

OECD Country Note

Early Childhood Education and Care Policy

in

Sweden

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Purposes of the Thematic Review

1. This Country Note for Sweden 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. Sweden is one of twelve countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, 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 Sweden 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 (1998).

Sweden's participation in the Review

5. Sweden was the fifth country to be visited in the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in Sweden was prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science (Ministry of Education and Science, 1999). 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 each participating country.

6. After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of two OECD Secretariat members and three experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visited Sweden from 9–18 June 1999. The ten-day visit was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Agency for Education. In the course of the visit, the team met with 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 Sweden (see Appendix 3). The team visited several districts in Stockholm and travelled north to the region of Dalecarlia (Borlänge and Gänef). During the visit, 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 Swedish context;
- the impact, coherence and effectiveness of different approaches;
- innovative policies and practices, and 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 Country Note

7. This Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in Sweden. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, literature surveys and the observations of the review team. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 provides an overview of the context in which policy making for children takes place by describing some features of Swedish government, geography, demography, economy, and society. In addition, the main elements of national policy concerning family, health, employment and equality of opportunity for women are discussed as they relate to child and family well-being. Chapter 3 includes an overview of the main forms of, and responsibility for, ECEC provision in Sweden, as well as the key features of funding, programme content, staffing, family engagement and support, and approaches toward children in need of special support. Chapter 4 discusses some observations arising from the visit. Chapter 5 outlines some key issues related to policy and practice in ECEC, that policy makers in Sweden may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision. In the final chapter, we offer some concluding remarks on the early childhood education and care system in Sweden.

Acknowledgements

8. The OECD team would like to express our most sincere thanks and appreciation to the National Co-ordinator and the Work Group for organising an extremely rich and varied programme for us. We were fortunate to enjoy open access to all levels of the system, which allowed us to gain a better understanding of some of the key ECEC policy issues in Sweden, in a relatively short period of time. We would like to commend the warmth of the welcome we received throughout the visit, the approachability of people at all levels within the system, and their willingness to engage in an open, critical debate. In addition, the Background Report, prepared under the leadership of the National Co-ordinator, the Working Group, and the Steering Committee, provided us with a wealth of information on the Swedish system. The Background Report is a thorough, thoughtful document, which should be of great value to those working on policy development for young children and families—in Sweden and abroad.

9. This Country Note represents the views of the OECD team after our intense ten-day visit. Our reflective comment is offered in a spirit of professional dialogue, basing our judgements on our discussions and observations. The facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received much guidance and insight from the Ministry of Education and Science, the National Agency for Education, and many researchers and practitioners in Sweden, they have no part in any shortcomings that this document may present. In order to have a complete picture of ECEC policy and practice in Sweden, it is assumed that the Country Note will be read in conjunction with the Sweden Background Report, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

10. All Swedish terms and services are explained throughout the text. In brief, the predominant form of non-parental ECEC for children from twelve months to five years is the centre-based pre-school or *förskola*. Other forms of provision include family day care homes (*familjedaghem*) and open pre-schools (*öppen förskola*). The age for compulsory school attendance is seven years old, although 98% of Swedish children are enrolled in school-based pre-school classes (*förskoleklass*) or compulsory school at age six. Out-of-school care for the six to twelve year olds takes place in leisure-time centres (*fritidshem*), as well as in family day care (and open leisure-time activities [*öppen fritidsverksamhet*] for older children). Since 1996, the responsibility for all ECEC services lies with the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is in charge of family leave, child benefits, and policy for children in need of special support. The currency of Sweden is the Swedish Krona (SEK). In October 1999, 10 SEK = 1.24 USD = 1.15 EUR.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL ISSUES SHAPING ECEC POLICY IN SWEDEN

The role of the state in Swedish society

11. Bolstered by nearly uninterrupted rule by Social Democrats since World War II, the Swedish welfare state is conceptualised as a means to building an equitable society where commitments to community, solidarity, and justice reign. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders, and solidarity for the weak and vulnerable hallmark Swedish socio-political traditions. Within this social context, the well-being of individuals is taken very seriously. Individual freedoms of expression, creativity, inquiry, and thought are highly prized. Simultaneously, the individual is viewed as a critical member of the collective society, with responsibilities to rectify injustices and promote the greater common good. Individuality, then, is valued and nourished within the context of the collectivity.

12. Known for social liberalism—its dominant political socio-political ideology—Sweden provides an unparalleled example of a nation that successfully converts its core values to action for the benefit of all its citizenry. To achieve these values, a social system predicated on universality and equity has evolved, with services regarded as a fundamental right for all. Unlike other nations where social benefits are construed as ancillary and available only to needy sub-units of the population, widespread service provision is normative, expected, and part and parcel of Swedish life. Not unexpectedly, social services are largely publicly supported and span all domains of life, including health, education, and welfare. Gender equality, the care of immigrants, the young and the old all rank especially high on the Swedish social agenda. Public policies at their very fibre reflect Swedish civic and political values and deeply-held convictions regarding the obligation of society to all its citizenry.

13. Such obligation to the public betterment of human life applies to children with perhaps even more strength than to adults. Children have rights from birth; they are to be seriously respected, attended to by society, and well cared for by their parents. These rights adhere to children not only because they are entitled as Swedes, but because children—the adults of the future—are obligated to carry forward a new and better vision of an egalitarian social order. In this sense, children are the most important social insurance for the perpetuation of Swedish ideals and the enhancement of the Swedish nation. In Sweden, therefore, children warrant special protections because of their potentialities as well as their vulnerabilities.

14. Sweden provides a bevy of services created to support and nurture the developing child. Moreover, the public commitment to supporting parents (via parental leave and workplace policies) cannot be sequestered from the state's pervasive commitment to the importance of childhood. Steadfast, such commitments exist internally and in the role the nation has played globally. Internally, the nation provides unparalleled, thoughtful, well-designed services for children, buttressed by an Ombudsman to assure the advancement of these services. Internally and externally, Sweden has been at the international forefront in supporting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as other global efforts. Externally, Sweden contributes much innovation, scholarship, and exemplary practice to the world. As the material below suggests, when one understands the Swedish sense of socio-political responsibility, it is not surprising that such strong commitments to children have emerged in this nation.

Geography and demography

15. Sweden spreads over a relatively large area, 450,000 square kilometres, making it comparable in size to California, Spain, or Iraq. Of the 8.8 million people in the population, 85% live in the southern part of Sweden. Overall, the country is relatively sparsely populated with 20 inhabitants per square kilometre. Most of the 289 municipalities have a population of less than 10 000 – 20 000 people; one in seven Swedes lives in a rural area. Traditionally, Sweden had a relatively homogenous population, but increasingly the population is becoming more heterogeneous; today, the population is made up of people from more than 170 countries. Approximately one fifth of the total population is of non-Swedish origin, although more than two-thirds of these individuals originate from the other Nordic countries. Sweden has two minority groups of native inhabitants, the Finnish-speaking people who live mainly in the Northeast and the Sami people who live in the north. In general, life expectancy is high, with men living an average of 76.5 years and women living 81.5 years, figures that are surpassed only by Japan. The number of older people has nearly doubled since 1950, and today this age group comprises 17.4% of the total population. Children aged 0–6 years have also increased as a proportion of the total population; currently children constitute 9% of the Swedish population (Swedish Institute, 1999; Eurostat, 1997).

16. Several recent social developments have shaped modern childhood in Sweden. First, most families have only one child (44.5%) or two children (39.4%), so growing up in a small family is common. Far fewer families have three or more children (16.1%). Second, cohabitation is today a normal social phenomenon, due to the extended legal rights for cohabiting couples. 67% of parents with children are married and 15% are cohabiting. Third, while most Swedish children experience growing up with both a father and a mother, one in every five families with children is a single-parent household (18%), mainly headed by a woman (Nordic Council, 1996).

