

OECD Country Note

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

in the

Netherlands

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purposes of the OECD Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for the Netherlands 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 of the review is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.¹

2. The Netherlands is one of twelve countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom 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, as well as 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 study early childhood policy and provision. To that end, consideration has been given to the roles of families, communities and other environmental influences on children's early learning and development. In particular, the review is investigating 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; 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, the OECD produces a short Country Note that draws together background materials and the review team's observations. The present report for the Netherlands 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.

¹ A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998a).

Netherlands' Participation in the Review

5. The Netherlands was the first country to be visited in the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in the Netherlands was prepared by Sardes Educational Services (Kloprogge et al., 1998). Guided by a common framework that has been 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 OECD Secretariat members and experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (Appendix 1) visited the Netherlands from 26 October and 4 November 1998. The ten-day visit was co-ordinated by Sardes Educational Services, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. 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 the Netherlands (Appendix 3). 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, NGOs and other social partners, and the institutional resources devoted to planning and implementation at each level;
- feasible policy options that are suited to the Netherlands 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

7. The Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in the Netherlands. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, literature surveys and the observations of the review team. 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 Netherlands*. The evolution of ECEC in the Netherlands is described and also the demographic, labour market and social policy contexts. In addition, we select for comment some traditional elements of Dutch society and education - a selection that cannot do justice to the complexity of the Dutch environment but which will allow the reader some understanding of the contextual background in which policy-making for children takes place.

Chapter 3: *Overview of current ECEC policy and provision in the Netherlands*. The reader will find here a resume of data provided in the *Background Report* of the Netherlands, supplemented by information from other sources. Because of the summary nature of the overview, it has been possible to describe only the broad features of the system, a list of which can be found in the table of contents.

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 Dutch situation. Eight issues were chosen for comment, namely: views of early childhood and family organisation; co-ordination of services; family engagement and support; children with special education needs; programme

content and implementation; ECEC workers in the Netherlands; research and evaluation; funding and finance.

Chapter 5: *Conclusions*, composed of some brief concluding remarks. Because our field is such a complex one and further, is deeply influenced in each country by tradition and culture, we view these remarks as elements that policy makers in the Netherlands may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision.

Acknowledgements

8. The OECD wishes to acknowledge the rapidity and efficiency with which the Netherlands responded to the invitation to be the first country in the Review. It would like to thank, in particular, all those involved in preparing the Background Report and the comprehensive programme proposed for the team review visit. The reviewers also wish to place on record their appreciation of the hospitable, open and informative meetings that were held throughout the review process and the extensive documentation that each group provided.

9. Throughout the Country Note, the analyses and suggestions offered are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a visiting 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, even when multiplied by the number of members of a team, is limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. The survey method employed relied heavily, therefore, on ethnographic crosschecking approaches and further feedback from experts in the Netherlands.

10. 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, researchers and practitioners in the Netherlands, 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 Background Report issued by the Netherlands, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

The main responsibility for the health and well being of young children under four and for out-of-school care for school-age children lies with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. In this report, provision by the Ministry is often referred to as *early care* or the *care sector*. These expressions do not imply that provision offers physical or health care *only*; the assumption is that the psychosocial development and stimulation of children is a primary aim of the care sector. The Ministry of Education becomes responsible once a child attends from age four (obligation begins at 5 years) the kindergarten section of the primary school or *basisschool* (ages 4-12 years). In the report, references to *kindergarten* refer to these classes, in which both health and a caring environment are important aspects.

The currency of the Netherlands is the guilder (NLG). Its current value in June, 1999 is:

10 NLG = 4.5 Euros or US\$ 4.67

or less and 76% had not employment of any kind outside the home (Singer 1992). Up to that time, working mothers were likely to be reliant on informal agreements with relatives, friends or childminders to help them cover their childcare needs or after-school care.

11. Nevertheless, for four and five year olds, widespread educational provision in kindergartens (*kleuterscholen*), staffed by qualified early years teachers, had existed for almost half a century. These kindergartens were defined by law in 1956, but up to 1985 attendance was not compulsory. The provision was intended primarily to foster young children's learning through play, following the philosophies of Pestalozzi, Froebel and Montessori, while at the same time laying the foundations for primary schooling.

12. For children aged under four, provision of any kind was scarce until the early 1990s, with, for example in 1956, only thirty childcare centres (*kinderdagverblijven*) catering for the children of working mothers (Oberhuemer and Ulich, 1997). Many playgroups (*peuterspeelzalen*), begun in the 1960s as parent co-operatives, also existed where two and three-year-olds could play, but the care and education needs of younger children were not considered to be a matter for public debate or investment. In short, public provision to serve the childcare needs of working mothers or efforts to enhance the learning environments of children under four had a low priority.

Expansion of childcare places

13. In the last ten years, the flourishing economy of the Netherlands, with its change to more service-oriented industries, has led to a labour shortage. Like most European Union member states, the Netherlands has a 'greying' population and new sources of labour are required. In addition, Dutch women have attained increasingly higher levels of education and qualification, and are intent on gaining greater recognition and equality both in society and in the labour market. The combination of these two factors has led to much greater recruitment of women into the developing service industries, with a corresponding need for expanded child-care provision.

14. Government awareness of the need to increase childcare facilities and promote the equal status of women in the workforce rapidly increased. Between 1990 and 1996 an incentive policy for childcare came into force. The six-year *Stimulative Measures* programme involved the channelling of central government funds into the setting up of services, often in collaboration with employers. The growing interest of both unions and employers to include child-care arrangements in collective labour agreements has led to the formulation of the long-term goal that 70% of all childcare places should be funded by employers and parents/employees and only the remaining 30% by the local authorities and parents. (Playgroups were not included in this initiative, since they are not seen as offering services relevant to the needs of working mothers.) As a result of the measures, the total capacity in childcare institutions expanded from just over 22, 500 in 1990 to 85,000 child-places in 1996. However, additional measures by the government will be needed if the expected demand of more than 60,000 until the year 2002 is to be met (Kloprogge et al, 1998). Basing calculations on 1998 statistics, at least 14% of children under four have now access to a childcare place, compared with 2% had the government not taken the initiative. Expansion of this volume within such a short time-span is an indication of the commitment of central government to the development of ECEC in the Netherlands.

15. Women's emancipation and the demand for labour have mainly fuelled the drive toward childcare provision, but other factors have given rise to social and educational interventions on behalf of young children and their families. There was, for example, the increased mobility of Dutch society, which had, in certain instances, the consequence of uprooting families and loosening neighbourhood ties. Another factor was the strong concentration of immigrant populations in many of the municipalities, with a corresponding concern to promote their social integration. Many innovative policies were introduced, relating to families and children from low-income backgrounds or deemed to be 'at risk'.

Expansion of places in kindergarten classes

16. In 1985 the kindergartens were integrated into the primary schools and attendance at five years of age was made compulsory. Although not required to do so by law, four-year-olds could also attend the kindergarten classes of primary schools; today, some 98% of four-year olds go to primary school. The accessibility of these schools is high both in terms of nearness to the children's homes and their availability to all sections of the population. With over seven thousand primary schools in the Netherlands, most children live within walking or biking distance from one or more primary schools. There are no financial thresholds to limit access: primary education is free. Schools are allowed to ask parents a contribution, but parents cannot be obliged to pay. Schools have to accept all children, even when parents do not want or cannot contribute. The fees demanded are generally speaking modest: thirty to fifty Euros per child per year. In most cases this contribution is used by the Parents' Council to organise feasts like "Sinterklaas", Christmas, a parent bulletin and the yearly outing for all pupils.

17. Accessibility is further increased by the freedom of education choice. Parents can chose the school they think is best for their child, even if the school of their choice is situated in another community. Schools can only be selective if they were founded with religious aims in mind, when they need not accept the child of parents who do not belong to that religion. This power is not used very often: Catholic and Protestant schools enrol as a matter of course children from Islamic, Hindu or other backgrounds.

Demographic background

18. Despite its modest geographical size (EVD, 1996, p.3), the Netherlands is one of the most densely populated countries of the European Union, with more than 459 people per square kilometre (Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998). In 1997, the country had a population of approximately 15.6 million inhabitants. (Kloprogge et al 1998). Projections for the year 2010 indicate a stable, 'greying' population, with the post-war 'baby boomers' reaching retirement age at that time.

19. Children and young people from ethnic and linguistic minorities in the Netherlands form approximately 14% of the youth population (by way of comparison: 1,5% in 1971), with families originating mainly from the Antilles and Aruba, Indonesia and the former Dutch East Indies, Morocco, Turkey and Surinam. While the birth rate among second generation ethnic minorities is higher than that of the indigenous population, the actual immigration rate is said to have 'declined sharply in 1995' (EVD 1996, p.7). It is also anticipated that the birth rate among the most numerous ethnic minority groups will have declined by the year 2010. The relatively higher number of boys in the Netherlands aged under six years, compared with that of girls in the same age group, is expected to remain constant, with all children aged from birth to six forming approximately 8% of the whole Netherlands population.

Table 1: Number of children under 6 years

Number of children	in 1998
From 0-3	772,635
Aged 4 & 5 years (in the kindergarten sections of primary schools)	395,332
Total under 6 years	1,167,967

Source: Kloprogge et al 1998

Labour context and the employment of women

20. As stated above, the Netherlands economy is currently very healthy, largely as a result of its transformation from an industrial to a service-providing and trading nation (EVD, 1996). Exports exceed imports, consumer price rises have been among the lowest in the European Union and purchasing power placed the Netherlands among the seven 'richest' European Union states. The unemployment rate is particularly low: 6.9% in the Netherlands compared, for example, to 16.2% in Finland and 23.7% in Spain. The Netherlands has the sixth largest GDP in the European Union; and in 1995 the sixth highest purchasing power among its inhabitants, behind Denmark, Belgium, France, Germany and Italy. Further, in 1995 the Netherlands had a surplus of exports, with a highly positive current account compared, for example, with countries such as Austria, Germany, the UK and the USA which showed deficits (Netherlands Foreign Trade Agency – EVD, 1996). However, not all groups have shared in the growth of the economy. In 1995, in the four largest cities - Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht - 24 % of the population were living on the minimum income, compared with 11 % in the rest of the country. Unemployment among the Turkish and Moroccan populations was five times as high as that of the indigenous population (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport, 1997).

21. Although the expectation that women with children would not participate in the workforce was still fairly strong in the 1980s, girls and women were preparing to take up places in secondary and higher education. Today, the proportions of women and men continuing to upper secondary level education and higher education in the Netherlands are approximately the same, although, in some of the municipalities, there is still real concern about a surprisingly high teenage, female drop-out rate. By 1993/94 the proportion of women students in higher education had risen to 50% of the total, although they were found predominantly in courses leading to the health, social work and education professions, rather than in those of a scientific, technical or economic nature (van Kampen et al 1996). However, the increase in earning rates for persons with secondary and university education is such that women are increasingly attracted to the labour market and maintaining their professional careers.

22. The current shortage of workers is also affected by the changing nature of economic activity. The types of industry that are expanding in the Netherlands tend to be those which traditionally attract female workers. The largest, the service sector, was already engaging in 1995 the majority of the Dutch working population - 74% compared to the 1996 OECD average of 64% - with just over a quarter of the total male workforce and over a fifth of the female workforce occupied in service industries by 1995. As in many other European Union countries, the number of women in employment, including those with small children, is increasing (Netherlands Foreign Trade Agency - EVD, 1996) – from 41% in 1986 to 58% in 1996 (the European Union and OECD averages are 57% and 59% respectively). However, Dutch women take up almost 79% of the part-time jobs available, although the number of men (around 20%) going into part-time jobs is remarkable both in the national and OECD context (OECD Employment Outlook, 1998).

Families and the social policy context

23. While there is a decline in the number of family households in the Netherlands, family issues have attracted increased attention from politicians and policy-makers. As in most countries, this focus is due to recognition of the family as 'as an important cornerstone of society...and as a feeding ground for problems of and for young people' (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 1998). Compared with 1960, when 61 % of households contained families with children, by 1995 this figure had fallen to 38. According to the Netherlands' National Review of Youth Policy presented to the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 1998), the proportion of single parent households is reported to be 6% or, seen from the point of view of children, 9% of all 0-17 year olds grow up in a single parent household. This percentage is expected to remain stable over the next decade, although it means a rise in the actual number

of single parent households, because of the foreseen rise in the number of households overall. Research studies cited by the Netherlands Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport (1998, p.101) suggest that “tolerance of deviant family patterns and adherence to autonomy have increased, but that the basic pattern of parent-child relationships is still founded upon the final authority position of the parents”.

24. Although, in 1967, a Dutch Department of Family Policy existed and was *avant-garde* in being given such a title (Gauthier 1996), the country’s approach to family policy until recently has been typically ‘pro-family but non-interventionist’ (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport 1998) and was based on the “primary responsibility (of parents) for the upbringing of their children” Accordingly, support to parents and families took the form of child allowances and special tax deductions to breadwinners (generally men). Support and guidance were also provided to families in need or when the moral or physical development of children was threatened. Such policies relied on traditional family organisation and did little to promote the equal participation of women in the workforce or in society.

