in poverty, one of the highest figures in the developed world (UNICEF, 2000). Also of concern are the disproportionate numbers of children in certain groups with low educational attainment: certain groups of boys, certain racial, ethnic and linguistic minority groups, children with special educational needs, 'looked after' children, and mobile or transient pupils. Truancy, exclusion from school, youth crime, and drug use are related problems that have been identified. The Government is making an unprecedented commitment to address these concerns, and early years, family, and work policies are key priorities. Initiatives such as the Sure Start, EAZ, and HAZ focus on multi-agency early intervention in communities with the greatest need. While it is still too early to evaluate the efficacy of these initiatives, their objectives and strategies seem promising. Sure Start is most closely related to early education concerns. Sure Start is regarded as an innovative community development initiative, but it is not clear as yet how it links into mainstream early years services or with other initiatives (e.g., Early Excellence Centres).

111. The review team felt that mainstream ECEC policies could better support families and children, particularly those from racial and ethnic minority groups, children with disabilities and special needs, and children from refugee and asylum-seeking families. From an equity perspective, it is worrying that these children in need of special support are less likely to participate in quality early childhood services than their more advantaged counterparts. A 1998 study sponsored by the Refugee Council and Save the Children (Rutter & Hyder, 1998) found that asylum-seeking and refugee children and families have less access to early years services. Limited access was attributed to a lack of information about early years services; frequent moves; unwillingness to place very young children with carers who do not speak the home language; unwelcoming services; and lack of familiarity with early years services. In sum, there is a need to address both the barriers to accessing services as well as the ability of services to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse society.

112. Local authorities and voluntary organisations have struggled for many years to support equity, fight racism, and provide for language diversity. As a result of these efforts, respect for diversity and anti-racist strategies are written in recent legislation and form part of the Sure Start and EYCDP initiatives. We have reviewed many excellent reports that aim to ensure that issues regarding race, ethnicity, and disability will remain focal in policy discussions (e.g., DfEE, 1994, 1998, 1999b; EYTARN, 1999a & b; Rieser, 1995). Voluntary organisations have played a significant role in making sure that ECEC services reflect the ethnic diversity of the communities they serve. They also have promoted the training of staff and pioneered the use of suitable materials. Despite this important work, significant equity issues remain to be addressed at an employment level, at a service delivery level, and at a curricular level.

Staffing

113. The quality of early years settings is intimately related to issues of staff training and qualifications, recruitment and retention, and remuneration. Current training schemes and conditions of work, especially within the childcare profession challenge the Government's plans to expand and improve services. Low salaries, poor or non-existent benefits, long hours, poor working conditions, high rates of turnover, limited access to training, and few opportunities for advancement have led to instability and, in some cases, low morale in early years education and care settings.

Staff training and qualifications

114. The review team was concerned about the low proportion of trained early years staff in the field. It has been estimated that approximately 20% of the early years workforce has acquired post-18, graduate qualifications (Moss, 1999), although it was explained to us that it has only been in the last two years that “early years” has been recognised as a specialist degree. A majority of childcare workers are childminders and nannies, who, with the exception of a brief training for childminders required by a few local authorities, have no formal training. This is also the case with fully half the staff in nurseries, playgroups, after-school clubs, breakfast clubs, and holiday play schemes (Bertram & Pascal, 1999). The review team also learned that many classroom assistants in Reception classes have no prior training.

115. The Government has recognised these concerns and has focused efforts on bringing coherence to the patchwork of training schemes that have proliferated across England. We were told that there were hundreds of courses of different lengths in various places and that many would not be recognised in other parts of the country. This was referred to by one high-level official as “the under fives training muddle”. The Early Years NTO is now working with the QCA to create a national training framework with the 392 courses that are recognised. The image of a “climbing frame” has been evocative in efforts to create horizontal and vertical career paths and to link care and education within a nationally recognised qualifications system. While these efforts bring coherence to a highly differentiated and fragmented set of approaches, they also further institutionalise the staffing hierarchy that divides care and education: an elite group of teachers to work with children from three to primary school age in nursery and Reception classes supported by a large workforce of various types of childcare employees (Moss, 1999). The work of the NTO is important, but it does not concern degree courses and post-graduate training for teachers, which are located separately, in the higher education sector. Likewise, the new “early childhood studies” degree courses, which attempt to bridge the gap and offer training in care and education fall outside the NTO’s remit. Thus, to a large extent, the care and education training routes remain separate.