17. Looking at the fertility rate, the movement toward smaller family size is clear, though it is not always linear. In fact, there has been great variation in the rates of child birth over time, due in large part to economic fluctuations. During prosperous eras, Sweden experiences sizeable increases in the number of children born. In 1990, the number of children born per woman was as high as 2.1 compared to only 1.6 in 1982. This aroused great attention, nationally as well as abroad, as Sweden is known for a high labour market participation rate of women. Since the early 1990s, however, fertility rates have declined so that the 1998 rate (1.5 children per woman) is even lower than it was in the early 1980s (SCB, 1984 & 1999b). Most women give birth at a relatively late age, with the mean age of first birth being 27.5 years; 25% of the mothers are over 31 years. Among the Nordic countries, the Swedish fertility rate is now the lowest, although until quite recently, it had been one of the highest in Europe

Economy, living standards, and poverty

18. With a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of 28,283 US dollars in 1996, Sweden is among the small group of countries in the world with a very high living standard. Only Japan, Germany, Luxembourg, and Switzerland have a higher per capita GDP (SCB, 1999b). This standard has evolved from 1970 onward; during this period, employment rates increased by about a 20%.

19. Some of this economic well-being has been attributed to the role that women play in the workforce. Women account for nearly half of the labour force, and as many as 75% in 1997 of women of working age are employed compared to 79.6% in 1997 of men. Many more women work part-time (41.8%) than men (8.9%). Whereas the proportion of women working part-time has not fluctuated a great deal, the number of men who work part-time rises and falls with the state of the economy (European Commission, 1997; Socialstyrelsen, 1996).

20. Most women continue working when they have children. As Table 1 shows, in all, 78% of mothers with children aged 0–6 years are active in the labour market, compared to 92% of fathers. Swedish women, in general, also work many hours when they have small children, although this has decreased slightly. Table 2 shows the distribution of full–time and part–time work among men and women with young children. In 1997, 62% of mothers with children under six worked more than 20 hours a week, down from 73% in 1985. Most of the children in child care (96%) have mothers who work more than 20 hours per week. Nearly all Swedish fathers of children 0–6 years of age who are employed work full–time (94%).

Table 1. Female and male labour force participation by age of youngest child, 1998. *Percent*

	Women	Men
With children 0–6	78	92
With children 7–10	87	93
Total	74	79

Source: Statistics Sweden

Table 2. Proportion men and women working full–time and part–time with children of different ages*, 1998. *Percent*

	Full–time	Part–time	Total
<i>With children 0–6</i>			
Women	54	46	100
Men	94	6	100
<i>With children 7–10</i>			
Women	56	44	100
Men	95	5	100

Source: Statistics Sweden * age of youngest child

21. While the overall Swedish economic pattern has been one of progression, there have been severe fluctuations in the past decade. In the early 1990s, for example, Sweden experienced an economic downturn which had great impact and from which the nation is still recovering. The era was characterised by labour shortages, high inflation rates, and high unemployment. Until the economic crisis set in, labour market participation had been high, and unemployment rates low, for decades. Unemployment rose from an internationally–low rate of 2% in 1991 to 8% in 1993. During the crisis years, the number of employed individuals decreased by nearly 300,000. Large numbers of men became part–time workers.

22. During this period, the Social Democratic government initially chose to maintain high levels of services and high replacement rates in cash benefits. When it became clear that the economic problems would persist, a crisis package was developed and agreed to under a new government. The package included cuts of SEK 10 billion a year and consisted of reductions in cash benefits, such as the parental leave benefit. The municipalities were also hit severely during the crises years, especially since the revenue from local taxes declined as unemployment rates increased. Moreover, the municipalities had to face rising demand for more services as a larger cohort of families needed support. As a result, in 1997, central government grants were increased in order to prevent further service cutbacks.

23. There are many consequences of the recession. From 1990, there has been increasing inequality in economic standards. This has hit young people particularly hard as they have lower disposable incomes. Attributed in part to the fact that young people stay in school longer, it is also explained by the growing difficulties young people face as they enter the labour market. Disposable income for the age group 18–24 years, excluding those still living at home, declined 30.1% in the period from 1989 to 1995, whereas disposable income for the age group 25–34 years declined 9.9%, and 11.8% for the age group 35–44 years (SCB, 1999c).

24. The impact of the recession has not escaped very young children. Because many children live in families where incomes have been reduced, more children are living in poverty. Poverty rates, measured as the part of the population having a disposable income lower than the social assistance level, have risen significantly since 1990. From 1983 until 1990, the percentage of poor people in the population had dropped from 8% to 3%, but it has risen back to 7% today. Poverty rates have increased especially among children in families with precarious job affiliations, those living in one-parent households, those outside the labour market, and those where one member of a couple is working part-time. The increase in poverty is also quite apparent among households where there are many children or young couples with children. Yet, children seem to fare better than the rest of the Swedish population. After tax and transfers, less than 5% of children are living in poverty. It also should be noted, however, that when compared with the rest of Europe, Sweden's poverty rates are low. Central European countries experience poverty rates between 11–13%, with Great Britain having poverty rates as high as 21% and Southern European countries having poverty rates between 18–27% (SCB, 1997).

Gender equality and work life

25. Gender equality in Sweden is not new, with women's right to vote established in Sweden (as in all the Nordic countries) in 1921. In Sweden, gender equality is based on the principle that each individual should be able to achieve economic independence through gainful employment. It is equally important for men and women to be able to combine parenthood and an active work and community life. These commitments are embodied in the Equal Opportunities Act, enacted in 1980. The main purpose of the Act is to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in relation to working life. The statute not only prohibits an employer from discriminating because of gender, but requires the promotion of equality in the workplace. Moreover, political support from the Social Democratic, the centre, and conservative parties has ensured that gender equality is a core element of the political and socio-cultural life of the nation.

26. Today, women are well-represented in political and civic life. Over 40% of the 349 members of the Swedish Parliament are women. Often, the main political work is carried out by one of the parliamentary committees, where 43% of the seats are taken by women. In the municipal councils, roughly an equal share of women (41%) are councillors, with as many as 48% being councillors in the county councils (Swedish Institute, 1997a). In the labour market, 40% of the managerial workers are women, compared to only 19% in Denmark, 25% in Finland, and 31% in Norway (Kjeldstad, forthcoming).

27. In theory, the principle of equal pay for work of equal value should prevail. Yet, wage differentials between the sexes still are apparent, partly because of the number of women who work part-time. Pay differentials varying from 1–8% cannot be explained, however, by any factor other than gender (Swedish Institute, 1997a). Yet, compared to other Nordic countries, the wage gap is small in Sweden. Female earnings in manufacturing are only 79.3% of male earnings in Finland (1995), and 87.1% in Norway compared to 90% in Sweden (Kjeldstad, forthcoming). Incomes later in life are also gendered; female pensioners receive less than male pensioners, often because women have no private pension savings and have received lower wages over their life course. 14% of the female old age pensioners receive only their old-age pension, whereas the same situation is found for only 3% of the male pensioners. On average, women 65 and older receive SEK 89,200 annually compared to the SEK 146,300 that men receive (SCB, 1996, 1999a).

28. Despite pay inequities favouring men, men are more likely to participate in family life today than ever before, though still not at levels equal to women. About 50% of fathers make use of the parental leave scheme, and 10% of the total number of days are taken by fathers. Many fathers also use the temporary leave scheme which can be used when the child is sick. Most of the domestic work is, however, still taken care of by women. Swedish women spend on average 4.75 hours a week on domestic work and men 2.83 hours, a ratio of 1.7, which is similar to the ratios found in Norway and Finland (Kjeldstad, forthcoming).