25. Today, in addition to the impetus given by ECEC provision, family policy is being aligned on the Employment Guidelines adopted by the European Union. Since 1990, working women who are pregnant are entitled to sixteen weeks of paid leave: six weeks of pregnancy leave and ten weeks of maternity leave. Women are free to choose whether to stop working four, five or six weeks before the calculated day of delivery and may add the amount of pregnancy leave not taken to their maternity leave. Both parents of children under 4 years are allowed to take unpaid parental leave for a period of six months to care for the child, on condition that they work a minimum of 20 hours per week. Some further days can be granted for “calamity” leave, e.g. when a child is seriously ill (Netherlands Institute of Health and Welfare, 1997).

26. The Netherlands has had a child benefit system since before the 1940s. Today, parents receive an allowance of c. 1200 NLG annually for children up to age of 6 years; 1450 NLG annual for children 6-12 years; 1710 NLG annual for children 12-18 years annual. These allowances are calculated to cover one quarter of the real costs of bringing up a child in the different age groups, and it is estimated that it constitutes 41% of costs for low-income families and 17% for high-income families.

27. Recent research (Rispen, 1998), suggests that most parents in the Netherlands are generally happy with their children and their upbringing. It is reported, however, that around 10% to 15 % of families do not conform to ‘this positive (self-) image of Dutch families’ upbringing conditions’ (Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport 1998, p.105) because they are poor, unemployed or enjoy less favourable living conditions. Researchers at the Netherlands Institute of Health and Welfare (Kloprogge, 1998) suggest that there are no reliable statistics on the number of children in families living in such conditions but they estimate that 5% to 15%, that is, over 250,000 children and youth from 0-24 years are growing up in ‘a state of permanent poverty or living in abject material conditions’. Figures given in Bakker (1998, p. 63) give a similar picture of 270,000 families with children 0-17 years old (about 15% of all households) who are part of the least affluent group in Dutch society, with about 95,000 of these families in long-term poverty.

Several interdepartmental youth policy committees and co-ordinating groups make a special effort on behalf of children and youth from such backgrounds and for children in ‘at risk’ situations, such as children of parents who are drug addicts (15,000 families), children suffering abuse or children who are homeless. Great concern is shown, too, with regard to school failure, with the Ministry of Education investing annually six hundred million guilders in policies to prevent education failure among children at risk.

Tradition, government and decentralisation in the Netherlands

Tradition

28. Culture, history and tradition play an important role in the policy-making and educational fields of all countries. While it is quite impossible in a short report to cover this broad field, mention should be made of two aspects of Dutch tradition which are still operative, namely, the principles of consensus and of freedom of education.

29. The tradition of obtaining *a wide consensus* is an important aspect of the socio-political context, which should be taken into account in any attempt to understand Dutch decision-making and policy-implementation. Discussion and negotiation are seen as a principled and reasonable way to behave at all levels of decision-making. There is a highly commendable belief in moral imperatives once an agreement has been reached, a noticeable lack of ‘sticks’ and some use of ‘carrots’².

30. A second principle which should be taken into account is that of *freedom of education* enshrined in Art. 23 of the Dutch Constitution. It means that parents are free to found or send their children to schools on the basis of religious, philosophical, educational and teaching principles. Thus, it is taken for granted that one will find in each neighbourhood, not just one public school but the co-presence of Catholic, Protestant and secular schools. The principle of freedom of education also means that there is no national curriculum, nor any interest in developing one.

31. In addition to schools with different religious and philosophical foundations, there are two main categories related to funding. These categories are defined according to whether the schools are publicly or privately run, but both types are funded from central and local government finances, without favour to one or the other. In fact, funding follows children, schools being paid on the basis of capitation or pupil population. This principle again illustrates the Dutch willingness to accept that people have a right to differ in their views and beliefs.

Government

32. The Netherlands is a constitutional monarchy, with ministers being accountable to parliament. Bills that are passed by parliament become law upon their receiving the Queen’s signature. Owing to the relatively high number of parties and shades of political opinion, the Netherlands has been governed by coalition governments, with ministries being divided among the political parties according to the proportion of votes gained. The Parliament has two houses, the Upper House which comprises 75 members indirectly elected by the Provincial Councils, and the Lower House which has 150 members elected by all Dutch nationals aged over eighteen. Together with the monarch and ministers, the Parliament forms the legislature. There are three tiers of government – central, provincial and municipal. Central government is concerned with issues of national interest, while municipal and provincial governments deal with local affairs.

33. Social policy in the Netherlands is well-developed and underpinned by a comprehensive nationwide, infrastructure of statutory, private and voluntary social organisations, whose aim is to develop strategies to prevent social exclusion and pre-empt problems. The 1970s saw the development of the Welfare State. When services were criticised for being too fragmented and failing to meet local needs (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 1998), moves were made to channel accrued responsibilities toward local and provincial authorities. The recession in the 1980s brought a further development when

² The notion of ‘carrots and sticks’ means the strategies employed either to reward or punish persons or organisations so as to encourage a particular behaviour, e.g. a ‘carrot’ would be extra funding to a local authority where childcare places were increased and quality monitored according to government standards. A ‘stick’ or punishment would be perhaps a reduction in funding, or fines, in the case of non-compliance.

cost-effectiveness became an important criterion. Private non-profit institutions that met local government standards began to be used widely to deliver specialised services, including in the early childhood field.

34. In parallel, the educational infrastructure of the Netherlands is comprehensive and of long historical date. Kindergarten classes have been free to all children since 1956. In 1985, they were integrated into the compulsory school system as part of the *basisschool* or primary school for children aged four to twelve. At that time too, the separate training institutions used for the pre-service training of early childhood personnel were amalgamated with those for primary teaching and the inspectorates for both types of education became one. Compulsory schooling of children begins at the age of five

Decentralisation

35. In an attempt to bring the people closer to the decision-making authorities and to combat bureaucracy, a process of decentralisation has been under way for over two decades.³ Today, there are 12 provinces and 572 municipalities, of which many co-operate to form together regional authorities, and jointly tackle problems (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997). Since 1987, local authorities have become responsible for the implementation of many central government initiatives. The main decentralising functions relevant to young children include: policies on childcare and out-of-school care; preventive health care for 4-19 year olds; the provision of educational buildings; the establishing of education advisory bureaus (*schoolbegeleiding*) and policies to combat educational disadvantage and school drop-out.

36. In the 1980s two interdepartmental working parties were set up by the national government to develop strategies to combat social youth problems through the adoption of a more positively oriented and generic youth policy. From that time, two key concepts have become embedded in the Dutch system, namely, *harmonisation* or greater coherence in service provision; and *decentralisation*, that is, making local government bodies responsible for the enactment of policies agreed at national level. While the rationale for such devolution appears to have been largely to do with co-ordination 'on the ground', it is also argued that such moves are in the interests of democracy, empowerment, and local responsiveness.

37. Decentralisation also reflects a shift from the concept of the 'caring state' to the concept of the 'caring society', in which emphasis is placed on the prevention of social problems at community level. In this perspective, services are also expected to be more 'client-oriented', as a way of addressing individual needs and reinforcing client autonomy.

38. A further important feature of social policy development in the Netherlands is the concept and practice of *integral policy making* - meaning that policies should be based on a broad consensus concerning goals and strategies, subsequently co-ordinated for the benefit of the 'target groups'. Central government, municipalities and elected council members remain key players, but integral policy-making requires the involvement of many others: employers and private ECEC providers, voluntary groups, the churches, the schools, the unions, and of course the citizens themselves. Although effective implementation still proves complex and sometimes elusive, the Background Report refers to innovative results from several municipalities engaging in integral policy making, in which the co-ordination of elements of health care, childcare, youth care, education, and welfare are a characteristic (Klopprogge et al, 1998).

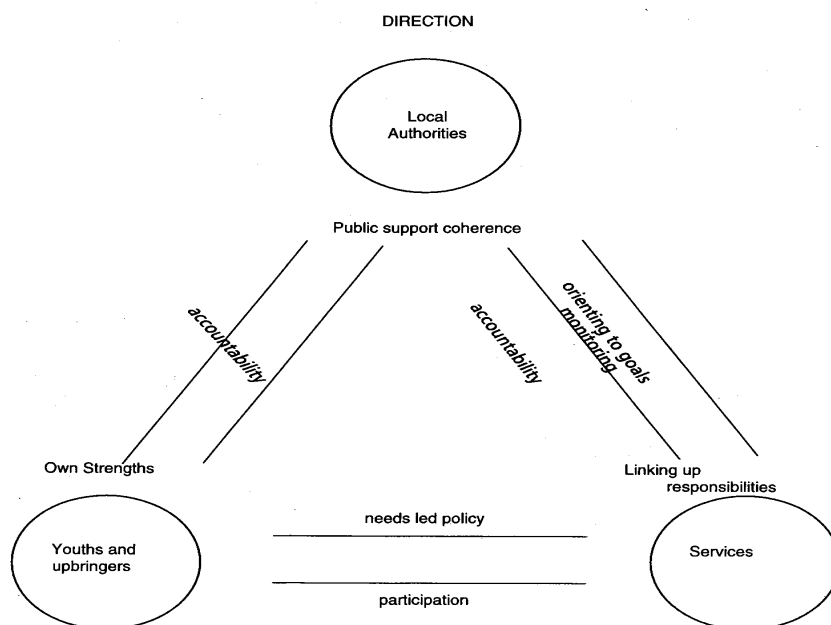
39. An example of integral policy making is the *intersectoral youth policy*. Since the end of the 1980s, 'youth policy' has been designed to cover children and young people from birth to 25 years, with particular attention to the 'at risk' groups. It is a central tenet of this policy that those engaged in different

3. Where education is concerned, it may be said the decentralisation is rather older, because of a certain control exercised by the provinces over the founding of new schools. In addition, the freedom of education clause in the Constitution allowed local initiative in education on religious or ideological grounds.

divisions in the various services, at whatever level, whether public or private, must be capable of working across departmental boundaries so that they can cater in a co-ordinated manner for the all-round development of the young (*Youth Deserves a Future*, WVC, 1993). An official committee was funded by the former State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport to stimulate and facilitate integrated local youth policies, for a period of four years, which inspired many municipalities to give priority to local youth policy and youth participation. A follow-up to this initiative is being discussed with the Union of Municipalities.

40. Figure 1 below illustrates the “continuous dynamic interplay between citizens, voluntary organisations and government.” The figure is also said to exemplify a change from a philosophy which assumes that children and young people to be simply consumers of services, to one in which they are regarded as co-producers and in which they are more socially involved.

Figure 1



CHAPTER 3: CURRENT ECEC POLICY AND PROVISION IN THE NETHERLANDS

41. This section of the report provides an overview of current policies and provision. It seeks to offer the reader an insight into the complex web of ECEC services, staffing, training, funding, curriculum and other key aspects of provision - all of which are intended to support parents and engage children in the initial stage of lifelong learning.

Policy responsibility

42. At national level in the Netherlands, policy matters relating to children of all ages and their families are currently dealt with by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Ministry of Justice, together with other central government departments, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and the Home Department. Although different areas of responsibility relating to young children's well-being and learning are assumed by different ministries, and within them by different departments, there is recognition of the need for effective co-ordination between the various participants. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has the main responsibility for the preventive health, care and well being of young children under four years and for the care, welfare and preventive health of all out-of-school children and youth. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science becomes involved once a child attends the kindergarten section of primary school at four. Thus, responsibility for ECEC rests largely with these two ministries.

Health services for young children from birth to six years

43. The Dutch are justly proud of their health care system, financed by compulsory health insurance and private health insurance, with government funding for those who, exceptionally, are not covered by insurance. Preventive health care for all children is comprehensive and free. Up to the age of four years, it is covered by government funding under the Exceptional Medical Expenses Act (AWBZ). By international standards, the infant mortality rate is exceptionally low and life expectancy high in the Netherlands.

44. The Netherlands takes considerable interest in preventive child health care, and organisations for preventive health are separate from the curative health services. For children, preventive care is divided into three parts: peri-natal health (maternity home help), pre-school health care and school health care. Preventive pre-school health (0 to 4 years) is provided by the nurses and doctors in the home-care or Thuiszorg organisations (private, non-profit-making foundations), while preventive health for children aged 4-18 year is the responsibility of the Municipal Health Services, under the school health division. Some 97 % of infants and 80 % of three year olds receive home-visits or visit the clinics for treatment, check-ups (nine during the child's first year), vaccinations and advice. Attention is paid also to developmental and psychosocial problems. Observations by pre-school health care staff are recorded. When the child begins school at the age of four or five, the parents are asked for written permission to transfer the file to the school health services.⁴ Preventive health care staff also offer training and support for parents experiencing difficulties, such as behaviour management training and information about models of interaction between adult and baby. This careful monitoring is particularly important in enabling early intervention for children with developmental delays, learning and other difficulties. Staff are also a key source of information on local pre-school provision, when parents are seeking childcare or opportunities for their children to play with others.

45. Children aged between four and six receive free, preventive health care services in school through the municipal health services. The screening carried out by these health services, through the comprehensive checks available during the child's early months and years, means that physical and psychological development are monitored and that special services can be called into play as necessary. The investment in this area is the result of the Netherlands' strong commitment to preventive health and social policies, to ameliorating the situation of children deemed to be 'at risk' and to treating as early as possible negative experiences which might lead, later in life, to illness or deviant behaviour.