Recruitment, retention, and working conditions

116. At a time when the early years system is undergoing rapid expansion, the success of the overall strategy hinges on a qualified and committed workforce. The review team was informed that a combination of factors are inhibiting recruitment and retention efforts. Salaries in the early years sector are not good, relative to positions requiring similar qualifications, and there is no grant or loan system, so there is difficulty in some places recruiting for teacher training courses. Adults over 25, the team was told, do not get the funding that under-25s get as a matter of course. Also mentioned was an “atmosphere of pressure.” The team learned that there is a shortage of early years specialists at higher levels, i.e., those who will be trainers at graduate and post-graduate levels and a reluctance for people to become heads or directors. As one advisor commented, “Being accountable to parents, governors, and OFSTED, the chances of falling foul are greater than gaining acclaim.” The head of one of the Early Excellence Centres suggested that a course of study be developed for “social entrepreneurs,” people who have learned to lead as well as to compete successfully for grants and other funds. A strong feeling was also expressed that the field needed men, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, and that special efforts should be made to attract a wider diversity of people to the field.

117. At the same time, turnover rates are high in early years settings, because wages are low and working conditions often poor. An estimated 30% of staff working in UK nurseries leave their jobs every year, and outside nurseries, most childcare staff do not get paid holiday or sick leave (Day Care Trust, 1997). Teachers have far better remuneration and work conditions, but generally operate with less favourable child-staff ratios than in the care sector. While the introduction of a minimum wage has improved matters, the issue of staff terms and conditions lies at the heart of an effective childcare strategy.

While appreciating the scope and intensity of the Government's efforts to address the "trilemma" of affordability, quality, and remuneration, members of the review team felt strongly that issues regarding salary and working conditions were understated in the current approach. It seemed doubtful that sufficient funds could be channelled to childcare practitioners through the indirect avenues of the Childcare Tax Credit and the minimum wage, a reality that might well undermine other efforts to forge a coherent and viable system.

Approaches to early learning

118. The desire to ensure that the workforce of tomorrow will be armed with the skills necessary for employment in an "information society" (Bell, 1987) has prompted efforts to revise the early childhood curriculum so that young children, regardless of background and family income, can gain foundational skills during the early years. One consequence of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies has been a heightened emphasis on these subjects in early years settings, marking the Government's clear intention to promote equity across income groups and sectors. However, the review team was concerned about the approaches to early learning, and specifically, that young children were being encouraged to acquire skills that are more typically learned during the early years of primary school in other countries.

119. Children not only begin formal schooling much earlier than in most other European countries, but they also undertake formal curricular tasks earlier. Some of the Early Learning Goals seem extremely ambitious for young children—even though they are not expected to reach these goals before the end of the Reception year (age 5-5+). As children do not progress toward goals in lock-step fashion, individual and cultural variation is to be expected. A more nuanced and eclectic set of approaches might be more successful in achieving desired results. While some young children might be quite motivated—and able—to achieve the outcomes stated in the Early Learning Goals, others will inevitably be distracted or confused. It is important that children be challenged but not expected to learn abstract concepts or other skills that are beyond their level of maturity. In particular, children who speak a first language other than English are likely to require educational experiences in their home language and only later transfer their understandings into English (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

120. The downward pressure on early childhood provision to comply with demands of the formal school system raises a number of concerns about the quality of children's early learning environments. As teachers struggle to meet goals for young children within the limited time-frame of the nursery entitlement, many nursery classes, Reception classes, and Early Years Units resemble downward extensions of primary school. The team heard from many early years practitioners that increasingly they were feeling compelled to teach specific content. Indeed, in one of the classrooms that the team visited, we saw erase boards for infants so that they could practice writing their names and, in a classroom for threes, we observed a small group of children being instructed on the perceptual distinctions between a capital "C" and a small "c." One official told us that children should be able to read and write by late five, "unless they didn't have good early years experience, or they have special needs." While children are introduced to literacy and numeracy from the age of four or even earlier in the UK, in many other countries, formal schooling begins at age six, and letters, phonics and numbers are not taught didactically during the early years. Research fails to demonstrate that early entry to school and an overly narrow focus on literacy and numeracy lead to better outcomes in reading and mathematics (Kavler et al., 2000).

121. In questioning the appropriateness of these activities, we are not advocating a wait and see, maturationist perspective. An emergent literacy perspective posits that reading and writing *behaviours* precede and evolve into conventional literacy (Sulzby, 1989). Literacy is seen to emerge before formal reading instruction, as children are immersed in print-rich environments, read to frequently, and begin to see and use print for a variety of purposes. Children see the relationship between spoken and written

language as they incorporate literacy tools into their play by writing grocery lists in dramatic play, signs in block play, or icons and words on the computer. Phonemic awareness develops from “songs, fingerplays, games, poems, and stories in which phonemic patterns such as rhyme and alliteration are salient” (Neuman, Bredekamp, & Copple, 2000, p. 18). Teachers reinforce the connection by writing children’s stories under their drawings and encouraging the use of print in meaningful contexts. The Education Action Zones’ sponsorship of books for babies, toy libraries, and family literacy projects would seem to serve as an important additional support for children’s emerging literacy capabilities.