Governmental policies and practices

29. In Sweden, power is exercised at the national level by the Riksdag (Parliament). But Sweden, like other Nordic countries, has a long tradition of local self-government, based on the principle that human needs are best determined and met locally. As a result, local self-government by municipal and county councils is written into the constitution. Municipalities and counties have the power to levy taxes and to finance the management of their tasks.

30. Within this decentralised structure, Swedish family policies are characterised by their comprehensive and universal nature. These policies are aimed at providing universal services as well as cash benefits to allow for as much family choice as possible (Andersson, 1990). A number of benefits ensure that families are compensated for the extra costs of having children. Child allowances of 640 SEK are paid to all children under 16 regardless of household income. In addition, many families receive a housing allowance, the size of which depends on the number of children in a family, family income and housing costs. These two financial supports for families with children are entirely funded by taxes. If parents are divorced, the municipality ensures that a maintenance (child support) allowance is paid to the custodial parent which must be repaid by the parent liable to pay maintenance. Parents of disabled or handicapped children also receive an allowance to compensate for extra costs.

31. Parental insurance consists of the pregnancy benefit, a parental leave benefit, and the temporary parental allowance. The pregnancy benefit is for mothers with physically demanding work and can be taken up to 50 days before birth. The parental leave benefit entitles parents to 450 days, or approximately 15 months, of leave compensated with a benefit. All parents are entitled to the leave, regardless of whether they are employed or unemployed, and whether they are natural or adoptive parents. The leave can be taken up until the child's eighth birthday or the end of the first year in school. Parents may share the leave or choose to let only the father or mother use it, but 30 days are reserved for the other parent. If these 30 days are not used by the other parent, then, they are lost. Parental leave can be taken at 25%, 50%, 75%, or 100% of time; thus, a leave may cover 900 days if only 50% is taken. A benefit of 80% of previous earnings covers the first 360 days with a maximum monthly benefit of SEK 18,200 in 1998. Public employees receive approximately 90% of their former earnings. The remaining 90 days are covered by a

minimum amount of SEK 60 per day. Mothers use on average 90% of the days for which a parental allowance is payable and on average take 140 days leave. Nearly all men take some leave (78%) and one in ten parents takes all 450 days (Swedish Institute, 1996).

32. Parents of children under age 12 are also entitled to 120 days temporary parental allowance in the event that their child is ill or 60 days during the illness of the person who normally takes care of the child. Temporary leave also includes the 10 days of paternity leave, to which the father is entitled following birth. A benefit of 80% of previous earnings is payable during the leave. In 1996, 685,000 parents received temporary leave benefit of which women took 69% of total days spent. 70,000 fathers received the benefit during the 10 “pappa-days.” On average 7.1 days were spent per child. (Socialdepartementet, 1997).

33. In another domain, health, every Swedish resident has a right to use the free or subsidized health care. The local county council levies taxes to fund local hospitals and health care centres. When consulting a doctor, a small fee of SEK 100–300 must be paid, with an annual ceiling of SEK 900. Hospital treatment is charged at SEK 80 a day. A majority of prescribed drugs are partly reimbursed if costs exceed SEK 400; they are fully reimbursed by the health insurance office when costs exceed SEK 1800 within a twelve month period. Dental care insurance covers all residents aged 20 years and older. Patients pay the first SEK 700 in a course of treatment and receive a reimbursement for the remaining costs up to a specified level. Reimbursement for more expensive prostheses is higher. For certain groups of elderly, sick and disabled patients, dental care is practically free of charge. All residents are covered by the national insurance regulations in cash benefits during illness. A sickness benefit is paid after a qualifying day, for low- and middle-income groups of up to 80% of previous income. Pregnant mothers receive free pre-natal care and all pre-school children are offered regular check-ups in child health clinics (Ministry of Education and Science, 1999; Swedish Institute, 1997b).

34. Health and parental insurance are financed by an employer social insurance contribution of 2.9% on incomes. In addition, employees and self-employed workers contribute a 5.95% tax on wages to finance health insurance (Swedish Institute, 1997b).

CHAPTER 3: OVERVIEW OF ECEC IN SWEDEN

Current provision

35. Given these extensive social, family, and health benefits, it is understandable that Sweden has had a very long and rich history of provision of child-care services to young children. Today, these services are an entitlement of Swedish society, but in the past a more targeted approach prevailed. Opened in 1854, the first infant creches (later termed “day care centres”) were designed to provide inexpensive care to poor children whose mothers worked outside the home. Building upon this service, day care centres and family day cares were intended as social supports to assist poor families; as such, child care was seen as a small piece of a larger array of supports. Another form of early childhood provision, infant schools, began in 1836 and had pedagogical goals in addition to the social motives of the creches. Few in number, they were eventually transformed into creches. Different in orientation and audience, the part-time kindergartens that began about 1890 had a strong pedagogical tradition. Based largely on Frobelian theory (though there were Montessori-based efforts as well), they were regarded as ancillary to the role of the home and family, attracting children primarily from the middle- and upper-classes.

36. These structural and pedagogical differences characterised Sweden’s early child-care services and evolved over the years into a diverse and somewhat uncoordinated set of services. In 1968, a National Commission on Childcare was created to consider how pedagogical, social, and supervisory elements of child care could be integrated. Its report, delivered after four years of deliberation, concluded that services to young children could best be provided if they linked care and education for all children. Called “pre-schools,” irrespective of whether services were provided full, or part-time, these entities were designed to serve children of mixed age groups, both 1–3 and 3–6 years. They were to be built principally on centre-based models that regarded parent engagement, close relationships between children and teachers, and children’s self-esteem and independence as key elements. Taking these factors into consideration, in 1975, a National Pre-school Act gave local authorities the responsibility for expanding public child care. In addition, municipalities were required to provide all six-year-olds with at least 525 hours of free pre-schooling.

37. This national strategy, defined in the early 1970s, has largely been followed since. In particular, the following goals—etched early on—hallmark Swedish pre-school services: (a) providing stimulating and developmental activities for children that combine education and care; (b) close co-operation between parents and service providers; (c) service provision for all children, with an emphasis on children in need of special support, (d) service provision designed to permit parents to combine parenthood and work; (e) public funding complemented by reasonable parental fees; and (f) municipal responsibility for full coverage.

38. Since that time, a sequence of initiatives has helped carry out the mandate to expand services. In 1985, the government required that all children between 1 and 6 years of age have the right to child care so long as their parents worked or studied. The 1990s baby boom coupled with the increasing desire of women to work strained municipal budgets, so that in 1995, departing from past practice, new legislation required municipalities not simply to *satisfy* the need for child care, but to *provide* it, without unreasonable

delay. The result of these legislative efforts can be evidenced in the growing numbers of children in Swedish pre-schools. Between the years 1970 and 1998, the number of children in full-time care increased ten-fold, from 71,000 to 720,000. At the end of 1998, 73% of all children in the 1–5 age group were enrolled in pre-schools or family day care centres. (It should be noted that in Sweden, infants under age one are taken care of by their parents, with only about 200 Swedish children in the age cohort enrolled in non-parental care.)

39. Paralleling this expansion in coverage was an operationalisation of Sweden's long-term philosophic commitment to integrate care and education. In July of 1996, child-care services were transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science, reflecting a desire to promote the policy of lifelong learning from birth, a policy stance, which in most other countries does not embrace very young children. Moreover, the move to the Ministry of Education and Science also emphasised the educational focus of early childhood settings and the goal of building close pedagogical links between child care, pre-schools, and public schools.