4. In 1997, integrated records were introduced in the Netherlands for pre-school and school health services for longitudinal monitoring of child health and development.

46. The Netherlands has traditionally invested considerable funding in institutions for children with significant learning difficulties. In the last decade, further availability and accessibility of mainstream provisions and community care are being promoted. Special facilities for disabled children living at home, such as out-patient services (often provided by the municipal social educational service), day centres and special schools are now available, as well as residential institutions for the more seriously disabled. Current policy, however, is moving away from special school care to a more educational model in which most children will be included with their peers in mainstream services.

The education and care system

47. The structure of the education and childcare system in the Netherlands is shown in Figure 2 on the following page.

Forms of ECEC provision, age-groups served, staff training/education

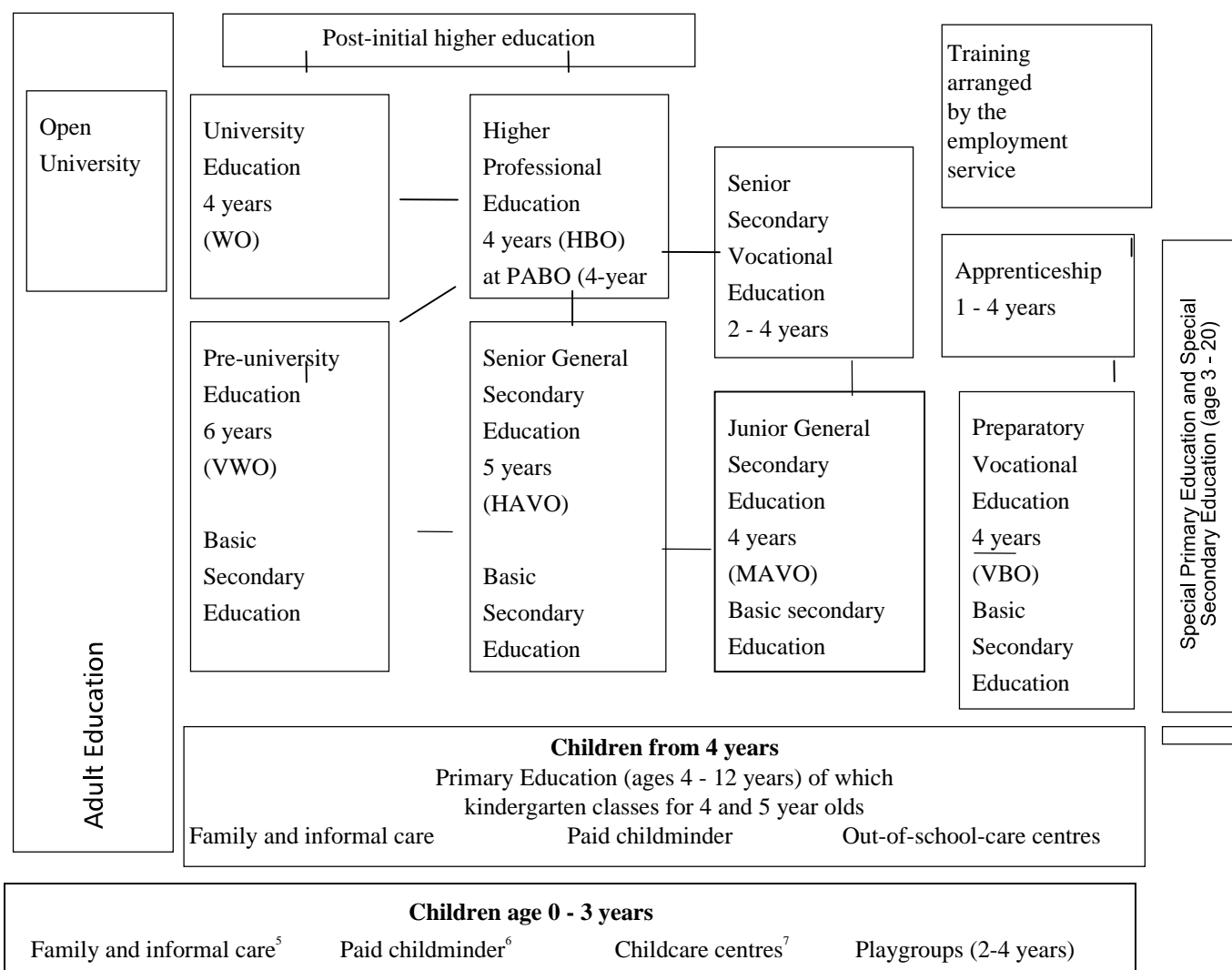
48. In relation to early education and care facility use, children aged between birth and four years fall, in general, into three main groups. About 85% of infants and toddlers experience home care almost exclusively in their own home and/or in that of a relative or unofficial childminder. A second group, about 15% of children, attends centre-based childcare settings. A third group, over 50% of the two and three year olds, attend playgroups. Many children experience two or more types of provision within the same week: childcare while parents work; playgroup to meet friends; and home with members of the family, or sometimes with a childminder or other caregiver. According to Klopprogge et al (1998) approximately half of the users of childcare provision use more than one type of care.

There is a substantial unmet demand for affordable childcare places. Significant waiting lists remain. In 1996, for every 100 children aged from 0-4 there were 7.72 places and for every 100 children aged 4-12 only two places were available. In 1996 some 30,000 children were on waiting lists, and 23,000 of these are believed to have been 0-4 year olds (Klopprogge et al 1998). By January 1998 there were 389,136 children aged two and three years in the Netherlands. The total number of children attending day nurseries and playgroups in 1996 amounted to some 340,000. Figure 3 below, on the following pages provides comparative information about the different forms of provision.

Other services and special programmes

49. In addition to the integral youth policy referred to in the context of decentralisation and integration above, other services for young children may be mentioned: non-residential emergency services for preventing child abuse (BVAs, JACs; youth divisions of mental health institutes) and other child protection facilities; Boddaert Centres for specialised out-of-school care for school-age children with behavioural problems or an unfavourable family situation; medical day nurseries mostly for pre-school children with physical or mental causes of developmental delay; foster care; child and youth psychiatrists in hospitals; residential facilities for children who require specialised medical treatment or showing severe behavioural problems or experiencing a family crisis. There are also plans to develop area-based approaches to ECEC targeted at families at risk, and through local community action, to strengthen the social infrastructure and to deal with the problem of deteriorating social environments.

Figure 2: Structure of the education and early childhood education and care system
(adapted from Ministries of Education and Ministry of Welfare, 1998).



5. Informal care is used by 85% of mothers in the Netherlands, generally combined with one or more types of formal care. Only 25% of informal care is paid.

6. Paid childminders are those provided through an official childminding office.

7. Childcare centres include: day nurseries and half-day nurseries; company-funded childcare, special services... see Fig. 3 below.

Figure 3: ECEC services in the Netherlands

	Family and informal care	Childcare	Pre-school play-group	Official child-minder or family daycare	Special services	Out of school care centres	Primary school kindergarten
Who attends	85% of all children, often combined with another supplementary type of care. Family/informal care is highest among ethnic and low income groups	Young children from six weeks to four years in care settings, generally in day nurseries and half-day nurseries... Most use is made by parents with jobs, higher education	2–4 year olds	Children under four and children aged 4-13 years out of school hours	0.6-1% of all 4 to 6 year olds: children with severe learning difficulties or children 'at risk'	School children from four to thirteen years old, for out-of-school care, school holidays and (less frequently) lunch-breaks,...	4 and 5 year olds
Number of children and % of total (Total 1996: c. 800,000 children from 0-3 years)	c. 680,000 c. 85%	c. 140,000 c. 17%	c. 200,000 c. 52% of the age group	c. 10,500 children c. 1.3% of 0 to 4 year olds	No actual figures for ISCED level 0	9,853 children from 4 to 13 years	395,332
Where services take place	Child's home or relative's home	In day-care centres, i.e. day nurseries and half-day nurseries, former kindergarten buildings	Municipal buildings, e.g. former kindergartens	In child-minder's own home	Special centres and schools	Day-care or other centres, classrooms in (former) primary schools	In a special class /classes of the primary school
Days per week & hours per day	According to need	Every weekday, at least 8 hours per day or at least, five half-days (of 5 hours), most children attend 3-4 days per week	Sessions only (2.5 to 4 hours), most children attend two or three sessions per week	Parents' work hours – usually up to five weekdays		Five days per week, before and after school, lunch-breaks, holidays, free afternoons, etc. Attendance within limits according to need	School hours, that is, 5.5 hours per day for 5 days per week in term time - not during lunch-break)
Funding	About 25% is paid for by parents, 75% is provided free of charge by parents or relatives.	Government, parents, employers - See Table 3 below. Also some workplace crèches directly funded by a large company or a group of companies	Parent fees and municipal subsidies	Generally, fees are paid by parents according to the services given, supported by a contract recognised by the municipality.	Governmental and municipal subsidies		Free of charge, paid for by the state but parents may be asked to give an annual contribution to the school. A primary school place costs 5,000 NLG
Staff qualifications and training (See note below)	None	Heads: MBO/HBO Other staff must hold an MBO	Playgroup leaders: MBO as a minimum. Many unqualified staff, voluntary or assistant	Trained by Child-minding Officers but no qualifications awarded or exist at present	Teachers in Special Education undertake an extra 2 year course after the PABO	As for daycare	PABO***
Career profile		Eligible to apply for headships when Heads' in-service course successfully completed	Few career opportunities other than by moving to childcare sector	Few opportunities other than work in area offices as director, co-ordinator, sector head etc.			As for other primary teachers – head-teacher route, etc.

Figure 3 continued

Pay and conditions	Not applicable	New terms introduced in 1998. Job profiles now exist. Pay governed by the Childcare Salaries Decree under the collective labour agreement for the Welfare sector.	Playgroup workers come under the collective labour agreement for the Welfare sector and as of 1998 pay is governed by the new Playgroup salaries decree. Pay lower than for childcare sector.	Same pay scales as childcare staff but self-employed or employed by the childminding office		as for childcare	School's governing body or municipality. Government sets conditions. Pay approximately 50% higher than that of childcare staff. Highly unionised.
Adult: child ratios	Not applicable	1:4 (ages 0-1) 1:5 (ages 1-2) 1:6 (ages 2-3) 1:8 (ages 3-4) 1:10 (ages 4-12) !	As for daycare		Special child/adult ratios depending on special need	as for childcare	1:25 on average in primary schools, but Government committed to 1:20 in Grades 1-4 by the year 2003
Regulation	Not applicable	Quality requirements for childcare 1996 (see below); municipal regulation		Overseen by the official child-minding office; municipal regulation	Special	as for childcare	School inspection
Educational expectations of the service by parents and / or society	Not applicable, but see "Views of childhood" below	Seen as 'care' with a developmental role. Ethnic minority parents said to favour closer link with primary schools	Opportunities for children to make friends, although urged to be co-educators with parents especially when working with children at risk	Expected to 'look after' children and offer a stimulating environment	Assistance in overcoming the learning difficulty, prevention of further problems	as for childcare	Emotional, intellectual and creative development and social, cultural and physical skills... At 6+, emphasis placed on language, literacy, maths

Note on qualifications:

MBO and HBO: Initial training and the achievement of the MBO qualification is currently gained through three years study in either *Social and Pedagogical Work* or *Social and Cultural Work*, in vocational education. The MBOs are popular courses, with around one third of all secondary school pupils in the Netherlands opting for this type of further or higher education. Both the MBO courses mentioned above include a childcare programme but the policy of broad, generalised courses is criticised as being insufficiently focused on the demands of work with young children. This situation is the result of legislation regulating MBOs and although trainers may be aware of the problems they cannot develop more appropriate courses because the MBO is intended to be a flexible 'care' qualification applicable in a variety of occupations. The HBO is a four year course.

PABO: Teachers are required to hold a PABO (Pedagogic Academy of Primary Education) qualification. This is a four year higher education course at one of the Netherlands' forty *hogescholen* (teacher training institutions). The training is mostly generic but there is now a one year *Young Children* specialisation within the four-year programme. Student teachers undertake periods of practice in primary schools throughout their courses and, unlike workers in the childcare sector, they are trained in teaching through play. They are also prepared for home-school liaison, teaching groups of children and how to manage children's interactions with each other.

50. There are also intervention programmes and parenting support programmes, many initiated and developed with funds from the Ministry of Social Welfare and planned and implemented by non-profit organisations, such as the Averroës Foundation and Sardes Educational Services in the case of the intervention programmes, and the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW), in relation to parenting programmes and innovation programmes for childcare and playgroups. As a result of decentralisation, individual municipalities or their schools have now the opportunity of contracting out these services, a number of which are outlined in Chapter 3 below.

51. Other bodies having an impact on the education of children under six years old are the local school advisory centres. At the national level, the local services are supported by a number of institutions, e.g. the Dutch Language Expertise Centre at the University of Nijmegen, which advises on language programmes and emergent literacy for young children.