Quality assurance and inspection

122. Raising quality and standards in early years services and the schools is high on the Government agenda, and many of its policies including that of early education, reflect this overarching concern. The new emphasis on adequate resources to early years, a planned approach to policy development, and an evaluative capacity are all positive developments toward creating a quality system. As part of the focus on quality assurance, the emphasis has been on “evidence-based” practice and policy. This approach stresses rational procedures (input, process, and outcomes). The review team was aware of a strong desire to bring coherence to the diverse and unwieldy practices that had developed over time and to implement mechanisms to monitor and ensure quality. Many officials used terms such as co-ordination, coherency, uniformity, and integration. The value of order and rational procedures is evident in the model of change that prevails in government efforts, particularly the focus on evaluation to make people accountable. There is a clear desire to get everyone on the same page and to meet the quality standards set by Government.

123. Although this strategy has enabled the Government to accomplish a great deal in a short amount of time, there are also drawbacks. The approach inhibits people’s ability to adopt policies and practices to the needs of quite diverse constituencies working in quite diverse circumstances. Children who speak a language other than English or who have other learning needs may not benefit from a standardised approach or be able to demonstrate what they know on a standardised assessment. Children living in poverty will not have the same advantages as children whose families are better off. People expressed to us their concern that educational and health solutions were being advanced to address problems that were largely economic, that a few hours of pre-school each day were expected to cure all social ills, with educators poised to be blamed if or when initiative fail to achieve desired results.

124. The current process of inspection also takes an external, standardised approach to the evaluation of individual settings. When the review occurred, it was still unclear how early years provision would be evaluated, especially for early years workers in different settings (e.g. a childminder or a provider working three mornings a week in a church hall). As noted above, the pressures on schools, teachers, and children to achieve good results are intense already, even in Reception classes and nursery education, and concern was widespread that a “naming and shaming” approach might be extended to the early years assessments. When asked what might be included on a baseline assessment, an OFSTED official, referring to the new Foundation Stage curriculum framework (QCA, 2000) suggested that children would be expected to count to ten, write their name, know where their family came from, and be able to recognise some words. He assured the review team that “Government has no desire to prescribe curriculum for the early years.” However, we were also told by others that there is a widespread perception among teachers that they will be expected to follow a prescribed teaching strategy to satisfy the expectations of OFSTED inspectors. While it is hoped that these practices will be a mechanism for raising standards, there is concern that young children will be taught not only how to take tests but actual test items. Moreover, many forms of assessment (e.g., paper and pencil questionnaires, abstract questions, multiple-choice tests) are unlikely to yield valid information with regard to what young children know and can do (Meisels, 1994).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

125. In recent years, there has been unprecedented attention and resources devoted to the expansion and improvement of early childhood services within the UK. The review team was impressed with the Government's attempts to redress many years of neglect in the ECEC field and to mobilise people and resources in the service of young children and their families. Early childhood provision in the UK has begun from a relatively low base. It is now benefiting from significant funding and a radical reform of policy, co-ordination and planning. The result has been a remarkable number of new initiatives launched in a brief period of time. The agenda will require continued strong funding over the coming years if progress is to be maintained and a stable, national ECEC system established. It is not our intention to minimise in any way the substantial progress that has already been achieved. Rather, in a spirit of professional dialogue, we conclude this report with suggestions that policy makers in the UK might wish to consider in their ongoing efforts to enhance early childhood policy and provision.

Creating a more comprehensive and co-ordinated early childhood system

126. The previous chapter discussed issues of comprehensiveness and co-ordination that were raised by members of the review team and by others with whom we spoke: the continuing division between education and care; the complexity of funding arrangements, and the decentralisation of responsibilities. It also underlined the progress made in recent years, in particular, the greatly increased material and financial resources placed at the disposal of the early childhood sector and the emphasis on planning and evaluation. To increase the effectiveness of the new policies and the energies that they have awakened, it may be helpful:

127. *To formulate and implement a comprehensive early childhood education and care policy for all children, from birth to five years.* The current approach reflects compartmentalised thinking toward the early years, seeing early education primarily as a preparation for school and later life, and childcare as a support to working parents. With this thinking, there is a tendency to concentrate early years efforts on children aged three to five years. The seeds of a new approach, however, are already apparent, and its implementation, in terms of cost, may not be prohibitive. The government has already established the EYDC Partnerships, which, with sufficient support from government and local authorities, have the expertise necessary to put into place integrated policies at local level. The creation of a Minister for Children and Education, as in Scotland and Norway, or the naming of an Ombudsman for Children working across ministries, might ensure that children's issues would be dealt with in a systematic and comprehensive fashion.

128. Other actions may help move toward a more integrated approach: (a) mechanisms to improve co-ordination across all the ministries concerned with children and families and to ensure that national objectives are understood and appreciated at local levels; (b) streamlining of funding and other arrangements for the two sectors to enable Partnerships and local authorities to allocate resources to service delivery in a fairer and more integrated manner; (c) a multi-disciplinary early childhood council (e.g., based on the Early Childhood Education Forum) to provide direct and regular advice to inform policy

decisions;⁴ (d) new approaches to qualifications and training to break down care and education boundaries; (e) developing a curriculum framework to guide early childhood practice across the age group; (f) public information campaigns to share knowledge with parents and teachers about young children's learning.