40. In 1998, the Schools Act removed the terms "day care centre" and "part-time groups," melding the two into the single category, *pre-school*. *Pre-school activities* cover all services for children from 1 to 5, (including the former day care centres – now named pre-schools – family day care homes, and open pre-schools) and *pre-school class*, that is the voluntary attendance of children who have reached the age of six years in a special class in public schools. *School-age child care* is for children from 6 to 12 and covers leisure-time centres, family day care homes, and open leisure-time activities. These forms of provision are described below and summarised in Table 3.

- *Pre-school (förskola) [previously day care centre (daghem)]*. This service offers full-time care for pre-school aged children whose families work, study, or are judged to be in need of special support. Pre-schools are open throughout the year, with hours adjusted to meet the needs of working parents. As of August, 1998, the pre-schools have their own State-established curriculum. In 1998, 338,000 children participated in pre-schools (about 61% of children, ages 1–5).
- *Family day care homes (familjedaghem)*. This service offers full-time care for pre-school aged children whose families work, study, or are judged to be in need of special support in private homes. Family day care homes are open throughout the year, with children participating for flexible hours, sometimes including weekends, evenings or nights according to parents' needs. While the curriculum of the pre-school does not apply to family day care homes, the National Agency for Education will issue general guidelines for this type of service. In 1998, 82,000 children participated in family day care homes (about 12% of children, ages 1–5 and 6% of 6 year-old children).
- *Open pre-schools (öppen förskola)*. This service offers part-time activities for children who are not enrolled in other services. Typically more informal than other types of care, open pre-schools require children to be accompanied by parents or another caregiver, such as a family child-care provider. As such, the open pre-schools provide an opportunity for parents and caregivers to get together on an informal basis, with the result that some of the open pre-schools are functioning as, and being changed into, family resource centres. The curriculum of the pre-school does not apply to this type of setting, but the National Agency for Education will issue general guidelines for the open pre-schools. As children are not enrolled at the open pre-schools, there is no national information on how many children attend. In 1998 there were about 1 000 open pre-schools.

- Pre-school class (*förskoleklass*). Since 1998, municipalities have been mandated to provide this service as part of the school system. Although participation for children is voluntary, 91% of all Swedish six year olds attend pre-school class, with another 7% already in compulsory school. The service, which is typically half day, is available for all six year olds, regardless of parents' work status or family need. The curriculum for the pre-school class is the national curriculum for compulsory schools that has been adjusted for this group.
- Leisure-time centres (*fritidshem*). This service offers part-time activities for children from 6 to 12 years of age whose families work, study, or are judged to be in need of special support after school hours and during holidays. Typically, these services take place in school buildings. The national curriculum for compulsory school has been amended to incorporate the leisure-time centre. With regard to enrolment, leisure-time centres have expanded rapidly during the 1990s; in 1998, 300,000 children (56% of children, ages 6–9 and 7% of ages 9–12) participated.²

Table 3: Overview of ECEC provision in Sweden

	Ages served	Coverage	Opening hours	Curriculum	Annual Average Cost per Child	Staffing (see Section III.E.1)
Pre-school	1–5	338 000 children 61% of ages 1 to 5	Full-day/full-year	Yes	74 300 SEK	Pre-school Teachers & Childminders
Pre-school class	6	91% of age 6 7% of age 6 in compulsory school	Part-day (at least 525 hours a year)	Yes	26 600 SEK	Pre-school Teachers & Childminders
Family day care	1–12	82 000 children 12% of ages 1–5 6% of age 6	Full-day/full-year (flexible hours)	No	57 600 SEK	Family Child Mindors
Leisure-time centres	6–12	300 000 children 56% of ages 6–9 7% of ages 10–12	Before and after- School hours, During holidays	Yes	27 800 SEK	Leisure-time Pedagogues & Childminders
Open pre-school	1–5	1 000 open pre- schools	A few hours a day	No	total of 328 173	Pre-school Teachers & Childminders & Social workers

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 1999

Responsibility for ECEC

41. Until the 1980s, the State government exerted considerable control over child care through the issuance of guidelines, including educational qualifications of personnel, ratios, group size, and pedagogical activities. State grants were used to stimulate expansion, and nationally-initiated programmes encouraged the promotion of state-desired directions.

² As a complement to leisure-time centres, about 25% of all municipalities provide open leisure time activities (*öppen fritidsverksamhet*) for children aged 10–12 years. Children are not usually enrolled.

42. Today, however, a new ethos prevails. The School Act is quite clear in devolving major regulatory authority to the municipalities. Its provisions related to pre-schools indicate that municipalities are required to provide and monitor pre-school and leisure-time centre activities without unreasonable delay. Such services should be located close to children's homes, with the wishes and needs of parents taken into account. A special article indicates that staff should have requisite education or experience and be capable of satisfying the children's need for high quality care and education. The size and composition of the groups should be appropriate and the premises should be suited to the purpose. It should be noted, however, that specific national standards regarding adult-child ratios and group size do not exist. These are set by each municipality, and vary considerably from one municipality to another.

43. In addition to these prescriptions, there are new roles for the state and for the municipalities related to the content of education, as well. Not only should activities be appropriate to the needs of the children, but the curriculum should be related to the achievement of particular goals. Thus "goals-led steering" has become the norm. The state now establishes the goals, guidelines, and financial framework for early childhood services, enabling the municipalities to tailor specific programmes to their unique priorities and needs. Specifically, the municipalities are responsible not only for the provision of services, but also for monitoring their quality and allocating resources. The National Agency for Education is responsible for follow-up, evaluation, data collection, development, and supervision at central and regional levels. Their monitoring role has become critically important for ECEC, especially in the rural areas, because the heads of schools, who frequently are not familiar with early childhood, are often given the responsibility of supervising pre-schools and family child care at local level.

44. In addition, municipalities have the authority to out-source pre-school services. Increasingly, this has become an important component of the Swedish pre-school, although it appears to have topped out recently, with the numbers of non-municipal services in slight decline. In 1998, 44,000 (about 13%) of all children enrolled in pre-schools were in settings not run by a municipality. The most common of these settings are parental co-operatives that have a long history of providing child care. While organised and run by groups of parents, the co-operatives are subsidised by the municipalities (and are incorporated into the enrolment rates reported above). Other non-municipal services include another type of co-operative—the personnel co-operatives; non-municipal services are also organised by churches, corporations, and other organisations. While non-municipally organised services must meet the standards of public child care, following the same basic principles and values found in the national curriculum, they are not required to adhere to it as strictly as are the municipal centres.

Funding, financing, and parental fees

45. Swedish investments in child care have been robust, ranging from 1.68% of GDP in 1980 to 2.13% of GDP in 1993 (OECD, 1997). The total gross expenditure for the pre-school system was SEK 38.5 million in 1997 or 2.3% of GDP. 67% of these funds were expended on pre-school centres, 15% on family day care and 18% on leisure time centres.

46. These funds are generated from general state revenue grants and are distributed from the state in block grants to the municipalities. A special income levelling system takes account of differences in local tax bases by redistributing the tax revenue more evenly among municipalities. Funds from the municipality, based on local tax revenues with tax rates established by the municipality, are added to the state funds. The municipality, then, makes decisions regarding how the total funds should be expended. Currently, then, municipalities face the difficult dilemma of having to serve more children amidst competing priorities for other necessary human services.