Quality regulations and inspection

Quality in the early care system

52. The Welfare Act of 1994 decreed that the childcare sector should develop its own quality standards, coming into force after five years. This regulation was followed in 1996 by the *Temporary Decree of Quality Regulations for Childcare*, which comprises five articles defining: the different forms of childcare; the responsibilities of the municipalities in regulating child health and safety factors; staff ratios, size of rooms and outdoor play space; sleeping room requirements for babies; regulations relating to childminders; parental influence on facilities; requirements demanded of childcare centres and childminders that they inform parents about their pedagogical policies, complaints procedures, parental involvement and contact with parents. The Union of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG) has provided model regulations interpreting these articles, which have been adopted by most municipalities. According to municipal regulations, including at least the requirements of the Temporary Decree, local inspection of childcare centres shall take place on a regular, usually yearly, basis. Childcare institutions that meet these national and municipal requirements receive a permit/licence. Making use of licensed childcare is also a condition for parents and employers to be eligible for tax relief.

53. The new (1998)-coalition government has announced that it too will introduce new legislation on basic facilities for childcare, including regulations for provision for children aged from birth to twelve years. In the meantime, the *Association of Employers in the Subsidised Sector* (VOG) was asked to develop a quality assurance system. This project, called 'Small Capital', funded by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, is to produce a national framework of minimum standards covering: personnel management, financial management, the arrangements for continuing professional development, the quality of premises, well-being, complaints procedures, staff involvement, satisfaction measurement, pedagogy and parental involvement etc. This national framework is now being implemented. Under this framework child care institutions will be expected to take responsibility for their own systematic and ongoing quality care in addition to certification by an independent expert group.

54. Municipalities are required to inspect childcare centres once a year and 80 % do so (Kloprogge et al 1998). The Municipal Health Services carry out the inspection, sometimes unannounced and parents are not normally involved during the inspection process. Inspections focus mainly upon the health and safety aspects with, according to Janssen-Voss (1996) less attention paid to developmental and pedagogical issues.

55. The present system of quality assurance is thought to be adequate by two thirds of the childcare providers and by 90 % of municipalities. The researchers who reported these findings add that the childcare sector is able and ready to adopt its own quality assurance system and is willing to accept external as well as self-evaluation (Kloprogge et al 1998). It is suggested, however, that the inspection system could be improved and given 'more teeth' to deal with infringements of the regulations

Quality in the kindergarten classes

56. Once children enter the primary school kindergarten classes at four, they are protected by regulations governing quality, as laid down in the *Law on Primary Education*. This law states the general mission of primary education, and is quite specific concerning the goals of education in general. In addition, for each subject area, outcomes are specified in terms of the skills, knowledge and attitudes that each pupil should achieve. The overall content of the education provided is left to the discretion of the schools, a tradition that has been reinforced by the increasing autonomy given to schools over the past decade. Home-based and other experimental projects are not subject to regulations, other than those devised by project staff or imposed by the setting, e.g. if the experimental project is based in a childcare setting.

57. Other school requirements deal with the number of teaching hours a year (one thousand hours), qualifications of the staff (a minimal teacher training certificate at higher education level), the spending of the budgets for in-service training of the staff and – recently – the obligation to give account of school policy to parents and the inspectorate, through a yearly school brochure and a four-yearly school plan. These documents contain information on the school's current state; describe school policy for the next four years; explain how the school deals with the individual capacities and problems of children; outlines the complaints procedure and may other aspect of daily school life. It is planned also to publish school results, e.g. the progress being made in the Dutch language by immigrant children.

58. The Dutch education inspectorate has the responsibility of ensuring that schools comply with the above regulations, compliance being a requisite for receiving government funding. As we shall see in Chapter 4 below, kindergarten classes have tended to be less inspected than the early obligatory classes and with less awareness of holistic child development issues.

59. Recently, however, the inspectorate has taken a new, integral approach to their task. During a full inspection, two inspectors visit one school for several days and evaluate all aspects of school policy and quality. Four hundred primary schools have already been inspected in this way. First impressions are very positive although the new approach makes great demands on the inspectorate. The experiment serves as a strong encouragement for schools to reflect on their own practice. Debate is ongoing whether it is feasible to continue a full inspection effort or rather to use a brief version of the procedure for all schools and reserve full inspection for those schools where there is some doubt about quality.

60. In addition, the government agreed upon extra investments in the early school years, under the heading of class size reduction, so as to improve quality. The aim is to reduce class size for the four to eight year olds to a teacher pupil ratio of 1:20. The policy is being implemented in steps and will result in extra structural expenditure of one thousand million guilders (almost 500 million Euros) by the end of 2002. From 1999, all funds earmarked for this purpose have been transferred directly to local authorities to enable them to build the necessary extra classrooms.

Funding

61. Several partners finance childcare. First, parents pay towards the costs of both day nursery and playgroup places; second, employers also contribute and are offered tax-relief by government if they offer day-care facilities to their employees; and third, government provides increasing subsidies through funds transferred to the municipalities. In addition, the municipalities have access to European and central government funding for large-scale thematic projects, e.g. social integration, part of which can be channelled toward early childhood education, care and prevention programmes. The Background Report and Table 3 below, present information concerning the proportional contributions of the different partners.

Table 3: Contributions to childcare financing (excluding playgroups):
(adapted from Ministries of Education, Culture and Science and Health, Welfare and Sport 1998)

	1989	1994	1996
Government	55%	41%	33%
Parents	35%	37%	42%
Employers	7%	19%	25%
Funds	3%	3%	-

62. Although the percentage contribution of government has fallen, the amount of funding provided has risen considerably since 1989 in real terms. It has been suggested that if the trend apparent in Table 3 continues, employers and parents may bear the major costs of childcare in the future (Kloprogge et al 1998). As tax breaks for childcare, under the current regime, are more profitable for companies than for parents, it is feared that a situation may evolve in which the children of parents on lower incomes may be progressively excluded from quality childcare.

63. Children from four years upward are taken in charge by the school system, which is fully financed by the state. A weighted funding system is in place: schools are paid extra capitation for children with special education needs (9.1%), for children 'at risk' (estimated about 30%) and/or from ethnic minorities. Thus, schools receive a 1.9 capitation grant for each child from a disadvantaged ethnic minority group whom it takes in charge. The system shows, however, a steep rise in costs between primary and secondary education, with spending per pupil being just over 5,000 NLG annual per child in the earlier years and more than three times this amount for a secondary school pupil.

64. Funding for the initial training of staff is largely taken in charge by the state. Initial training for day nursery trainees is funded as for trainee primary school teachers. For in-service training, situations diverge: in-service training and upgrading of childcare staff in general is the responsibility of the childcare employers, while in service courses for primary school teachers are funded through government grants to school boards of public and private schools for the purpose of continuing professional development. In certain situations, funding is provided directly by central government.

ECEC workers in the Netherlands: status, training and supply

65. In the Netherlands, early childhood workers are not always perceived as professionals and they are not accorded a high status by society. The workforce is almost entirely female. Although kindergarten teachers are held in higher esteem than childcare and playgroup staff, they too have relatively low status within the education sector. Further, in addition to the paid and tenured staff, some child-care centres and most playgroups are staffed by volunteers and trainees, e.g. in playgroups, volunteers numbered almost 11,800 in 1995, while the paid staff numbered 8,620. Workers with young children are treated more like mother-substitutes than professional educators/caretakers. There is an effort also to bring in paraprofessionals who are ethnic minority parents with young children to increase the involvement of these groups in the education of young children. During 1998, an increase in pay higher than that of other sectors began an adjustment to the previous low rates of remuneration in childcare, reflecting a greater commitment to increasing quality provision and improving the status of childcare workers.

66. In the Netherlands, staff and their training are split by sector. In the welfare system, staff are trained with a broad social work orientation to work with under-fours in a variety of settings (childcare, playgroups, experimental programmes). In general, they have lower levels of training, less specialisation in early childhood education and care, lower compensation, and poorer working conditions than primary school teachers.

67. Much is now being done to improve the quality of the professionals employed, although some concern was expressed that enhanced qualifications, higher salaries and better working conditions might increase costs and so reduce access to services. Municipalities sometimes encourage

in-service training opportunities for childcare staff. A growing number of educational and private organisations are funded to provide a range of courses from one day workshops to extensive programmes, some tailored to staff need and delivered 'in house'. Provision of joint in-service training for playgroup workers and day nursery staff is encouraged as a way of enhancing co-ordination across the two types of provision. In addition, basic training is possible for home-based para-professionals in order to provide them with opportunities to move into further vocational education.

68. In the education sector, where kindergarten staff receive a high level of training and have the same professional status - and salaries - as primary teachers, the issues are different. In the process of amalgamating teacher-training institutions for kindergarten (4-6) and primary school teachers (6-12), there has been a sharp decrease in the number of early childhood specialists among the teacher training staff. Although there is an optional specialisation in early childhood (out of the total four-year programme), there still is less time and emphasis on the early years than when early childhood teachers were trained separately. In-service courses specialising in early childhood are also available for teachers, often focusing on the problems they encounter in working with this age group, such as language development, functional literacy and early numeracy. National educational advisory centres, directed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, are part of the training network, which also includes teacher training colleges, and individual experts.

69. There is an increasing demand and anticipated shortage of early childhood staff in both the care and education sectors. The demand for workers in the care sector is increasing rapidly as childcare expands under the pressure of more women enter the labour force. In parallel, government funding is readily available to municipalities to increase jobs in the social sector. In the education sector, increased government funding to schools to reduce class sizes and the "greying" of the present teaching profession will increase demand for qualified staff. In addition, the inner cities do not attract teachers, so shortages are foreseen, precisely where professional early childhood personnel are most needed. To cope with the situation, thousands of former teachers are being offered refresher courses to enable them to take up their old profession once again.

Programme content and implementation

70. As noted above, there is no national curriculum for early childhood services or for primary education and it is thought that such an idea would be resisted by all concerned. The sponsoring ministries are content to provide guidelines or to establish standards which each childcare centre or kindergarten is expected to reach. However, as we have outlined in Chapter 2, quality standards are maintained through a variety of means, not least through insistence on and strong governmental support to maintaining structural standards. Continued funding depends on such standards being maintained.

71. A variety of philosophies and programmes have found favour with different providers. For example, the nurseries run by Humanitas are currently developing approaches based on the ideas of Loris Malaguzzi from Reggio Emilia; the *Piramide* intervention project is based on Robert Slavin's *Success for All* programme in Baltimore; *Kaleidoscoop* is adapted from David Weikart's *High/Scope* project in Ypsilanti, Michigan; and *Opstap* on Avima Lombard's *Hippy* programme in Israel. These adaptations show the commitment and openness of Dutch researchers and pedagogues to international developments and the capacity of the present system to absorb innovation.

72. Programme content and implementation are more homogenous in the kindergarten classes within the primary school. In general, classes for the 4-5 year olds emphasise social/emotional development, creativity, play and exploration. It was reported that methodology is dominated either by a free play model which critics say, lacks a good theoretical and educational basis, or by a more academic readiness-for-school model (see Chapter 4 below for a brief comment on these approaches). However, since 1996, the Ministries of Education and Social Welfare are co-operating in developing a number of prototype programmes, such as the *Piramide* and *Kaleidoscoop* projects mentioned above, which encourage play and child initiative and yet provide the basic elements of school preparation.

Examples of innovative programmes

Box 1: The Averroes Steps Programme

Averroes is a non-profit organisation based in Amsterdam. It specialises in developing, implementing and going-to-scale with non-formal programmes for disadvantaged young children and their families. These programmes represent a first step in helping children realise their individual, social and educational potential and are based on reinforcing and supporting parental effort.

Since its foundation in 1972, the Foundation has reached over 50,000 young children. Today, it caters for 25,000 children in its programmes in over 70 municipalities throughout the Netherlands. The Foundation's strength lies in the many tailor-made programmes that it is able to provide, to its creation of employment among parents of the target population (70 part-time jobs for every 1200 children looked after) and since 1985, from strong and constant support from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, which enables it to train community mothers and provide tailored materials and intensive parental support.

The premises of Averroes programming are as follows:

- that disadvantaged homes in urban areas are generally not conducive to learning the skills and knowledge necessary for children to integrate successfully the primary school... hence, the need for respectful intervention;
- that parents of these children have generally little self-esteem and consider themselves as inadequate parents and educators... hence the need for informal, educational programmes that lead to self-esteem results;
- that society has no interest in allowing pockets of poverty to persist or spread. .. Hence the emphasis placed by Averroes on identifying the stakeholders in society who can help them achieve their educational objectives.

A number of key principles underlie the various activities undertaken by Averroes: that priority should be given to socially disadvantaged populations; that a minimum of social infrastructure and social mobilisation should be in place to support intervention programmes; that target groups and especially women from the target groups - should participate in the design and monitoring of programmes; that activities should be community-based and culturally relevant; that there should be a focus on the whole child and that the children be accepted as active participants in their own development.

Averroes offers seven progressive but different programmes, mostly based on home-visiting of parents by trained professionals and para-professionals:

- *Instapje or First Steps* (infant) to improve the quality of interaction between mothers and infants
- *Klimreek or Climbing Frame* (young toddlers) aimed at stimulating, through toy play, verbal interaction between parents and young toddlers.
- *Spel aan huis or Play at home* (1-4 years) to stimulate play development among children and play skills among parents. Much of the early years "curriculum" is covered...
- *Opstapje or Leg-up* for children 2-4 years from disadvantaged backgrounds to prepare them for successful entry into kindergarten in the basic school; its Level II, for children 4-6 years.
- *Overstap or Change Over..* to help children (5-7 years) beginning reading. It focuses on the collaboration between school, parents and children;
- *Stap door or Keep on going* for Second and Fifth grade pupils in primary school to strengthen their reading skills... through teacher, parental and peer tutoring;
- *Stap rond or Move around* is a parent education programme providing educational support to parents of children from birth to 6 years of age;
- *Kaleidoscoop* - the Dutch adaptation of the High/Scope kindergarten programme for children 3 to 5 years old.