129. *To provide greater support to the EYDC Partnerships and to local authority managers of early childhood services.* Many times during the visit, the team was convinced of the need to maintain a balance between centralised authority and local decision-making. It seems important to create a situation in which system leadership and evaluation continue to exist and, at the same time, genuine powers of organisation and supervision are given to local actors, including parents. The EYDC Partnerships and local authorities are key agencies in the devolution of responsibilities. Already, the EYDC Partnerships have made much progress in assessing and addressing local needs, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders. Greater dissemination of the achievements of more successful EYDC Partnerships may be helpful. However, we also understood that the Partnerships have many practical difficulties that need to be addressed: heavy workloads required of voluntary personnel; administrative requirements set by the DfEE, including the masses of documentation involved in planning and reporting, and the need to employ additional municipal staff at certain periods.

130. It would seem important for the Partnerships to benefit from the continued guidance and funding from the Government as they seek to address emerging challenges: How to facilitate closer co-operation and collaboration across the UK education system (i.e., from pre-school to school) and across the various initiatives relevant to children and families (i.e., Sure Start, Early Excellence, EAZ, HAZ)? How to engage certain groups (e.g., parents, teachers, children) in the dialogue and decision-making around early childhood issues? How to take into account the perspectives of diverse constituencies, and in particular, how to make the voices of marginalised families heard? How to ensure flexible adaptation of programmes to diverse settings? How to make assessment strategies useful and appropriate?

Expanding access to full-time provision for all children

131. The previous chapter raised issues concerning access and equity. In particular, the chapter addressed the impact of part-time provision on both access to and quality of services, the limited access to services for children under three, the variability in service provision across regions, and the inequities in access to appropriate services for children in need of special support. The team is aware also that the government has undertaken wide-ranging efforts to ameliorate the most deleterious effects of economic and social disparities. In particular, the review team supports the Government's multi- and cross-agency approach to addressing disadvantage that characterises several of the current initiatives. In order to render policy even more effective, authorities may wish:

132. *To establish closer links between Sure Start and early years initiatives, such as the Early Excellence Centres, which provide family outreach, child care and early education services.* As an interdepartmental, multi-disciplinary programme, Sure Start is a very promising strategy for tackling social exclusion, and it will be important to monitor its impact on children, families, and communities in the coming years. It also would seem important that Sure Start link closely with other early years services, as research consistently shows that equitable access to quality services can help overcome some of the negative effects of disadvantage that hinder subsequent educational performance. At the national level, there is a need to develop a co-ordinated approach to address the issue of affordability, so that family income does not determine which children may benefit from quality early childhood services.

4. In recent months, a new Children's Unit has been established at Cabinet level to co-ordinate the work of the major ministries regarding children's issues. The review team strongly supports this development.

133. However, the team is aware that access is not enough. Early childhood policies and programmes need to address the language, social, and economic needs of children and families from diverse backgrounds. The team supports the efforts of several organisations in the voluntary sector to recruit staff from the same backgrounds and communities as the children and families served—men, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities. While early intervention can help address social exclusion, it cannot by itself address structural poverty, income inequality, or poor families' limited access to goods and services. The diversity and complexity of social issues are not easily or quickly resolved. It is necessary to question and seek input every step of the way, to set targets, but then to take stock when those targets are not met.

134. *To reconsider the limited definition of early years provision, its organisation and intensity.* The achievement of a two-and-a-half hour daily session of early education for all four-year olds is already an accomplishment, but for the reasons outlined in the issues section, it is probably insufficient. The current organisation may have negative impacts on both access for children from low-income families, and on the quality of programmes being offered. We would suggest consideration of a full-time entitlement to early childhood services for all children under compulsory school age, as in Sweden or Finland, and if it is necessary for financial or organisational reasons to limit intake, to set criteria that favour children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

135. *To identify successful access strategies from existing mainstream provision.* The review team learned that, in the past, a number of local authorities had begun to integrate services, with some success, by combining the three forms of provision—early education and care, support for vulnerable children and support for working parents. Various kinds of provision that were free-standing (separate from school) offered a seamless service for children under five and their families. The Government may wish to consider upgrading, extending, and developing such integrated (offering both care and education), free-standing provision, e.g. the nursery schools, many of which are located in relatively poor areas.

Reconciling work and family responsibilities

136. The National Childcare Strategy is a significant initiative in acknowledging women's contributions to the workforce. As the Background Report notes, for the first time in the UK, the Government has recognised an obligation to support working parents, particularly mothers. While there has been rapid expansion of services over the past few years, the high cost of private childcare, especially for younger children, may also be a barrier to equitable access. The shortage of quality services for infants and toddlers, and in rural and low-income areas is also a concern. The authorities may wish:

137. *To consider the need for direct investment in services, in addition to tax credits.* The Government has made the assumption that the private market will expand to meet demand and, in consequence, has adopted a strategy of subsidies in the form of tax credits. However, there is evidence—not just from the UK, but from several countries—that private operators are deterred from expanding provision in poorer areas. While taxation and benefit policies support poorer families seeking private childcare, without direct support to services by Government, the problem of lack of provision in low-income areas is likely to remain. Limited access to quality ECEC is also an issue in rural and remote areas. The team supports the Early Childhood Education Forum's recommendation to further develop mobile provision in rural and remote areas to help address this problem (Duffy & Griffin, 1994).