47. This process stands in marked contrast to the funding mechanism used previously. In the past, that is, prior to 1990, grants from the state were clearly earmarked for child care, so that the cost of Swedish pre-school was borne by the government; the state paid 45% of the costs, the municipality paid 45%, and parent fees constituted the remaining 10%. Now, these funds are used to support an array of services, including child care, leisure-time care, and family day care. Then, however, there was no day care guarantee, that is there was no obligation placed on the municipality to serve pre-school aged children from 1 to 12 years of age. Moreover, there was no economic crisis that placed a ban on municipalities increasing taxes, and there was no reduction in municipal revenues occasioned by the economic recession—a reduction estimated to be about 11% (European Observatory, 1995).

48. The consequences of these changes have been enormous for child care, for parents, and for services. First, from the state perspective, 185,000 more children are receiving pre-school services and services in leisure time centres from limited additional funds. That means that available funds need to be spread more broadly, so that actual per-child costs have been reduced about 20%. Day care programmes, forced to accommodate the reduced funds, typically have increased group size and child staff ratios, with potentially serious effects on quality.

49. Decentralisation and less revenue have fuelled changes for parents, as well. By law, municipalities are entitled to charge for services. The fees charged should be reasonable and should not exceed the real costs. However, there is no definition of what is reasonable; by general agreement, reasonable means that the fees should not discourage parents from using the pre-school system, especially as the emphasis on life-long learning is taking hold in Sweden. Yet, given the economic conditions and municipal short-falls, parental fees have increased considerably. In the 1980s, parent fees constituted 10% of the costs of services; today, they constitute 16.5%, a significant increase. It is important to note that during this period many families have experienced a decline in disposable income, causing the payment of increased child-care fees to be even more burdensome. About 85% of municipalities have tried to accommodate differences in parental capacity to pay by instituting sliding scales. Reflecting a fee-for-service orientation, many municipalities also charge according to the number of hours care is used. Parent fees for children are not only divided into part- and full-time care, but often into more precise time slots, sometimes by hours. Municipal variation in fees is great, with differences of almost 70% between the lowest fees and the highest fees for the same income groups in differing municipalities (European Observatory, 1995). In sum, both increases in the amount of fees individual parents pay and increases in the variation of fees paid are now prevalent.

50. Accompanying these changes have been calls for more parental choice and more efficient services. As a result, increasing numbers of services are being contracted out to various groups. As noted earlier, about 13% of all children enrolled in pre-schools are in settings that are not run by a municipality. This reflects a twin commitment of society; first, parents should have choice in their selection of pre-school and leisure time programmes, and, second, the existence of a variety of programmes can be enriching to all services. Accompanying these commitments is the strongly held belief that such non-municipal services should not lead to the establishment of a two-tiered system of care. To prevent this from developing, municipalities decide by legislation whether to give a licence to a non-municipal pre-school or leisure time centre or not. If a licence is given, the municipality must provide the same grants to non-municipal and municipal programmes. In fixing these subsidies, municipalities may take into account the voluntary contributions of parents as well as the special costs of delivering services to divergent populations (e.g., low-income and immigrant children). In so doing, municipalities may vary the amounts accorded to programmes based, not on the municipal or non-municipal affiliation of service providers but on the need of children who are being catered for. Non-municipal programmes must meet standards of public care; they must also adhere to the themes and values of the national curriculum; and their fees must not deviate substantially from municipal norms. These arrangements have artfully allowed for diversity without compromising quality or allowing for the emergence of a large for-profit sector.

51. The most popular form of non-municipal service are the parent co-operatives. These co-operatives have a long history in Sweden and are organised by groups of parents. Often parents work in the programmes themselves so that parent involvement has become a central component of these efforts. Like other forms of care, parent co-operatives are not equally distributed throughout Sweden, with many more co-operatives found in the Southern parts of Sweden and in the larger cities where waiting lists for many years were quite long. This variation in the distribution of parent co-operatives characterises also other service types. For example, family day care homes are much more popular in the more sparsely populated parts of Sweden. Thus, in 1998, 20% of children between the ages of one and five in rural municipalities were in family day care homes compared with only 6% in urban municipalities. The opposite holds true for pre-school and leisure time centres; 46% of one to five year olds in rural municipalities attend pre-school compared to 69% of children in large cities.

52. Not only are many services unevenly distributed throughout Sweden, but consistencies that once characterised the pre-school system are disappearing as municipalities create the array of programmes and services that work best for them. As a result of devolution, services in municipalities vary in costs (both base costs and costs to parents), in mix of services, in ratios, group size, and in other quality variables. For example, given that demand and occupancy costs are considerably higher in urban areas, child-care costs are also higher there. In other words, as the system is becoming more decentralised, it is also becoming more differentiated.

Programme content

53. Consistent with the devolution of operational authority to the municipalities, the state curriculum specifies broad pedagogical goals and guidelines; in turn, municipalities have responsibility for their implementation. The curriculum does not specify the means by which goals should be achieved, rather it articulates goals and standards in the following areas: (a) norms and values; (b) development and learning; (c) influence of the child; (d) pre-school and home; and (e) co-operation between pre-schools and the pre-school class, the school, and the leisure-time centre. Part of a curricular trilogy (one for centre-based pre-schools; a second for compulsory school [grades 1-9] including pre-school class for 6-year olds and leisure-time centres; and one for upper secondary school [grades 10-12]), the pre-school curriculum (LPFO 1998) provides a clear method of conceptually linking pre-schools with the pre-school class. The National Agency for Education is working on guidelines for family day care homes, open pre-schools, and open-leisure activities based on the same values. It is important to note the pedagogical inclusion of the leisure-time centres; this indicates the value accorded them and their integral role in Swedish education.

54. Philosophically, the pre-school curriculum builds on the idea of the child as a competent learner, active thinker, and involved doer. The child has great inner resources and is capable of both formulating his/her own theories about the world and using diverse situations and opportunities to foster learning. Swedish theories about child learning can be briefly summarised by the following values:

- Continuous learning and development. Children learn continually in all places over time. Children use all their senses so specific times for “learning” can not be specified.
- Play and theme oriented ways of working. Play is the basis of pre-school activity in that it fosters thinking, imagination, creativity, language, and co-operation. Theme-oriented learning fosters children’s opportunities to understand contexts and relationships, and heightens their ability to develop their own learning theories.
- Linking to the child’s own experiences. Children must be able to relate what they are learning to what they already know.

- The pedagogical importance of care. Care provides the experience and knowledge young children need to get to know themselves and the surrounding world.
- Development in groups. Children need other children from whom to learn; other children can not be replaced by adults or toys.

Other key information

Staffing

55. By and large, Swedish ECEC personnel are well trained. Specifically, there are four types of pre-school personnel in Sweden:

- Pre-school teachers (*förskollärare*). These workers complete a three-year university level educational programme that combines field and theoretical work. Courses focus on child development, family sociology, and teaching methods. Such training is free of charge to the students. In addition, students are entitled to low-cost government loans to cover living expenses while they are in school. Upon graduation, pre-school teachers may be employed in pre-schools, open pre-schools, or pre-school classes.
- Childminders (*barnskötare*). These workers receive their education in Swedish secondary schools. Three years in length, this programme provides students with basic skills in child minding and developmental psychology. This programme is a regular part of secondary school so there is no fee for students. Upon completion, students will be employed in pre-schools or, if they become mothers themselves, they may choose to work in their own homes as family childminders.
- Family day care providers (*dagbarnvårdare*). These workers are not required by the State to obtain any training, though it is recommended that they complete the child minder training course. Most municipalities, however, have instituted special training of about 50–100 hours as an introduction to the family day care occupation.
- Leisure-time pedagogues (*fritidspedagog*). These workers have education and training comparable to the pre-school teachers and often work closely both with them and compulsory school teachers as part of an early childhood team. The two groups take courses together at universities.