Box 2: The Capabel Project

The *Capabel Project* is an example of collaborative work by different participants in the field of ECEC. Begun in 1991 and situated in the immigrant “Bos en Lommer” district in Amsterdam which has over 32,000 inhabitants and many social problems, the Project addresses the needs of children and youth, up to 23 years. It is a wide-ranging, preventive, experimental programme that is programmed to last 18 years. It has now covered the age-ranges 0-4 and 4-8 years setting up a series of prevention programmes for all the children in this age range.

Capabel is not an executive but a networking organisation which aims to mobilise, develop and co-ordinate the work of existing organisations in a neighbourhood. Through its close contacts with the children, parents, and youth of the immigrant groups, it is able to draw the attention of the statutory district services to the actual questions and problems of the target groups, which can be as much a search for employment as for other matters. It introduces new programme models and encourages close co-operation between municipal and local voluntary organisations.

Among the programmes it has introduced are: the Meeting Points method; play groups; the Averroès Klimreck (a mother-child parenting programme), Opstap (a mother-child home instruction programme to prepare immigrant children of 2-4 for successful entry into the kindergarten classes of the basisschool) and Overstap programmes (supporting education and learning of the 5-7 year olds, particularly during the key transition to reading and writing); circus theatres, homework classes...In addition, a crèche is provided so that mothers from linguistic minority groups can learn to speak the Dutch language, take part in activities with older children and also attend seminars where they learn to use play materials provided by the *Capabel Project*. The tutors are themselves from the linguistic minority groups (mainly Turkish and Moroccan) and the seminars are conducted in the group members' first language. However, parents are encouraged to help their children use Dutch, both for the sake of the children's education and for their own. The *Capabel Project* promotes an increase in the number of qualified teachers from ethnic and linguistic minorities.

Capabel is an educational project. Its basic aims for children are:

- to minimise the number of children entering schools with developmental delays
- to help developmentally delayed children in primary school to catch up;
- to ensure better access to secondary school and better completion rates for children from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- to reduce the incidence of early school leaving;
- to contribute to a more balanced distribution of employment in the labour for girls and boys from poorer or ethnic backgrounds.

To achieve these aims, *Capabel* seeks to improve the links between parents/families and the local agencies through exchange of information and information services, e.g. for mothers of young children; networking parents; improving the housing stock, facilities and environment; contact points for education (school), health, police, welfare work, relief, recreation... The many networks mutually strengthen each other and always aim to strengthen the participation of parents.

Capabel is a significant *action research programme*. Research is conducted by the University of Amsterdam. During the whole period of 18 years, the university will supply the project with factual data and findings that will, in turn, be transformed by project leaders into hypotheses and guidelines for further action. In turn, the project provides the Dutch research community with extremely important data, e.g. the emotional and social development levels of 4 year-olds entering school. Other data: % of ethnic parents that are reached; progress of ethnic children in school; % of women participating in the program; % of parents taking adult education; % of children on police records; % of unemployed; % of women with regular salaried work; % of children on drugs; fertility rates; % of families living in a good house/apartment.

Capabel maintains social and political support at the level of the district and the city and has established a number of mechanisms to maintain its consultative profile. It invites politicians, local civil servants and subsidising authorities into the project through its quarterly Policy Group meetings. The partners in the project are the Municipality of Amsterdam and the local district council. A central government official, from the Social Policy Department, is a member of the project's Steering Committee.

Box 3

The Piramide Project

The Piramide project is an experimental early education programme designed by the Dutch psychologist, Dr Jef J. van Kuyk and inspired by Robert Slavin's original *Success for All* programme. The programme was especially designed for Dutch children who need special support, such as minority language children and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The programme is called Piramide (pyramid) as it is built on four cornerstones or principles:

- *Child initiative*: the initiative and active involvement of the child is of fundamental importance, leading him/her to establish, plan for and achieve goals;
- *Teacher initiative*: the free play of the child does not necessarily lead to development. A trained teacher provides modelling, showing which skills are important and how they can be acquired in a planned and goal-oriented way. Scaffolding takes place continually: through giving directions, instructions, pre-structuring the task, dividing it into small parts... all with the purpose of giving the child as much chance as possible to learn actively.
- *Psychological nearness*: providing the child with a feeling of being protected and safe;
- *Psychological distance*: coming from this feeling of being protected and respected, the child forgets fear and is able to devote his/her energies to exploring the world,

Piramide aims to promote in children: socio-emotional development; personality development and resilience; creativity; motor development and preparation for writing; perception; language development and preparation for reading; cognitive development and preparation for mathematics; orientation in space and time and in the world. To achieve these ends, learning to play in a pre-formed environment is important as are the group (including teachers) achievement of the fortnightly projects. Monitoring of children is done through close observation, documenting and six-monthly tests of cognitive development, language development, concept development and their notions of time and space. Children who are not achieving well receive also diagnostic tests. Both preventive and remedial tutoring are carried out daily within the daily programme. Special attention is paid to minority language children and they are supported both in their own language and in Dutch. Parents too are involved. Provisional results about the programme - both research and survey - are very encouraging.

The Kaleidoscoop Project

The Kaleidoscoop Project is a Dutch version of the American High/Scope programme for children attending playgroups and the first year of primary school. High/Scope is characterised by trust in the inner autonomy and learning motivation of children and an insistence on certain structural qualities of the pre-school environment and curriculum, viz. adequate funding, favourable staff/pupil ratio, appropriate room arrangement and materials, team facilitation and evaluation, clear understanding of the respective roles of children and facilitators, shared core method and daily routine, focus on child learning through the key experiences, continuous monitoring, parent involvement.

The *Kaleidoscoop* project visited by the team was in a school with a high representation of ethnic minority families. Research carried out by the Averroes Foundation has shown the Kaleidoscoop prepares children effectively for learning, reading, writing, language and number. The children are helped to develop their own plans and learn to work independently. *Plan-Do-Review* is a motto much used in High/Scope work. Children are also encouraged and shown how to get along well with each other and to solve problems either individually or in groups.

Parental involvement is also an important aspect of this project. Parents can visit the Kaleidoscoop class and attend regular meetings about children's development and learning. They are also provided with materials for use at home.

Family engagement and support

73. Maternal and parental leave in the Netherlands - in comparison to other continental European Union countries - is quite reduced. While employers help with funding ECEC provision for their workers with young children, until recently, they have not been expected to consider ways in which more flexible ways of working could be beneficial to families with young children. However, there is the promise of a new law to make it easier for parents to combine work and family responsibilities (*Labour and Care Framework Act*). In addition, job creation schemes are being promoted to help

women re-enter the workforce. Likewise, negotiations with the employers and unions are ongoing to encourage flexible working hours and modern work patterns. Some adjustments to school hours and after-school care have also been initiated. In the meantime, part-time employment among mothers with young children seems to have developed as a popular - whether by choice or by necessity - means to balance work and family life.

74. However, the role of parents as the primary carers for and educators of their children is increasingly stressed in Dutch social and educational policy. Parents are no longer seen as passive recipients of health, care and education services. In 1996, the *Temporary Decree on Quality Regulations for Childcare* required that childcare providers must state how they will maintain contact with parents; in addition they must give information about and involve parents in the formulation of the pedagogical plan. In the same year, the *Act on Participation of Clients in Care Services* relating to publicly funded welfare and health facilities, imposed a responsibility on service providers to inform parents and to encourage their participation in all matters relating to the provision of services and the institution policy. The parents' national organisation, BOINK, represents the common interests of parents whose children attend childcare settings and supports local parent committees and advocates the parents' perspective in national policy debates.

75. Similarly, the primary education service has plans to improve the manner and level of information to parents. From January 1999, all primary schools will produce an annual brochure and four-year school plan which will include information about school organisation, school goals, and an outline of educational objectives for each age group. In addition, efforts are being made to upgrade the currently sporadic information about parenting and educational support and to co-ordinate these services, e.g. through the adoption of a 'one-counter front office' model where parents can seek help. To this end, the 'broad-based school', underpinned by a philosophy of service integration on one site, has been initiated by some municipalities. Many schools in the extensive network of special education in the Netherlands also offer training and support to parents.

76. The review team noted a further innovative effort to provide information and make services more accessible to parents from linguistic or ethnic minority groups. In several municipalities in the Netherlands, there exists a policy to employ bridging personnel from ethnic groups in early childhood programmes. This valuable staff is trained to work alongside the institutional and voluntary ECEC professionals and to communicate information about programmes to their groups of origin.

Children with special education needs

77. Traditionally, Dutch society has been extraordinarily generous in its funding for children with special educational needs and for children deemed 'at risk'. There are a wide range of projects and organisations catering for children with special education needs (learning and behavioural difficulties...), although the services cannot be said to be uniformly sensitive and comprehensive throughout the country. As far as we can judge, there are few ISCED level 0 (zero) statistics on the numbers of young children with special education needs⁸ but for levels 1 and 2 (primary and secondary education), the figure of 9.1% is given. This percentage is high in comparison to other industrialised countries, but the Dutch figure may be due to differences in definition and/or the rigour of Dutch screening methods. Of these children, just over 6% are in special schools. Since the mid-eighties, policy has been to reintegrate children with special needs into the regular system. The new Primary Education Act of 1998, while recognising the status of a number of special primary schools, brings both special and regular education together. It has opened more fully primary and secondary schools to children with special education needs and kindergarten classes to young children with developmental difficulties. A new act is foreseen for children with special needs having impairments to vision, hearing, motor or mental capacity. New support services are also foreseen in support of the children's families, if these children are mainly cared for at home. It is not possible as yet to evaluate the impacts of these measures, in particular, in the early years before entry into kindergarten classes.

⁸. There are approximately 250 special education pupils in special schools at age 3, about 1300 at age 4 and 2500 at age 5.

CHAPTER 4: ISSUES RELATING TO POLICY AND PRACTICE

78. Chapters 2 and 3 of this report have described the context and manner in which the Netherlands is developing its ECEC provision. The country has engaged in a very rapid expansion of a complex range of services for children under four years old, with the intention to increase still further the capacity of the childcare sector. Between 1990 and 1995, the aim of increasing provision through the *Childcare Incentive Scheme* resulted in an extra 50,000 places being realised, with a third of them being rented to companies as planned. The leap from 200 to over 600 municipalities providing childcare during this period is an indication of the success of the scheme, with over 95 % of municipalities now involved.

79. Similarly, out-of-school care provision for school-age children, relatively non-existent prior to the government's interventions, is developing, although more slowly than early childhood care. Nor has it been exclusively a top-down approach. Attention has been paid by politicians and the officers from central government to involve all the stakeholders in this field: local government and municipalities; the actual providers of childcare, playgroups, childminding and kindergartens whether public, non-profit or private; trainers, union representatives, parents' organisations and researchers. Many innovative alliances between statutory and voluntary services have been formed or are nascent (see examples of innovative programmes above). The issue of supporting equal opportunities in the workplace for women is receiving greater support while the honoured Dutch tradition of supporting disadvantaged groups has continued.

80. Amongst so much that is positive, the review team noted eight areas, which they believe require, further consideration. These areas are:

- Views of early childhood and family organisation: implications for ECEC
- Co-ordination of services
- Family engagement and support within the ECEC field
- Children with special education needs
- Programmes: content and implementation
- ECEC workers in the Netherlands
- Research and evaluation
- Funding and finance

Views of early childhood and family organisation: implications for ECEC

81. In any society it is important to explore the social representations of young children and families that are used to underpin assumptions about provision for and treatment of children at any particular age (Tobin et al, 1989). Dutch society approaches young children through its own historical lenses and through implicit concepts, continually being modified by current notions of childhood. Different childhoods are constructed for different age groups and in addition, for children classified as departing from the norm for a variety of reasons. What were the images of childhood presented to the review team and reflected in the documents and statements of the many Dutch people interviewed?

The young child

82. The review team members suggest that in the Netherlands children often appear to be classified: socially, medically, educationally. These classifications tend to be expressed in compensatory categories, e.g. in the health system, there is intensive screening of young children with

numerous classifications of morbidity and developmental difficulty. Likewise, within social welfare, there are numerous classifications of disadvantage and minority status, paralleled in mainstream education by several types of disadvantage to which compensatory capitation grants are attached. These classifications of children are carried out to ensure that all Dutch children have a happy and fair start in life. However, they can suggest a protective and egalitarian attitude toward children, rather than a strong desire to invest in the various intelligence areas of young children (Gardner, 1994), to seeing their deficiencies rather than their strengths. In fact, as Super & Harkness have pointed out: in the Netherlands, the understanding is widespread that “you must not push young children”: and that children will develop well if provided with a healthy environment, characterised by regular schedules and regular rules (UNESCO, 1994).