138. *To devote policy attention toward assisting the many parents who work non-standard hours.* There is a need to develop services to meet the needs of parents working non-standard hours. Since family day care may be able to provide more flexible care arrangements than centres, strategies for recruiting and training qualified childminders to the field should be prioritised.

139. *To increase work-family supports including: expanded paid parental leave, job sharing with benefits, paid leave when a child is ill, home-based work, and flexible scheduling.* It is also important to explore strategies to engage parents—especially fathers—in their children’s ECEC. Pen Green, now an Early Excellence Centre, is exemplary in its efforts to involve fathers (and to make special efforts to recruit divorced fathers) in workshops where they can learn about the contributions they could make to their children’s lives (Whalley et al., 1997).

Improving staff training and terms of conditions

140. In the previous chapter, the team commented on key issues that directly affect the quality of early years settings: staff training and qualifications, recruitment and retention, pay and conditions. Developing an integrated system of care and education would involve new initiatives:

141. *To establish comparable training systems and working conditions for all early years staff, regardless of the setting in which they work.* To that end, there is a need to discuss what level of training should be the standard to work in ECEC and what levels of remuneration and conditions of employment should be linked to this training. Other related questions include: What are the opportunities for career development in the field, including across care and education sectors, and what are the incentives to encourage staff to seek additional professional training? What articulation should exist across training courses at the vocational and higher educational levels? Finally, how might the shortage of teachers, trainers at graduate and post-graduate levels, heads, directors, etc. be addressed?

142. *In the interests of recruitment and retention, to improve salary levels and the conditions of work for staff in the early childhood field.* The low salaries of many early childhood workers are likely to increase with the minimum wage and may improve further through the Childcare Tax Credit. A study of salaries in other EU nations and the relationship between salaries/benefits and staff turnover rates might offer some additional insight into how to address this difficult issue. In France, for example, prospective teachers have been given free tuition and a stipend with the understanding that they will teach for a number of years after graduation. There is also a need to identify and address any disincentives that currently exist to recruiting and retaining qualified staff (e.g., lack of support for staff over 25 years old seeking training; limited career opportunities in the field).

143. *To respond to the increasing diversity of society, by training staff to work with children and families who come from a wide range of backgrounds.* To support staff, there is a need for more emphasis within training courses on working effectively with parents from diverse backgrounds. In addition, as mentioned above, it is important to explore strategies to recruit women *and* men from diverse ethnic, racial, and linguistic groups, as well as people with disabilities to the field. To that end, it would be useful to explore alternative forms of induction into the field (e.g., the on the job training that occurs in Reggio Emilia, and accreditation of classroom practice by teacher assistants). These efforts may help address the staffing shortage, make the field more inclusive, and support the development of the early childhood institution as a public setting for children, families, and members of the community.

Broadening the approaches to early learning

144. Prominent in the written and spoken discourse around new early years initiatives is the need for children to learn basic skills. The review team appreciated the Government’s clear intent to ensure that all British children have the opportunity to establish a sound foundation for learning. The team’s major concerns were that: 1) undue attention was being focussed on the rote aspects of learning; 2) a more flexible set of approaches might better address the needs of children from diverse backgrounds and those with diverse learning styles; and 3) early years provision was approached primarily as preparation for

school rather than as a stage that is different from, but as important as, compulsory education. The team would propose:

145. *An examination of how young children learn.* A number of strategies may be worth considering. First, the commissioning of an expert panel or panels to review the literature on children's learning and make recommendations. In particular, theories of early literacy and numeracy acquisition may be examined, and an analysis made of the teaching strategies that are thought to facilitate children's learning. Second, a review of the literature on the assessment of young children's learning might be undertaken, so as to help evaluate the current approach. Third, it would be useful to fund a study that maps the process features of children's literacy acquisition in a diversity of early years settings. Finally, given the significant size of the group, there seems to be a real need for an explicit focus on how to enhance learning for children with special educational needs.

146. *Consideration of other approaches within the UK, including a later start to primary school.* In Scotland, children do not begin school before the age of five, and Reception classes do not exist. The Scottish early years curriculum framework seems to reflect a less school-dominated agenda than the Early Learning Goals and focuses on key areas of children's development. In addition, in Scotland, there has been strong public opposition to attainment testing, and parents have the right to withhold their children from testing. It may be valuable for policymakers and officials throughout the UK to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these different approaches to ECEC policy.