56. In 1998, 96,000 persons (84,000 full-time equivalents) were hired to work with children in Swedish pre-schools and leisure time centres. Of these, 5% were men, and 60% of the total had completed a university-level education. In addition, 35% were childminders while only 2% had no training to work with children (see Table 4). An additional 14,500 people were family childminders working in their own homes. Most (72%) of family day care providers were trained to work with children, an increase from 41% in 1990.

Table 4. Education and training of full-time employees in different Swedish ECEC- and school-age child-care settings, 1998. *Percent*

	Pre-school	Leisure time centre
Pre-school Teacher/Teacher	54	26
Leisure-time Pedagogue	1	44
Child minder	42	21
Other	1	1
No training to work with children	2	3
Total	100	100

Source: Ministry of Education and Science, 1999

57. While criteria are specified for each of the distinct categories of early childhood pedagogues described above, working across categories in teams has long been advocated by Swedish authorities. In most teams, the skills and knowledge of the pre-school teacher are needed, so teachers are coupled with childminders or other categories of early childhood pedagogues.

Family engagement and support

58. Long a commitment of Swedish early education, the engagement of families is also critical to current pre-school education. Such commitment to families is manifest in several ways. First, the long-standing Swedish commitment to reconcile child-rearing and work responsibilities permeates a host of policies and practices. Families are given extended maternal and paternal leave before birth and have the option of not returning to work for fifteen months after the birth of children; health benefits are robust. Second, during this period and after, families have the option of linking with family resource centres—such as the Family House the team visited—after childbirth. In these settings, families are supported in their parenting roles. Third, family interests and concerns are considered throughout the programmes of the pre-schools and pre-school classes. Families are strongly encouraged to work in close co-operation with the pre-school staff. They are to be engaged in a variety of efforts including budget and policy decisions and centre activities (e.g., accompanying children on field trips, and making toys and materials for the centre). Parents are scheduled for semi-annual conferences with teachers regarding their children. Finally, when children begin pre-school, there is a two-week adjustment period when parents spend time with their children in the centres. The adjustment period not only eases the transition for the child, but helps set the relationship between the parent and the centre.

59. Not all parents can be involved in the same way. Parents who are working are often stressed and have limited time for parent engagement, making family engagement of all sorts a challenge for most pre-school staff. Yet, programme staff continuously strive to engage parents in ways appropriate to their needs and availability. Open pre-schools provide a wonderful example of this; in these programmes, parents have great flexibility for their own and their children's engagement. Reggio Emilia-inspired programmes that the team observed provided splendid examples of parents being engaged in community advocacy, as well as in the fabric of the programme itself. For some parents, parent co-operatives are ideal. Here, parental participation is a prerequisite for enrolment. Parents often spend as much as one or two weeks per year in the centres, actively engaged in a range of activities.

Special populations

60. Though perceived as a rather well-off, homogeneous population, Sweden has numerous special populations that receive considerable attention. Groups of children included are those who need special supports due to reasons of physical, psychological, social, and emotional challenges. In these cases, municipalities have the responsibility to provide services regardless of parents' employment status. Children in need of special support are entitled to a daily three-hour session in pre-school free of charge, throughout their entire childhood. In most cases, they are integrated into the daily life of pre-school settings. Sometimes the children are given extra support by the municipality in the form of additional personnel. In 90% of municipalities, funds are earmarked for this population.

61. Immigrant children are often under-represented in Swedish pre-schools because their parents are not employed. As a result, some municipalities in areas with large immigrant populations have arranged special half-day language training services. The government has also decided to make available special funds for such services over a three year period.

62. Provisions are also made for children in hospitals. Authorities are responsible for providing play therapy and providing assistance in preparing children for medical and social services. Children must be provided with developmentally stimulating activities.

63. Finally, children of unemployed parents constitute a special group in Sweden. Since much of the national policy is concentrated around children of employed parents, children of the unemployed often do not receive services. With a changing economy, this represents a sizeable portion of youngsters. In 1997, for example, 59,000 children between 1-6 years had unemployed mothers, and 40,000 had unemployed fathers. In roughly 40% of Swedish municipalities, children can lose their pre-school place if their parent loses his or her job. Children may also lose their pre-school place when parents take family leave after the birth of subsequent children. This situation is clearly recognised and is troubling to Swedish authorities. Significant efforts, discussed below, are underway to alter it.

CHAPTER 4: OBSERVATIONS ARISING FROM THE VISIT

64. As a part of the visit, the review team had the opportunity to see various parts of the country and to observe a variety of early childhood settings. As it was the beginning of the summer holiday, in some cases there were not large numbers of children attending the programmes we visited. Yet, the visit was significantly rich and varied to evoke a set of clear impressions and observations.

Social construction of the child

Democracy forms the foundation of the pre-school. For this reason, all pre-school activity should be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Each and everyone working in the pre-school should promote respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as respect for our shared environment.

An important task of the pre-school is to establish and help children acquire the values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the pre-school shall actively promote in its work with children.

Ministry of Education and Science, 1998

65. So begins the Curriculum for Pre-school, prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science in August of 1998. The document, more a guide or a philosophy than a curriculum per se, clearly enunciates the vision Swedish society not only holds for its child-serving institutions, but for children themselves. Inherent in this opening paragraph is a clear vision of the nation's construction of childhood and of children.

66. Children are perceived as total beings, with rights and responsibilities attendant to their age. The curriculum notes that "the social development of the child presupposes that, in relation to their capacity, they(the children) are able to take responsibility for their own actions and for the environment in the pre-school (page 16)." As young citizens, they are expected to become part of the social community of the pre-school, receiving and giving respect and attention to and from others. Routinely, children were observed helping peers and supporting younger children, even when serious play was interrupted by little ones.

67. Children are helped to realise societal values by being accorded considerable autonomy in their daily experience. Children are encouraged to solve their problems. Routinely, children were observed contemplating and debating how to share materials and toys most effectively and fairly. Youngsters are also encouraged to form their own opinions through discussions with peers and adults, by autonomous and semi-autonomous play in open settings, by time spent with creative and expressive materials indoors and outside, and by reflecting on and sharing their thoughts on the issues that life poses (page 7). At once, children are socialised to be tolerant of others' perspectives and ideas while venerating and preserving Swedish values and traditions.

68. Children are also citizens of the nation, obligated not only to carry out the social traditions, but to improve them. Children—the adults of the future—are regarded as repositories of tomorrow and as agents of social betterment. Their role is to learn and grow for themselves as individuals and as members of the society that they will create. Investing in children is analogous to investing in society.

69. Coupled with this vision of the child as social participant and change agent is the inherent belief in both the goodness of the child and in the natural evolution of childhood. Like the ideas of the German pedagogue Froebel, upon whose work much of the Swedish pre-school system is based, children are viewed as innocents, basically good though ultimately susceptible to the evils that lurk in society. As a creature of nature, the child develops in a series of natural and somewhat predictable stages. This perspective suggests that the role of adults is to nurture children's natural development, to prune out the weeds from the children's garden, but not to direct or quash the natural trajectory of the flowers' growth. The child in this perspective is regarded as both inherently capable of orchestrating his/her experience and as needing the opportunity to gain practice in becoming a change agent for society.

70. Augmenting this classic tradition—so ably advanced by Rousseau, Piaget, and Froebel—a new vision that acknowledged the mutability of development emerged. Relying on empirical data that evidenced the variation in children and their development, new theories suggested that stages of development are influenced by the social contexts in which children live their lives. Theories of stage development began to be tempered by heightened understandings of the differential and penetrating influences of socio-cultural contexts. That is, the good, natural child is profoundly and individually affected by his or her environments (e.g., the home and the pre-school). In short, the impact of context on development has been incorporated into the Swedish view of the child.