Family organisation and the role of women

83. The young child is seen primarily as the responsibility of the parents and many of the non-formal, programmes established in the Netherlands for young children seek to involve parents in child-rearing and to engage their responsibility toward the young child. By parent, however, mothers are often understood, for Dutch society, like many others, still sees the mother as the parent who *should* be the homemaker and caregiver of children. Although recent research (Hakim, 1999) shows that Dutch attitudes with regard to child-rearing, are becoming increasingly egalitarian, and that an increasing number of men engage in part-time work, the traditional division of labour is still reflected in labour market organisation, in which women take up much the greater proportion of part-time jobs. According to Liesbeth Pot (Pot, 1996), Netherlands’ representative to the former European Childcare Network:

.. A new norm is developing – three days a week in a centre is the maximum period compatible with ‘good parenting’. Women in dual earner households are very busy: they combine children, employment and household tasks, all on a part-time basis, and although ideally they would like to share with their partners, in practice this is still far from achieved. They have had to find a balance between these tasks, a balance which in my view reflects the continuing predominance of the ideology of motherhood.’

84. Women, therefore, may be bearing a disproportionate share of the cost of the present system. Not only are salary levels low in the childcare field itself, but also the great majority of low-paid, part-time jobs are held by women, who, in the interests of parental time with children, suffer the costs of lost opportunity.

Implications for ECEC

85. What are the consequences of these representations on young children and families? In exploring the social construction of childhood in the Netherlands, one is once again aware of the strong traditions of responsibility, tolerance and freedom of which the Dutch are justly proud, and the proactivity of Dutch governments in favour of the interests of the weakest or least powerful members of their society. However, a negative consequence of a predominantly social welfare perspective is that countries which adopt it, may tend to invest in young children only reactively, because, for example, the traditional caregiver, the family, is unable to meet the conflicting responsibilities of childcare and full-time work or, is deemed ‘at risk’. In parallel, investment by education authorities, may likewise pursue a strongly utilitarian line, seeing programmes for the four to six-year olds as primarily a preparation for school. Young children may not always be seen as competent, living at the heart of the greatest learning curve in the developmental cycle, nor as members of a social group with its own rights and interests.

86. In the Netherlands, with the entry of women into the labour force, the state was obliged to enter the childcare field, but, it seemed to the review team that investment in the capacities and competencies of pre-kindergarten children is only now being seen as a central issue. ECEC services have tended up to the moment to provide first and foremost, a protective environment to children rather than promoting interactive and creative educational settings. What one is arguing for is an environment which is both ‘caring’ (i.e. protective and safe) **and** educationally stimulating, providing children with the social interactions through which they learn about themselves, their society and culture. Excellent

work is done in many situations, but frequently programmes are taken in charge in an unstructured manner by relatively untrained personnel (see below) or, as in the case of education, by the least experienced teachers. As a result, some children under six years do not experience environments based on an informed view of either child capacity or developmental need. No doubt, much of this may be a passing problem, caused by present pressures on a system that is trying to meet greatly increased demand.

Co-ordination of services

87. The structure and organisation of early childhood care and education services in the Netherlands are typified by diversity. Responsibility is divided and while there are clearly strengths to be gained from multiprofessional working, where different knowledge bases can contribute to the offer of a wider range of services, there are also dangers of fragmentation. The Netherlands Background Report acknowledges this issue: “There is need to strengthen coherence, promote quality improvement and control, while adapting to the needs and preferences of children and families”(Kloprogge, 1998). In this regard, the segmentation of early childcare services into childcare, play groups, interventions toward children ‘at risk’ and pre-school can present particular difficulties.

88. Whatever services a family uses, it is important that they make sense at the parental and child level. If provision appears extremely diverse or if parents are placed in the situation of being consumers only, it makes it difficult for them to hold onto a stable image of child-rearing and parental responsibility - all the more so, if different professionals appear to offer conflicting opinions. Likewise, for the child, unless continuity of relationships and learning goals are ensured across different experiences in a range of settings, it may prove difficult for the child to integrate these experiences in a meaningful way.

89. Policy coherence and services integration in the Netherlands will be challenging for a number of reasons. First, policy matters relating to children of all ages and their families are currently dealt with by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science; the Ministry of Justice, together with other central government departments, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, and the Home Department. However, there is real recognition of the need for co-ordination and the two main ministries in the field, Welfare and Education, work increasingly in partnership with each other to improve early childhood care and education, including education and support programmes for families.

90. Second, early childhood provision is now decentralised and deregulated. In line with Dutch tradition, consensus building and discussion have been the main tools used to work out the division of responsibilities between the central government and the municipalities. Municipalities are generally pleased to take on new responsibilities but despite the differentiation which now characterises the early childhood sector, it seems that local authorities may need more support and guidance from the ministries in developing and implementing policies (VWS, 1998). The need is felt, particularly in services for the youngest children, to balance, on the one hand, the freedom of the municipalities to act according to the needs of their populations and, on the other, the responsibility of the central government for ensuring that national policy priorities are met and that programmes are successfully implemented at the local level.

91. Third, there is an increasing market orientation and trend toward privatisation. Specifically, there is a tripartite funding system by which government, parents, and employers share the costs of childcare provisions.

92. Finally, recent developments and changes in different components of the system have been rather unconnected and isolated, making it difficult to take a unified approach, a situation which is further complicated by the great diversity of services and service delivery mechanisms.

93. Yet, the foundation for building a more coherent system is there, and all levels of government seem to recognise the need for the integration of policy making and services for young children and families. Though it is difficult to create convincing incentives to encourage services integration at the local level, there are increasing efforts to co-ordinate services from the perspective of the client.

Process management has been introduced as a promising temporary measure to co-ordinate services around the needs of school-aged children, though this approach does little to address the needs of children under four.

An example of policy co-ordination

Local Compensatory Education Policies. In August 1998, the then-Educational Priority Areas were decentralised to the municipalities. Responsibility to draw up meaningful integrated schemes to combat educational disadvantage was devolved to local government. As part of the new policy, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport provide funds to the municipalities to co-ordinate early childhood and early primary provisions for children 'at-risk'.

Within this new policy approach, the Ministry of Education limits its direct responsibility for schools to setting educational goals and outcome standards. How these objectives are met is a matter for the municipality. In addition, the Ministry makes its contribution toward achieving programme objectives, in particular, through weighted capitation grants. The policy further reinforces the Ministry's goal of creating the autonomous school, with less regulation and more policy freedom.

A *national framework* was created to give direction to municipal policy makers. The stated goal was to improve starting conditions of children at the beginning of primary school, by increasing co-operation between schools, play-groups, and childcare centres with the aim of preventing delays in the development of young children; and by enhancing the expertise of staff working with young children. By linking the money to meeting certain conditions at the local level, these policies ensure that municipalities: a) encourage the exchange of information concerning pupils entering primary schools; b) promote systematic planning and future educational expertise in pre-school provision; c) implement programmes and instruments that foster pre-school language development and provide support to parents through home-based programmes.

A notable element of the new role of central government is to appoint a "consortium" of specialists in the field of local policy making and early childhood education to provide expertise to local authorities to initiate such integrated schemes. The local parties are helped to identify the instruments, programs and approaches that give better solutions to local needs, taking in to account the means, institutions and expertise at their disposal. Another element to note is the joint action of the ministries, the council of Dutch cities (VNG) and the PMPO (process management for primary education: the national implementation office for primary education).

The effort described is further integrated into the national policy for "big cities", in which the twenty-five major cities in the Netherlands receive extra money and more policy-making freedom to enhance local social infrastructure. A covenant with each of the cities will be ratified before 1st September 1999. It has been agreed that raising the rate of participation of the most deprived children in early childhood education programs from the age of two-and-a-half, will be a major indicator of the success of this policy.

Family engagement and support

94. Already reference has been made to the limited maternal and parental leave provision in the Netherlands (European Commission, 1998). However, there is the promise of a new law to make it easier for parents to combine work and family responsibilities (*Labour and Care Framework Act*) and job creation schemes are being promoted to help women re-enter the workforce. Likewise, negotiations with the employers and unions are ongoing to encourage flexible working hours and modern work patterns. Some adjustments to school hours and after-school care have also been initiated, but are deemed by many parents to be insufficient. Within the ECEC field, three other issues require mention with respect to family engagement and support

Further investment in early education programmes and non-formal family support

95. In Chapter 2 above, the issue of family poverty in the Netherlands was raised and in response, the many programmes initiated by the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sport. Likewise, the great

diversity of children in the Netherlands society was referred to and the compensatory education policies put into place in favour of children 'at risk'. Amongst other measures to ensure that young children from poor or ethnic origins should not suffer the consequences of either poverty or acculturation, the Ministry of Education grants extra capitation to over 30% (estimation) of the children in its primary schools. Yet, the contribution of the school is not sufficient by itself to provide equal opportunity to children from deprived homes and communities. The engagement of families is needed, particularly in the early childhood stage when multifaceted inputs can be made and the willing co-operation of families with care and education bodies can be won.

Likewise, a fair start in the kindergarten classes and school can be problematic for these children. Ethnic minority children are often unprepared for school and begin kindergarten classes already behind Dutch children in terms of language and the mastery of the social and cognitive skills which the young child needs if he or she is to benefit fully from the school environment. The Dutch Ministry of Social Welfare has invested significantly in intervention programming for these children and children 'at risk' often with excellent results, as shown by the Averroes and Capabel programmes outlined in Chapter 3. However, the Netherlands Background Report suggests that take-up for such programmes is still very low for children from ethnic groups, as is their participation in childcare, e.g. only 6-7% of Turkish and Moroccan parents in Rotterdam make use of childcare services.

Out-of-school care

96. Another issue that arose in discussions with several groups was that of schools being insufficiently involved in the development of out-of-school care programmes. Currently, school hours are not adapted to the schedules of working parents. Although all schools, since 1985, are obliged to provide a lunchroom for children, many children break in the middle of the day and the school day ends long before factories, services and offices close. Despite recent expansion, out-of-school care remains scarce. The review team was informed that schools do not seem to accept the responsibility of encouraging or supporting the development of out-of-school care.

Training of professionals to engage family support

97. The review team was informed on many occasions that professionals in both the social and education sectors have not been sufficiently trained to engage parents. It is an issue of some importance as parental support for education helps children enormously in their progress through school. Today, education systems can no longer take that support for granted, especially the support of parent who are marginalised from mainstream societal values in one way or another and do not see clearly the connection between educational achievement and the advancement for children. In the early childhood period, the foundation for co-operation between parents and public services can more readily be laid.

Children with special education needs

98. In Chapter 3 above, we have referred to the genuine concern shown by Dutch society toward children with special education needs. However, their participation in early childhood services was not clear to the review team. We know that intensive health screening of young children exists but whether this screening is helpful in allowing young children with special needs to benefit from the expansion of the childcare system remains uncertain. Another cause for concern with regard to special needs children is that in a situation in which the drive to increase childcare *places* predominates - for the moment at least - over the developmental needs of young children, it may be doubted whether the additional services necessary to support special needs children and their carers will be supplied in sufficient volume. As noted above, the new Primary Education Act of 1998 has opened the ordinary primary and secondary schools to children with special education needs and kindergarten classes to young children with developmental difficulties. This provision is important not only from a human rights perspective but also in educational terms. Inclusion, according to the Salamanca Declaration "provides an effective education to the majority of children and improves the efficiency and ultimately, the cost effectiveness of the entire education system." (UNESCO, 1995)

Programmes: content and implementation

99. Wherever young children find themselves, they are actively learning and trying to ‘make sense’ of the cultural and social community in which their lives are embedded. Programmes, however, need to go beyond implicit learning and encourage forms of expression, sociability and psychomotor development that challenge and support young children to develop in the ways most positive for them. In addition, official programmes need to be properly frameworked and monitored. The evidence is there, as noted above, that the structural and environmental qualities of ECEC services in the Netherlands are fast improving. Formal criteria, such as numbers of children participating and their social background; the quality of buildings and equipment; client satisfaction; outcomes for children, have been formulated and are well appreciated. Yet, concern was expressed with regard to the marked unevenness in quality of programming across the childcare sector (infant/toddler, 0-3 years) and in out-of-school care. Effective models already do exist in the Netherlands to strengthen programme design and process, but for a number of reasons, these approaches have not yet gone to scale.

100. Kindergarten classes, on the other hand, are comprehensively accessible, appropriately staffed and offer relevant learning opportunities. There seems to be some concern, however, that these classes are not always adequately adapted to the development of young children. We have already mentioned in Chapter 3 that a seemingly contradictory criticism is sometimes expressed in their regard. On the one hand, kindergarten classes are criticised for engaging too much in free play, leading to a lack of continuity with the early, obligatory classes of primary school. On the other hand, many teachers, it seems, use a readiness-for-school approach that does not meet the complex needs of young children. The situation leads to comments such as that children are “doing nothing” or that by working on emerging literacy and numeracy, they are being “educated too early”. However, as already noted, above efforts are now being made by the ministries to adapt to Dutch conditions some of the better play/instruction programmes, e.g. Piramide, Kaleidoscoop. These programmes may do much to allay fears that though education for children from 4-12 is now in the same institution, there is still a lack of continuity between the former nursery school classes and the primary school.

101. Age six is the beginning of “formal learning,” a period which adopts a more teacher-directed approach. The review team was told several times that children are expected to learn to read within three months. There is a feeling among teachers and education officials that the high ratings achieved by Dutch pupils in the IEA early reading and numeracy evaluations depend on tackling early the challenge of reading. It is a question that might be reconsidered as other factors certainly influence performance, such as, the specialised reading instruction methods adopted in Dutch primary schools or emergent literacy work in the kindergarten years.