147. *Consideration of experimentation in other parts of the world.* For example, the New Basics Project in Queensland, Australia has spearheaded an effort to reorganise the educational enterprise through rich tasks, productive pedagogies, and systematic assessment tailored to the tasks (Education Queensland, 2000). Also, early childhood curriculum frameworks developed in other countries provide examples of less school-oriented approaches. The Swedish framework for pre-school education (birth to six), is closer to a philosophical statement of core principles than a prescriptive document for teachers to follow; it builds on the same goals and principles as the curricula for compulsory school, thus providing a continuum of learning for children from birth to age 18 (Gunnarsson, Martin Korpi, & Nordenstam, 1999).

148. *Consideration to what is known about the learning needs of future societies.* Futurists suggest that the workers of tomorrow will need to be flexible, capable of lifelong learning, and able to work collaboratively with others. While setting expectations is important, it is also important that they not get translated into an over-emphasis on memorisation. Moreover, a focus on emerging literacy and numeracy skills should not mean the neglect of other important areas of children's development. If methods and goals become overly standardised, the challenges faced by young children in special circumstances are less likely to be given the attention they deserve (e.g., children from refugee and asylum seeking families, children whose mother tongue is not English, children with disabilities and special learning needs, etc.).

149. *Reconsideration of the narrow focus on curricular goals and attainment testing.* The Early Learning Goals and the Foundation Stage provide an opportunity to create a buffer against the downward pressure of formal instruction from the national curriculum or from the national literacy and numeracy strategy. By embracing the period from three to the end of Reception and by including the private and voluntary sectors, the Foundation Stage is a positive step toward smoothing transitions for children across settings and over the years. It is hoped that the new guidelines to the Goals will help staff focus on early childhood as a distinct stage with intrinsic value, as well as an important preparation period for primary school.

Supporting a quality assurance and inspection regime that respects diversity

150. In the earlier discussion, the team raised concerns that a generalised approach to monitoring and evaluation might make it more difficult to tailor programmes to diverse constituencies and to evaluate early childhood staff working in diverse circumstances (e.g., in their own home, in a church hall on an occasional basis). We spoke further to specific issues that have been raised about the validity of assessing young children. It also was explained to us that teachers expected that they will now have to follow a prescribed teaching regime. Thus, while the new inspection regime provides an opportunity to make quality assurance and monitoring more coherent, *the key will be to ensure quality across inspections, across forms of provision, and across geographical regions. There also is a need to ensure that inspectors' interpretation of quality are compatible with expectations and aims of the early childhood field.*

151. The review team hopes that the guidelines to accompany the Early Learning Goals (QCA, 2000) will strengthen quality assurance. They will help make explicit what good early childhood practice looks like in order to reduce chances of misinterpretation by inspectors, practitioners or parents. The review team found very useful the reports (in booklet form) on nursery classes and primary schools published by HM Inspectors of Schools in Scotland. These included helpful overviews of the schools' aims, parents' views, accommodation, resources and equipment, an assessment of the effectiveness of the school, management and quality assurance, key strengths, and main points for action. The documents are co-constructed by HM Inspectors and school personnel, and seemed efficient and supportive tools for school improvement.

152. In the light of this discussion, the following suggestions are offered:

- Case studies of the effects of QCA baseline assessments and OFSTED regulatory practices on early childhood practice;
- Close scrutiny of differential outcomes on baseline assessments, including case studies of settings where many children who attended fared poorly on baseline assessments, as well as a focus on understanding the community context;
- Additional funding and assistance for non-achieving early childhood settings or schools;
- Supports so that children can become literate in their mother tongue and then transfer these skills into English (e.g., translation of the baseline assessments into other languages);
- Development of alternative means of reporting on gains made by children with disabilities or with other learning needs.

Developing a research agenda that considers alternative paradigms

153. As with other initiatives, the review team was impressed with the substantial progress that has been made in broadening the research base relevant to early years policy making. While appreciating the scope of these efforts, we also agree with the concern raised in the Background Report regarding the “dominance of a rather narrow and technical research paradigm” (p. 68). In developing a strong research agenda for the early childhood field, the Government may wish to include survey research, comparative reviews, qualitative studies, and other alternative paradigms and methods. Survey research can paint a broad picture of service provision and take-up, and evaluations can be used to assess whether and to what extent new programmes appear to be working. In addition, knowledge of other perspectives and approaches, as outlined in the present OECD cross-national research, has the potential to provide new or different insights into current policies and programmes. Post-modernism, feminist post-structuralism, and

critical race theory can also offer alternative frameworks for understanding social change, and intransigent social problems, such as sexism and racism, that impact on early childhood and education outcomes.