71. Within these traditions, it is easy to understand why Sweden places so much emphasis on the early years of development. Without manifesting a significant social investment in children, the commitment to fostering an improved, just society where all are equal would contradict the very ideals upon which the nation's social values and policies—its *raison d'être*—are predicated. To the contrary, the pre-school and other programmes for young children are regarded as cornerstones of the Swedish social system. And, unlike other nations that divide groups of young children among ministries according to their age or other eligibility criteria, Sweden presents a unified approach, now under the auspices of a single ministry, for all pre-school aged children, from birth to school entry, as well as for school aged children and young people to the end of the schooling period at 19 years of age.

72. The implications of these conditions are significant and need to be elaborated in three areas. First, a simplistic view might imply that such commitment to the child as the individual embodiment and the pre-school as the institutional embodiment of social liberalism is free from tension. Little could be further from reality. The dualism that characterises the simultaneous commitment to individuality and collectivity resonates through every debate on policy and on the nature of pedagogy. How much freedom should be accorded individual municipalities and how much should be reserved for the collective, the state? How much freedom should be accorded individual children? Where do the rights of the single child end and the collective begin? To what extent should the curriculum be individually or peer driven? How much attention must be given to the care, affections, and rhythms of individual children versus those of the group? How do teachers and curriculum resolve this dialectic that is manifest in the particulars of pedagogy?

73. In Sweden, teachers carefully consider how these issues should be handled. They pay close attention to the individual in the context of the group—the ever-present tug between a commitment to the individual and the collective (Hultqvist, 1998). For example, considerable attention is accorded the process of inducting little children into pre-school, often their first departure from the individuality and privacy of the home to the collectivity of the out-of-home setting. Teachers realise that this is the time

when children's individuality must accommodate to a collective. As a result, much effort, on the part of teachers and parents, is associated with the induction process. In some of the programmes that the team visited, parents had made dolls—exquisitely crafted replicas of children—to accompany their children to pre-school. Metaphorically, the dolls are used to express and convey the individuality of each child to the group. Parents with whom we spoke talked about the dolls and their efforts in making them, always stressing the dolls as an expression of their love for their children and their recognition of the importance of this transition. Embodying the individual-collective dialectic so prevalent in Sweden, this sensitive time for parents and children is well-understood and respected by the Swedes.

74. A second recurrent theme emanating from the social construction of the child is the degree to which childhood is regarded as a special time to be cherished in and of itself versus the degree to which childhood should be regarded as preparation for the future. Like the question of the individual-collective duality, this issue is played out in policy and practice. On the one hand, the early years are regarded as a special time, a time when children's curiosity, their motivation, and their childhood in general are to be fostered. For example, teachers debate the degree to which classrooms should reflect or deflect reality. What is the perspective on violence and violent play? This interest in protecting children and childhood as a special and unique time is also observed in the degree to which a pre-occupation with readiness, so prevalent in other nations, seems held to a modicum. What children do each day is in service of their childhood, as well as in preparation for their future. More than in other nations, this ethos is reflected in the comparative absence of the need to account for children's accomplishments. Assessing children's "readiness" (for school and for life), so common in other cultures, is absent from the explicit Swedish agenda. The curriculum explicitly states that in the pre-school the outcome of the individual child will not be formally assessed in terms of grades and evaluation. That is not to say that there aren't goals for the pre-school years and that these goals are not assessed informally to improve instruction. But obsession with accounting and reporting them is absent. In part, this lack of a need for accountability relates to the fact that the existence of pre-school services does not need to be justified and re-justified in Sweden. Services for young children are part of the social contract of the welfare state.

75. On the other hand, the child's future also is recognised and valued. Indeed, there is a concern that what happens in pre-school will be continuous with the values, norms, and events of school. The curriculum, which is approved by the parliament, is codified and is part of an educational sequence that embodies the national commitment to lifelong learning. In this very real sense, pre-school is seen as the first step on a ladder of perpetual inquiry. This vision is reinforced by the fact that in Sweden, unlike many other nations, services for young children are lodged in the Ministry of Education and Science alongside other universal educational services. The tension, then, between pre-school education as a pedagogical experience for the day versus pre-school as the preparation for the future seems to find expression in a duality of strategies. On an individual child basis, the pedagogy of the pre-school respects the "todayness" of childhood. On an institutional level, it fully recognises that the early years of care are a first step in the trajectory of life-long learning.

76. Finally, the third theme that is essential to understanding current Swedish pre-school services is the degree to which such services are holding on to the past versus the degree to which they are embracing the post-modern world. The discourse of the past focused on centralisation of authority and more constrained governance by rules. This has been substituted by a discourse around decentralisation and governing by goals. Not an insignificant shift, this change imposes new discourse, a set of new classifications of what was, and a reorganisation of the practice of early childhood pedagogy. In the past, early childhood education was regarded as a common good, a service to be rationally planned from above. The system was characterised by standardisation and normalisation.

77. Today, with the system in great transition, the decentralised approach further fosters freedom of choice and complexity of options. Professor Gunilla Dahlberg has noted that the market and free enterprise are metaphors for the current system. And indeed, a clear characteristic of the Swedish system is the existence of multiple options. Different types of care exist: pre-school, open pre-school, family day care homes, leisure centres. Although certain options are decreasing, multiple programmes are on offer within these types to meet the specialised needs of parents, e.g. evening or night pre-schools to care for the children of night workers. Examples of such efforts were visited, leaving a clear impression of the importance and difficulty of both launching and sustaining these initiatives. Another type of effort serves the needs of children who have physical disabilities. Immigrant children who come from other lands and need to be acculturated into Swedish society are being served as well. Our visit to the Rinkeby district of Stockholm clearly indicated the innovative efforts being made for populations of new immigrant families (see Box 1).

Box 1: Rinkeby—an approach to multiculturalism

Rinkeby is a municipal district of Stockholm with 14,000 residents; 73% are of immigrant background. As in other residential areas of Stockholm, there are many pre-schools and schools in Rinkeby; most children over three have had some form of pre-school experience. More unique is that of the 1,400 children attending 24 pre-schools in the district, over 50 different languages are spoken. The most widely spoken language is Somalian, followed by Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, and Serbo-Croat. The primary goal of the multicultural project is for children and youth in Rinkeby to be able to thrive in Swedish society as other children. This goal is achieved through the development of children's academic knowledge, language development, social competence, and personal maturity. The same approach is used in pre-school and schools, such that children's development and learning is recognised and followed along a continuum from 1–16 years. The project contains four main components:

Focus on language. The project encourages the preservation of children's first language. Teachers inform parents of the importance of speaking their mother tongue with children at home and encourage written language and oral language to be a part of daily life. To further support children's development of their home language, the district employs home language teachers, with a special training in bilingualism, to consult with different pre-schools. Currently, there are four Somalian-speaking, two Turkish-speaking home language teachers. In addition, in most schools, there are bilingual teachers who speak Turkish and Swedish. Since children who enter school are expected to speak Swedish, pre-school is viewed as an important setting for children to develop their competence in a new language. Among Rinkeby's services for children and families, there are nine pre-school classes for six year olds which focus on Swedish language development. There also is one open pre-school where Somalian mothers learn Swedish, while their children attend pre-school with a focus on language and socialisation.

Partnerships with parents. Parents in Rinkeby may not be familiar with the norms and values of Swedish society. An effort is made to see parents as equals and to determine what they can contribute to the centre. Staff try to help parents feel comfortable and safe, which in turn, will help the child adjust better. When children first begin pre-school, an adjustment period of two weeks to two months is encouraged. Teachers acknowledge and talk about traditional celebrations of children's home country and they also teach children about Swedish traditions. In this way, Rinkeby pre-schools bring cultures together, fostering mutual respect and learning about different traditions.