102. At the national level, there is hesitation about developing a national curriculum, which would violate the principle of “freedom of education.” There is also resistance to identifying what competencies children should have, because of a fear of “state pedagogy.” Yet, this proved much less of an issue than at first expected: the review team found evidence of real consensus about what should and is taught across schools, guided in part by goals identified at national level and national (optional) tests administered four times a year. The SLO, a national institute which co-ordinates work on curriculum, also influences the content of the *basischool*. Most schools know about the SLO programme and use part of it.

103. With the creation of the *basischool*, the inspection systems for kindergartens and primary schools were brought together. Subsequent to this merger, there has been a decrease in early childhood training and expertise among the members of the inspectorate. In addition, there appears to be less attention to young children on the items for evaluation on the inspector sheet. However, with the new and more integral approach to the inspection of schools, it may be hoped that a renewed emphasis will be placed on the specificity of the kindergarten classes and greater efforts made to understand the developmental and learning needs of children at this age.

ECEC workers in the Netherlands

104. Differentiation in provision in the Netherlands is made available by a number of parallel systems, which may be seen to offer choice to parents. A less favourable consequence of this range of systems however, is the fact that staff also form a differentiated workforce. The review team was informed that inequalities in the treatment and training of staff within and across services creates tensions and dissatisfaction in a situation where co-ordination and collaboration are vital. Professionalism and continuity are important criteria for working with young children. Hence, in the early childhood professions, factors that impact on training and retention of staff become crucial. These include: a duly accredited system of training and qualifications; stable and significant funding for in-service training (especially in a situation of rapid expansion and upgrading as in the Netherlands); clear career structure and progression; comparable conditions of service, e.g. between fully professional early childhood staff and primary school teachers. Obviously, in a decentralised and deregulated system, difficulties may arise in raising expectations, training and practice to meet with national standards.

105. We have already made some observations with regard to ECEC staff. There is, firstly, the question of status, particularly the status of staff in the welfare sector, who have, in general, lower levels of training, less specialisation in early childhood education and care, lower compensation, and poorer working conditions than primary school teachers. In addition, concern was expressed by the workers in the intervention programmes, who find themselves - because of employment schemes - paid very different rates for exactly the same work or who have no means of gaining either permanence or promotion.

106. A second issue is training. In the education sector, the review team was informed that the amalgamated kindergarten and primary school training does not pay sufficient attention to working with very young children. In the social sector, although a multitude of training offers now exist, they are often not adapted, according to our correspondents, to the actual needs of staff. In addition, the great variety of training places, entry levels and diplomas do not make for solid professional profiles or loyalties, nor do many of the courses on offer appear related to career structure and progression. Reference was also made in the section on *Family engagement and support* to a lack of attention, in much of the training, to improving the capacity of professionals to work with parents and multi-cultural groups.

107. A third issue is that of recurrent staff shortages in both sectors. To add to the difficulties that shortages present - to children, parents and staff - in the daily organisation of care and education centres, it was felt in addition that attempts to bring in new staff were not always judicious. Early childhood specialists expressed the view that new initiatives to recruit “sleeping” teachers or attract new recruits did not address the needs of the kindergarten sector. Likewise, the attempts to bring more women into part-time employment in the social sector, although welcome from a number of aspects, was seen to have a further detrimental effect on the status of workers. Again, the enrolment of volunteers in playgroups - the most common type of intervention for 2-4 year-old children - though advantageous in terms of parent participation and programme costs, may not enhance quality.

Research and evaluation

108. There is a commendable Dutch tradition of using pilot research and development projects toward improving ECEC policy and practice. A plethora of experimental projects receive State and/or local funding, but these programmes are often not evaluated rigorously and when they are, the results are not effectively used to inform policy and practice. It seems that there are difficulties in achieving large-scale implementation of successful innovations; and lessons from experimental programmes are not widely shared. The gap between research and policy may be influenced by the four-year election cycles; when governments change, so do policy priorities. Several correspondents spoke of the difficulty of receiving long-term funding. However, in certain programmes, such as Capabel, funding for experimental research has continued over many years.

109. The gap between research and *practice* may be linked to the fact that teacher trainers do not conduct research and teachers are not trained as researchers. Research activity is generally the domain of a relatively small group of academics. While their work is extremely valuable and necessary, the lack of practitioner research and the lack of research opportunities for those in teacher and early childhood practitioner education (i.e. those in teacher training institutions), means that there is a divide between those with research experience expertise and those with practical knowledge from working in the field.

Funding and finance

110. The current funding system can be very confusing to understand, and therefore difficult to monitor. “Even within one municipality it is difficult to gain an insight into the origin of funds and into the total expenditure on ECEC; it is even more difficult to produce an overview of resources, costs, and expenditure on ECEC at the national level” (Kloprogge et al., 1998). This complexity can lead to inefficiencies and inequalities. For example, the allocation of funds to increase ECEC provision may vary greatly from municipality to municipality according to the decisions of local policy makers, who may not have an interest in supporting more affordable, quality options for families.

111. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the trend in contributions to childcare by the three major partners - government, employers and parents - gives rise to fears that parents may bear in the future the major costs of childcare. As tax breaks for childcare, under the current regime, are more profitable for companies than for parents, it is feared that a situation may evolve in which the children of parents on lower incomes may be progressively excluded from quality childcare (Kloprogge et al 1998). It was not possible for the review team to judge how real this fear may be, but the trend in childcare spending needs to be monitored carefully. The present investments of the two responsible ministries give rise, however, to more hopeful outcomes. It is clear, for example, that Dutch society has decided that the education of young children is a national investment, as kindergarten classes are completely free and real efforts are being made to improve quality. Attitudes towards programmes for the younger children who have not entered the education system are more ambiguous, as programming for young children still seems to be viewed, in part at least, as a cost-effective means of meeting the economic demand for a stable, well-educated workforce or as a means of intervention toward families ‘at risk’.

112. Another issue with major impacts on funding and financing is that of the professionalisation of personnel and services. Greater professionalism is needed in the childcare sector, but the upgrading of staff has obvious financial implications. The Netherlands is not unique in facing this problem, but the rapidity of the expansion of childcare services does not make finding a solution to the trade-off between coverage and quality an easy one. At the same time, the extent to which the state should professionalise services raises issues other than funding, e.g. that of parents feeling deskilled when confronted by many experts on child rearing. This can become a particularly delicate issue for disadvantaged or ethnic minority young parents whose feeling of social marginalisation and lack of control over their lives is further reinforced if their child-rearing practices are called into question. The Netherlands has been creative in this matter through its use of “bridging” personnel who help create links between minority groups and the public services.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

Views about childhood and families

113. The first policy issue that we have selected - views about childhood and families - may seem rather general to over-worked policy makers but we believe that it is crucial. The rationale for expanding investment in early childhood services in the Netherlands has been largely concerned with increased female participation in the labour market and as a result, Dutch society's need to provide care facilities for children. The best interests of children have indeed been considered in the course of this tremendous expansion but there is some concern that these interests may at times be crowded out by other concerns. We would suggest that the interests of children could be served by prioritising open national objectives for children, as well as aiming at other goals.⁹ The raising of some fundamental questions would assist in reaching consensus about objectives and standards, and does not necessarily mean pouring every municipality or institute into the same mould. What place for childhood and child rearing does Dutch society wish to allow? What are the respective places of women and men, of families and the state, in child-rearing and childcare? Is early childhood education and care to be seen as a benefit to the whole of society or simply a service to those who choose to have children? If the former, who should pay: mainly parents and employers, or the whole of society? What is the essential purpose of the childcare and early education offered? Are young children seen primarily as little ones to be protected, taken into care, socialised and educated or in addition, will an enriched environment be provided for them to allow them to express their tremendous capacities through an appropriate education? Is giving them opportunities to play and learn with other children and professional caregivers, seen as an educational investment in the future citizens of the Netherlands? The debate on these questions can influence how young children are seen and treated and also serve to identify where the country wishes to go in the early childhood policy field.

114. Assumptions with regard to families and child rearing are also significant. Dutch society promotes actively the principle of equal opportunity for women, but the review team was left with the impression that much more could be done at a practical level to ensure that childbirth and child rearing do not become a responsibility for women to bear alone. A number of practical measures come to mind: e.g. the legal entitlement to more generous maternal and parental leave; increased early childhood provision, out-of-school care¹⁰ and recreation services for children; greater support of mothers from their partners. The career choices of women; the common organisation of schedules around children are all affected by these measures or the lack of them.

115. It is important also that the world of work should take into account the new situation created by women's engagement in the workplace. Labour market organisation is a complex issue but its contours in the Netherlands suggest that traditional gender roles are still operative, with women taking up most of the part-time and lowly paid jobs. Gender roles are reflected too in the excessive

⁹. The Background Report notes: "ECEC policies are partly inspired by parental interests and socio-economic developments and partly by the desire to reinforce social cohesion, to reduce educational disadvantages and to prevent delinquent behaviour through early intervention." The best interests of children are not mentioned.

¹⁰. Schools can play an important role in facilitating working parents, e.g. by permitting municipalities or non-profit organisations to develop out-of-school services on school premises, without charging rent.

feminisation and the low status of ECEC provision. In order to continue to compete with other potential employers, there is a need to make work with young children more attractive by improving salaries, status, and working conditions (see also *Quality of ECEC workers*, below). In this context, central government may need to provide improved guidelines and increased budget to local authorities to ensure adequate recruiting policies and training.

116. Related to the question of women's work is the place that Dutch labour market organisation is willing to make for parental (including paternal) time with children. For the moment, part-time working among women with young children seems to have developed as a necessary means for families to give children some of the time they need. Experiments in many countries have shown, however, that it is possible to find other flexible ways of working that are compatible with the needs of young children and yet are not detrimental to productivity or the working environment. Following the new national legislation being developed to help parents reconcile employment and family responsibilities (parental leave, part-time work, flexible hours), it will be important to monitor in the coming years the acceptance of these options by employers and their use by employees.

117. Again, assumptions about childhood, the family and child-rearing need to be re-examined at group levels - especially among ethnic and low income populations - if adequate interventions are to be planned. In short, many families need not only services but also consideration and dialogue if they are to use the public services available, and secondly, to have those services tailored more to their needs. The providers of services need also to avoid dissonance with the child-rearing practices and expectations of groups whom they serve: "When cultural concepts of the child expressed in schools are in conflict with those held by parents... the result is confusion and ultimately disengagement, failure, or the development of anti-social behaviour." (UNESCO, 1994, Super & Harkness).

118. Finally, more public information to challenge assumptions about young children and their development would be welcome. It would seem that present assumptions are placing a brake on more stimulating programming in the early care and kindergarten sectors. The practice of providing regular schedules, health and security is perhaps sufficient scaffolding to allow a balanced development in many young children, but the recent success of structured and well-theorised programmes in the Netherlands show that both parents and children respond to quality.

119. The current international focus on early childhood and its importance as the first phase in life long learning could also be disseminated more widely. With the new research evidence on brain growth and development in the first three years of life, the negative consequences of poor diet, environmental pollution, and lack of stimulation are more fully acknowledged than ever before. While human growth, development and learning may be highly flexible and may not be subject to rigid, one-for-all judgements, it is during the earliest years that future capacity to participate positively in life and learning is relatively 'hard-wired' (Lambert 1996; Lindsey 1998/9).

120. The multi-ethnic nature of Dutch society and its families is a fact, particularly in the larger cities. Faced by this diversity, the Netherlands has invested heavily in social integration policy. Intervention programming with outreach to families is an important tool in this policy and among the most innovative parts of ECEC in the Netherlands, but to date, it has attracted only a small percentage of children from the target populations. It seems essential, therefore, to invest in culturally sensitive, early childhood programming, backed up by mother-tongue language support and appropriate Dutch language teaching. Part of the success of the Capabel or Averroes programmes stems from their being perceived by their users as supportive of integration, yet respectful of cultural and linguistic difference. The creative efforts by the kindergartens and early primary classes of certain schools, e.g. Bos en Lommer (Amsterdam), could also be encouraged and brought to scale. Though knowledge of the language of the host country is essential for integration, not least in the world of work, it may be effective in the long run to prioritise the creation of a broad multicultural identity, based on democratic rights and equality of participation. It is important to value the cultural inheritance of all children and to see this inheritance as enriching all children's learning. The challenge to develop clear and inclusive policies for young children and families from immigrant or minority groups is still ongoing.

Access and equity

121. Access concerns in the Netherlands arise essentially with regard to the infant/toddler stage (0-3 years) and for children with special education needs. For the first group, additional measures by the government will be needed if the expected demand of 60,000 places by the year 2002 is to be met. If that target includes greater use of services by children 'at risk - today, with an enrolment of much less than 10% - the task is even greater. However, according to Kloprogge (1998), it is estimated that 90% of Turkish and 56% of Moroccan parents would like to make use of childcare under certain conditions, particularly if connected to a primary school. This preference may be a further argument for improving childcare and play group programming, giving them an educational character which both safeguards the child's developmental needs and yet satisfies the parents' need for programmes that imply learning and usefulness.