154. There are promising signs that these alternative research methods are gaining strength with government support. Britain has been a forerunner in developing an action research approach to understanding and addressing educational issues. Practitioner research is now being encouraged and supported by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). In the early childhood field, it is highly valued in training and professional development. The Effective Early Learning (EEL) project—through its externally-validated self-evaluation model—has been a valuable tool in supporting staff to reflect on and improve their practice with children and families. It is a welcome sign that the DfEE has engaged the lead researchers of the EEL project (Professor Pascal and Dr. Bertram) to undertake the evaluation of the Early Excellence Centres which uses a validated self-evaluation model and a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. In addition, qualitative research (e.g., ethnography, interviewing, case study) provides a means of examining social processes in context and over time. For example, in the ongoing EPPE Project, Dr. Siraj-Blatchford has been engaged in qualitative approaches that complement and inform the quantitative study.

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155. Throughout our visit, it was clear that people in the ministries and in organisations, local authorities, the Partnerships, schools, and early childhood programmes throughout the UK have made extraordinary commitments of time and energy in order to construct a more equitable and comprehensive early years system. Increased public funding has been made available to support ECEC, and there has been an acknowledgement of the need for public support for working parents. The Government has initiated various experiments on the ground, which are generating important lessons for policy and practice. It is likely that this emerging system will be dynamic and changing, animated by dialogue and practical activity as people continue to debate *what* policies should be formulated and *how* they should be achieved. We hope that our analyses and policy suggestions will be a useful contribution to the discussion as the UK pursues its commitment to addressing the complex and diverse needs of children and families in the 21st century.

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APPENDIX II: INFORMATION ON THE UNITED KINGDOM BACKGROUND REPORT

The OECD project on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in the United Kingdom is supervised and organised in the United Kingdom as follows:

National Co-ordinator: Mr. Patrick Curran, former Team Leader of Early Excellence Centres, DfEE, a post now filled by Mr. Nick Blake.

The Background Report was prepared by Professor Christine Pascal and Dr. Tony Bertram, Centre for Research in Early Childhood, University College Worcester. The review visit was co-ordinated by DfEE in co-operation with Professor Pascal, Dr. Bertram, and Mr. Michael Gasper.

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References

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1 - 10 December 1999

Wednesday 1 December

London

9h30 - 10h00

Welcome and overview of visit: Patrick Curran and Jean Langan, Early Years Division (DfEE Officials responsible for OECD visit and programme); and Christine Pascal, Tony Bertram and Mike Gasper, Centre for Research in Early Childhood, University College Worcester (Authors of the Background Report)

10h15 - 11h30

Overview of National Policy: Shirley Trundle, Head of Childcare Unit DfEE; and Alan Cranston, Divisional Manager Early Years DfEE

11h45 - 12h45

New Policy Initiatives: Samantha Mason, Sure Start Unit; Christine Pascal, Early Excellence Centres' National Evaluator; Zena Peatfield, Social Exclusion Unit, Cabinet Office; Tim Sands, Team Leader Health Action Zones, DoH; Sue Dasey, Team Leader, Education Action Zones; and Mary Hipkin, Team Leader, Childcare Unit, DfEE

14h30 - 15h30

Policies in Wales and N. Ireland: Alan Lansdown, Welsh National Assembly; and Maureen Boyd, N. Ireland

15h45 - 17h00

Other Government Agencies in ECEC quality measures: Lesley Staggs, Early Years Division, Q.C.A (Curriculum Policy); Paul Roberts, Team Leader Quality/Funding in ECEC; and Dorian Bradley, HMI, OFSTED (Inspection)

Thursday 2 December

9h30 - 11h15

Graduate Initial ECEC Training and CPD: Shirley Maxwell, Roehampton Institute; Hilary Emery, University College Worcester; Linda Pound, University of North London; Lesley Abbott, Manchester Metropolitan University; and Gill Staley, TTA

11h30 - 12h30

Visit to the House of Commons, Education Questions and tour of Parliament Buildings with the Minister's Parliamentary Secretary, Graham Walker; followed by lunch with Valerie Davey MP, Acting Head of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment

14h30 - 15h30

Developing a comprehensive training framework in ECEC: Gill Haynes, CACHE; Richard Dorrance, Early Years NTO; Pat Dench, Training and Quality Assistant Director, PLA; Rosa Vela, Childcare Unit, Training, DfEE; and Anna Bolster, Childcare Unit, Training, DfEE

15h45 - 16h45

Local implementation of policy: Nicki Kanwar, EYDC Partnership Division, DfEE; Zena Brabazon, Haringey LEA, Early Years Officer; John Wilkinson, Hampshire LEA, Head of Corporate Unit (Early Childhood Education and Childcare Unit); Nick Tooze, Team Leader EYDCP/Childcare, DfEE; Rosemary Peacocke, Chair, Oxfordshire EYDCP; Collette Kelleher, Daycare Trust, EYDCP Chair; Martin Bradley, HMI; and Hazel Briant, Team Leader EYDC Partnership Division, DfEE

17h00 - 18h00

Meeting with Margaret Hodge MP, Minister for Education, Employment and Equal Opportunity with responsibility for Early Years