122. Investment in special institutions for children with special education needs is high, but the trend to channel funds toward mainstream kindergarten classes for the inclusion of these children should be encouraged. The reintegration of budgets and personnel - from segregated, specialised sub-systems - can provide significant savings that may be used to improve mainstream, inclusive education and family support. Because early detection programs are so important and young children so adaptable, the early care and education field is a privileged ground for screening, supporting and including these children. (OECD, 1999).

Policy coherence and co-ordination:

123. The Dutch early childhood system is divided across the education, welfare, and health sectors and is characterised by increasing decentralisation, deregulation, and privatisation. In addition, early childhood programming is employed to respond to multiple social and educational needs: to bring women more easily into the work force through providing early care; to create employment in the social sector; to improve child health and family welfare; to prepare children for school and retain them in the school system; to raise the educational levels of low-income and ethnic parents; to increase parental approval and support for the education of their children; to reach out to communities and reduce unemployment, criminality; and so on. How can the Dutch government promote policy coherence and co-ordination in such a system? No matter what solutions it chooses, the challenge of both vertical and horizontal co-ordination will be great.

124. The effort to co-ordinate policy by the Ministries of Education and Social Welfare should be further encouraged and perhaps, some thought given to establishing a more unified auspices for early care and education programming. Consolidation of goals and activities would seem to be needed, leading to a more rational use of resources. Care and education are not separate activities for different age groups but are essential components of all programmes for young children: *no care without education - no education without care*. Greater co-ordination of auspices should normally enable clearer objectives, policies and budgets for early childhood to be formulated and proposed. Ideally also, it should ensure the up-stream support and services necessary for the management of a large and complex system, including statistical collection and analysis (especially, data collection at ISCED level zero), the mapping of actual services and of present and future demand. On the other hand, concern was expressed about excessive streamlining of services, e.g. about consolidation within a dominant schooling model, in which young children at risk might not receive programmes sufficiently tailored to their needs or in which the value of outreach toward family environments might be underestimated.

125. In the meantime, however, mechanisms could be introduced to ensure that the general aims and standards set at the *mandatory or ministerial level* are actually implemented (OECD, 1966). This may imply a tightening of the system:

- at the *mandatory level* (dealing with legal frameworks, major policy orientations, regulatory steering...);

- at *senior ministerial management level* (regular consultation between senior managers of the various departments so as to co-ordinate national policy; to create effective goals-led and financial steering mechanisms for the system, to establish system monitoring and research; to co-ordinate staff profiling, training and certification...);
- at *the decentralised, senior management level* (ensuring that national objectives are understood and that the large-scale programmatic elements, best taken in charge at decentralised level, are properly devolved, e.g. the work of instrument analysis; goal-setting; local data and information collection, local prioritisation, establishing systems of evaluation and quality control; in-service training and the allocation of budget and personnel...);
- and at *the level of field operations* (at this level, stricter measures of accountability are seemingly needed, better evaluation of programmes through using among other instruments, measurable outcomes for children; integrated and coherent service delivery, which calls for much more intense horizontal co-ordination, e.g. between schools and the other childcare/education agencies...).

126. Essential to this exercise will be local capacity building, the lack of which, according to VWS (1998), causes bottlenecks and wastage in the system. An indication of this lack of local capacity is the unevenness of quality across the childcare sector and/or the number of excellent initiatives that have perished through lack of management skills, training resources, documentation or ongoing financial support.

Quality

127. Clearly, quality in services is influenced negatively by incoherence in policy making and the present inability of some local authorities to implement the policy responsibilities devolved on them. In contrast, as shown in Chapter 3, the structural and environmental qualities of ECEC services in the Netherlands are fast improving. Formal criteria, such as numbers of children participating and their social background; the quality of buildings and equipment; client satisfaction; outcomes for children, have been formulated and are well appreciated. From what the review team saw, the elements that still need urgent attention lie in the staffing area (particularly in the social sector) and in the programmes available.

Quality of ECEC workers

128. There seems to be a real need to take a closer look at the recruitment profiles, training (pre-service and in-service), working conditions, career prospects, and compensation for staff working with young children. Although distinctions need to be drawn between the major strands (daycare, play groups, 'at risk' interventions and pre-school) of early care and education, staff turnover is high, a factor which is detrimental to the profession and eventually, to the care and development of young children. What are the policy options under consideration? In the 1999 collective agreement, the unions representing childcare workers were planning to represent playgroup staff as well. Consequently, new staff joining the profession will need to meet higher qualification requirements. It would also be desirable to see this type of upgrading applied also to informal child-minders, home-based care workers and volunteers, many of whom currently have no training whatsoever and who are not subject to any regulations. Bringing together personnel from different sectors - including education - for common in-service training may also be helpful in improving the coherence of the system. It may be profitable also to consider how a flexible ladder for early childhood workers could be promoted with specific roles and responsibilities clearly defined for those with different levels of training.

129. In this effort, there should be ways to encourage ethnic minority representation at all levels in the training and qualifications system, since this representation appears very low at present. The Capabel Project in particular is providing some initial training which it may be possible to link to courses in higher education. The initial courses have provided the impetus and the confidence to women from ethnic minority groups to go further, assisting in their empowerment and their efforts to

achieve higher levels of education (Esseboom, 1992). Similar projects could empower women from other low-income groups who did not enjoy their own school education and did not benefit from it.

Quality of programmes and processes

130. Concern has already been expressed with regard to the quality of present programmes at the infant/toddler (0-3 years) level and in kindergarten classes (4-5 years): marked unevenness in quality of programming across the childcare sector and some doubt about the appropriateness of the approaches used in kindergarten classes. Yet, as Averroes, Capabel, Piramide and Kaleidoscoop show effective programmes do exist in the Netherlands, underpinned by sound theory and with strong programme design and appropriate process. When the evaluation results of these programmes become available, the Ministries may wish to consider bringing their more successful elements to scale across the system. Implementation instruments and strategies could also be better developed. At the same time, it is important to understand that no panacea programmes exist. To meet the complexity of situations that young children face in such a diverse society, combinations of programming strategies will remain necessary and room for experimentation left open.

131. In the transition to primary schooling, carrying over the approaches and methods of good kindergarten programming into the first year of the primary school may also be worth considering. Clearer theorisation and better programming across both sections seems a necessity. This requires quite explicit emphasis if providers are not to rely on inappropriate, formal teaching techniques. Agreement over what is to be expected of children at the different transition stages will need to be reached so that there is clarity about assessment measures. In this field, one needs to avoid limiting the experiences that children are afforded through the statement of narrowly conceived outcomes.

Research and evaluation

132. In Chapter 4, we noted while many experimental projects receive State and/or local funding, these programmes are often not evaluated rigorously and when they are, the results are not effectively used to inform policy and practice. With the findings from the evaluation of Piramide and Kaleidoscoop experiment becoming available soon, there will be a tremendous opportunity to share the results with policy makers, programme developers, practitioners, and parents--with implications for future investments in ECEC. Programmatic research should not remain within the confines of the ECEC field but should include research on the capacity of lower primary school classes to build on what is best in early childhood education. Further research on parental expectations would also be welcome.

133. It may also be beneficial to establish at ministerial level, practical criteria concerning what foci and what institutions should gain research funding. According to our correspondents, abrupt changes in priority might also be examined. Government too may wish to consider regular system monitoring through well-designed models so as to generate accurate and sufficient information on which to base policy decisions. The promotion of a research and self-monitoring culture within the system could also do much to improve the performance of the service providers.

134. While it is necessary to continue to fund also academic researchers to carry out independent enquiry, the idea of researchers, practitioners and policy makers learning from each other is crucial. To bring them together in discussion groups and conferences to share knowledge, skills and expertise, and to understand each other's roles is much needed too. In addition, improvements in the quality of provision could accrue from the learning gained by the development of practitioner research. This type of research, often using an action research paradigm, when supported by tutors from the higher education sector, can be very effective.

Funding and finance

135. Major concerns for all governments in the area of finance are: the costs of a given area of activity to the exchequer; the elimination of wastage from that area and the value for money being obtained. All three concerns are raised by the need for greater coherence and co-ordination within the

present ECEC system in the Netherlands. Yet, one should be aware that the estimated costs per child in the early years in the Netherlands is relatively low: 3020 NLG per year compared to c. 5000 NLG in the kindergarten/primary sector and almost three times as much again, c. 15,000 NLG, at secondary education level. In addition, with the exception of subsidised places, increasing proportions of care costs are being met by parents and through low staff wages.

136. Nonetheless, better financial accountability seems essential in the context of increased financial commitment to ECEC by the current Government. The potential impact of this funding will depend on improved financial co-ordination of provisions and activities at the municipal level. This means that municipalities must be given the tools to monitor spending used to implement national policy priorities. One option would be to “mark the money” or link funding to targeted groups or certain activities that are defined by a national framework. In general, the funding should be monitored to track to what extent funds intended for young children and families are actually used for this purpose. Municipalities would still have the freedom to adapt allocation of funds to meet the local needs of its constituents.

137. Another issue raised by several correspondents was the need to invest more in professionalising ECEC services in the Netherlands, particularly through staff training. We have mentioned above in the section on *Quality of ECEC workers* some measures that might be considered. A fine balance needs to be struck between the best interests of children, the creation of low-skilled jobs within the service sector (which can in turn serve to raise family finances and fund better the early childhood system) and the validation of parental skills through sensitive programming.

138. This report on the Netherlands acknowledges the high priority accorded to the well being of the youngest children in Dutch society. It is a society holding to long-established values while trying hard to address rapid change and its effects on the young. In this high employment society, where most parents may be required for the workforce, a greater place is being made for young children and their social and learning needs. There is a growing recognition of the right of young children to receive a just share in what society can provide and a desire to help them construct solid foundations of life-long learning.

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Appendix II - Information on the Netherlands Background Report

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26 October - 4 November

Monday 26 October

09h30 - 10h00

Reception of the committee by the Ministries of Education and Science and of Health, Welfare and Sports

10h00 - 10h30

Presentation of the programme and information about logistics

10h30 - 12h30

Discussion about the background review

Afternoon

Discussion with scientists (Prof. Dr. Rispens, Dr. Hubbard, Dr. Leseman, Dr. Vanderley); discussion with policy makers from the Ministry of Education and Science

Tuesday 27 October

9h30 - 10h30

Preparation of meeting with State Secretary

10h30 - 12h00

Reception by the State Secretaries of Health, Welfare and Sports, Lange Voorhout, The Hague

12h30 - 13h30

Visit of an early childhood health centre in the Hague

14h30 - 16h30

Discussion with representatives of organisations involved in provisions for young children (LOKZ, NIZW) and policy makers involved in health provisions for young children and youth policies and social policies from the Ministry of Welfare on subjects like quality, training, parenting support, and access.

Wednesday 28 October

09h30 - 12h30

Visit of a primary school Wolters in the Hague

14h00 - 15h00

Discussion with representatives from educational organisations

15h00 - 16h00

Discussion with the inspectorate

16h00 - 17h00

Discussion about teacher training with staff from a teacher training institute.

Thursday 29 October

10h00 - 12h30

Discussion with the Dutch Union of Municipalities, welfare and education

14h30 - 17h00

Internal Discussion of the review committee and authors of the background review and contact persons of the Ministries.

Friday 30 October

10h00 - 12h15

Visit of a day care centre, a pre- school play group and a medical day care centre at Maarssen/Leusden

14h00 - 16h30

Discussion at the NIZW with stakeholders in childcare, out of school care, pre- school play groups, Employers (VOG), Labour Union, Dutch Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW), Parents organisation for childcare (Boink).

Monday 2 November

09h30 - 11h00

Visit of a Kaleidoscoop provision in connection to the Pre-school (voorschool) programme of the city of Amsterdam

11h00 - 12h00

Presentation of some home-based and centre-based projects by the Averroès Foundation

12h00 - 12h30

Information about creating jobs by involving para-professionals in programmes

14h00 - 15h30

Discussion about the experimental projects aimed at stimulating children at risk, with special attention for language development of the children; with members of the committee for early childhood stimulation experiments (VVE), staff of Averroès, an expert in Dutch as a second language for ethnic minority children, staff of the city of Amsterdam.

15h30 - 17h00

Discussion about social policies in the Netherlands with Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (social policies), Averroès, members of VVE.

Tuesday 3 November

09h30 - 12h30

Visit of the Capabel Project in Amsterdam as an example of a coherent approach for a neighbourhood, information about and visit of aspects of the approach of Capabel, local direction of a coherent approach

14h00 - 15h30

Discussion with staff of Capabel, staff of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, and of experts and local policy makers (Lankhorst) and experts involved in the development of local preventive youth policies and the broad based schools, and city council.

15h30 - 17h00

Internal discussion of the review committee

Wednesday 4 November

10h00 - 12h30

Session about research and monitoring of early childhood education and childcare, with leading researchers in the field from the University of Amsterdam (D.v.d. Boom, Dr. Dobbelsteen), the institute for social sciences research at Nijmegen (ITS; G. Driessen), the Foundation for Information about Youth SJN (Dr. Bisschops, Dr. Vanderbehr), the research institute of the VNG (SGBO, H. Mutsaers), and the monitor project of Rotterdam (Spierings).

14h00 - 15h30

Discussions with the authors of the background review and the staff of the Ministries involved.