Friday 3 December

Travel to Birmingham

10h45

Welcome by Tim Brighouse, Chief Education Officer, Birmingham, LEA in the Town Hall

11h00

“EMAG” ethnicity initiative, extended daycare; visits to settings in three groups

Group A: Community Day Nursery -- Teviot Tower, Community Day Nursery, Newtown

Group B: Nursery School -- Bloomsbury Nursery School, Nechels

Group C: Reception Class

13h00

Lunch at the City Council House with Sandra Jenkins, EYDCP Chair, followed by two sessions of meetings

Session 1: Meet practitioners to discuss the “Literacy Hour” and “Numeracy Hour” from the perspective of Reception Class Teachers

Session 2: Meet practitioners for perspectives on Education Action Zone, Sure Start and Inclusive Education

Return to London

Sunday 5 December

Travel to Corby, Northamptonshire

Monday 6 December

Corby, Northhamptonshire

EEC providing: Sure Start, SEN, Playgroup, Nursery, Extended Day, Parent Support, Drop In, Research and Training Integration of Services; meetings in two groups

Morning

Group A: Pen Green, Early Excellence Centre

Group B: Rushton Primary School (Mixed Reception and Yr 1-4-6); group led by Sue Moxon, Northamptonshire Primary/Early Years Inspector

Afternoon

Group A: Meet Childminders

Group B: Rural - Playgroup, Private Nursery, Playgroup

Tuesday 7 December

London

9h30 - 10h45

Regulation and Inspection: Dee Gasson, Team Leader Regulation/Daycare Early Years Division, DfEE; Sue Stern, Advisor on National Standards, Early Years Division, DfEE; and Elspeth Davies, HMI, OFSTED

11h00 - 12h00

Evaluation including Self Evaluation: Tony Martin, Team Leader Analytical Services Division, DfEE; Christine Pascal, Director, Effective Early Learning; Tony Bertram, Director, Effective Early Learning; Sam Mason, Childcare Unit, DfEE; and Sue Archer, EYDC Partnership, DfEE

14h00 - 16h15

Co-ordination and Integration within Policy: Patrick Curran, Early Years, DfEE; Jennifer Ruddick, Social Services; Shirley Trundle, Head of Childcrae, DfEE; Alan Cranston, Divisional Manager Early Years DfEE; Chris Corrigan, Health; Christine Pascal, Early Excellence; and Simon Courage, Sure Start, DfEE

16h30 - 17h30

Integration in Practice: Wendy Scott, Director, BAECE; Peter Moss, Thomas Coram Research Institute; Sheila Thorpe, Hillfields Early Excellence Centre; Gillian Pugh, Chief Executive, Thomas Coram Family Centre; and Martin Bradley, HMI

Travel to Edinburgh.

Wednesday 8 December

Scotland

8h30 - 10h00

Meet Edinburgh Education Department

10h30 - 12h00

Visits in two groups

Group A: Nursery Class

Group B: Private Nursery

12h30 - 13h00

Debrief

13h00 - 14h00

Working Lunch with Sam Galbraith, M.S.P - Member of Scottish Parliament with responsibility for Education

14h15 - 14h45

Meeting with Senior Officials: Gill Stewart, Head Children and Young People Group; Kathy Fairweather, Head Schools Inspectorate; and David Pia, Head Social Work Inspectorate

16h00 - 17h00

Early Years Best Practice Initiative: Francesca Osowska

Travel to London

Thursday 9 December

London

9h30 - 11h45

Themes, Issues and Paradigms in Early Years Research: Kathy Sylva, Oxford University, EPPE Project; Iram Siraj-Blatchford, Institute of Education, London University, EPPE Project; Peter Moss, Thomas Coram Research Unit; Tony Martin, Team Leader Analytical Services Division, DfEE; Tricia David, University of Kent at Canterbury; and Martin Woodhead, Open University

13h00 - 16h00

Early Childhood Networking: Ann Jamieson, National Children's Bureau; and Members of Early Childhood Education Forum

Friday 10 December

9h30 - 11h15

Finance and Funding Issues: Alan Cranston, Divisional Manager Early Years, DfEE; Nick Tooze, Childcare, Partnership and Funding, DfEE; Stephen Kingdom, Team Leader Finance Directorate, DfEE; Stuart Taylor, Treasury (Nursery Funding); Bob Allen, Treasury (Childcare Funding); Nick Ville, Audit Commission; Jill Green, Audit Commission; and Keith Morris, Team Leader Childcare Unit, DfEE Childcare

11h15 - 12h30

Equal Opportunities: Kim Sibley, DfEE Special Needs Division; Jane Lane, EYTARN; Tina Hyder, Save the Children, Equality Learning Centre; and Jean Jackson, Race Equality

14h30

Review and Feedback: Patrick Curran, Early Years, DfEE; Jean Langan, Early Years, DfEE; Worcester Team, Early Excellence; Alan Cranston, Divisional Manager Early Years, DfEE; Keith Morris, Sure Start; and Rob Smith, Director of DfEE