Links with research. Staff in Rinkeby are in continuous contact with the Rinkeby Research Institute on Multilingual Studies. The Institute arranges joint in-service training courses for teachers in schools and pre-schools. To date, 30 teachers have completed the programme which includes coursework on topics, including migration, assessment, second language acquisition, and how to learn in a second language. To develop new methods for language, researchers at the Institute conduct semi-annual assessments which document how children use their first and second languages. Currently, teachers are working with different methods, such as thematic teaching, story telling, and co-operative learning. The goal of the assessments is to disseminate successful work among programme staff.

Resources for staff. Rinkeby receives more public money per child than other areas of Stockholm. The city and state allocate additional funds to recruit extra staff as home language teachers and for children in need of special support. As a result, the child-staff ratios that the team observed were lower than in other parts of the city, though staff expressed that the group sizes were too large. Rinkeby also faces difficulties recruiting trained teachers because of low salaries and perceptions that the area may not be safe. On average, only 50% of staff are pre-school teachers in Rinkeby, most of the rest being childminders.

78. Swedish pre-schools are not only diverse in their structures and audiences, but in their pedagogical approaches. In contemporary Swedish pre-schools, pedagogical emphases as diverse as Reggio Emilia and Montessori can be found. In addition, the team observed programmes that emphasise an environmental curriculum where children learn to live in and appreciate their environment through recycling and composting projects, raising farm animals, and tending to a vegetable garden. We also visited computer-based programmes where children learn to use technology as a means of gaining skills and advancing their creative expression through art and literature. Massage programmes afford children the opportunity to be in touch with their bodies and with their senses. The massage programme, which the reviewers found new and unique, inculcates a strong sense of respect for self and for others. In observing this programme, we were amazed at the children's naturalness as well as with their genuine concern for the well-being of others. In short, it does appear that Swedish pre-school can be viewed as a market where choices are abundant.

79. These three tensions (individuality versus collectivity, childhood as a time of its own or as prelude to the future, and the focus on the past versus the present) all signal the productive shifts that are taking place in the Swedish system of pre-school. Daily services are not in turmoil nor are they being rendered ineffective by these omnipresent tugs. Rather, they propel Swedes to think hard and long about how they view children, childhood, and the institutions that serve youngsters. That this intellectual dialogue exists and that issues are discussed and debated, is a strength of a system that is not afraid to question, to be analytic and to be self-critical.

Structure, organisation, and coherence of ECEC services

80. The themes discussed above manifest themselves in the structure and organisation of contemporary Swedish ECEC services. In the transition of recent years, the structure and organisation of Swedish early childhood services has been heavily influenced by two major trends. First, the devolution of authority to the municipalities and the related privatisation efforts, and second, the transition of services from the Ministry of Health and Social Services to the Ministry of Education and Science.

81. As noted earlier, devolution of authority for child care and pre-school services hallmarks contemporary service provision in Sweden. Municipal centres derive their funding from the municipalities and in exchange are obligated to meet the state pre-school curriculum. Municipalities decide the appropriate balance between family day care homes and centres, a balance that varies tremendously depending on geographic locales. In addition, devolution has given the municipalities the discretion to privatise services as they deem fit.

82. The trend toward non-profit privatisation is taking hold in certain districts. In 1999, 13 percent of all children enrolled in pre-school and 5 percent of all children enrolled in leisure time centres were attending a non-municipal pre-school or leisure time centre. Enrolment in non-municipal centres has grown, but is heavily concentrated, with a majority of it found in parent co-operatives. As such, parent co-operatives are a good example of contemporary privatisation efforts in Sweden. They operate on a non-profit basis and receive in principle, since 1991, funding from the municipality equivalent to that received by municipal services. Typically, however, the parent co-operatives receive a lower subsidy than the municipal centres in the same area, due to the fact that parents help in the work of the service. The value of this voluntary help is deducted at source from the subsidy, as co-operatives are seen to run their services at a lower cost than the municipality and also have lower parental fees. Parent co-operatives are not bound to meet the state curriculum, but if they do not support the themes of the curriculum, it is unlikely that they will receive ongoing support. The finances of the co-operatives are augmented by

parental commitments of time, services, and commodities, resulting in the co-operatives' ability to sometimes pay higher salaries to employees, salaries that are individually negotiated. Despite these different arrangements, comparatively speaking, there are few apparent differences in the quality of the parent co-operatives when compared with the municipal centres, except perhaps in the area of physical facilities where the co-operatives appear to be rather poorer. The parent co-operatives do not link formally with other pre-schools, although personnel from both kinds of programmes are engaged in some informal networks. The parent co-operatives play a very important role in the Swedish system of child care not only because they provide options to parents, but because they have pointed the way toward greater parent engagement for many municipal pre-schools. Decentralisation and privatisation have increased, first with an intention to reduce waiting-lists and in the case of parent-co-operatives the costs, but in the process more choice has been afforded parents.

83. The second factor that strongly influences the structure of services in Sweden is the transfer of authority to the Ministry of Education and Science. Long debated, the transfer represents new opportunities as well as the re-kindling of some historic challenges. As noted above, the Swedish system of services to young children is well etched in the social psyche and social commitment of the state. The transfer of services, coupled with the goal-driven approach espoused by the Ministry of Education and Science, has conjured some concerns that the quality and intimacy that once characterised Swedish child care will be lost. It is feared that with the effort to make child care more educational, the caring elements will be reduced, if not abandoned.

84. On the other hand, there is a strong possibility that the location of pre-school within the Ministry of Education and Science will lend coherence and stability to the services provided. The state curriculum is a strong manifesto of values and goals for pre-school education that is guiding services throughout children's educational experience. So that, rather than an array of intellectually disparate services, early childhood pedagogy has been codified. Moreover, the fact that the curriculum for pre-school is linked with the curriculum of the compulsory school is important in establishing an educational continuum for children as they mature through the years.

85. Coherence is also advanced by the switch to the Ministry of Education and Science in that there is far greater co-operation between pre-schools and compulsory schools. In part, this may be due to the establishment of the pre-school classes for six-year-olds which are located in the public schools. As teachers of pre-school children, teachers of the pre-school class children, and teachers of the compulsory school children increasingly work together around curricular issues, a new culture of understanding of children's development across the age span is being advanced. Some feel that this linkage will help to alter the pedagogy and approach of the schools, making them more child-centred, something that many feel would be welcome. Simultaneously, many feel that there is an important culture of the schools that should be preserved. Given the pre-school curriculum and the location of pre-school services in the Ministry of Education and Science, it is anticipated that a synergy of cultures will be affected. Schools will have the opportunity to foster a more child-centred perspective, and pre-schools will have the chance to work collaboratively with the schools, assuring more effective transitions for children. Indeed, it was expressed by many during the visit that the overall quality and trajectory of learning will be promoted by this continuum of learning.

86. Exciting developments are occurring to link the pre-schools, the schools and the leisure time centres, as well. Teachers are developing teams across the services, with much attention being paid to children's transitions on a given day, and over time (see Box 2). As the Minister of Education noted, these linkages have been orchestrated for pedagogical reasons, though she and others noted that the linkages were not always easy. As in any well-established institution, practices and traditions that may impede or delay change exist. In this case, there has been a history of compulsory teachers enjoying greater status than pre-school teachers, a perception that is reinforced by considerable salary differentials between the

two groups. With the new approaches to teaming and with new efforts at joint training and professional development, some of these boundaries may be eliminated or reduced. Ultimately, comparable levels of training and compensation are envisioned by the Ministry of Education and Science. This will lead to greater coherence and respect across the different types of services. Indeed, it is anticipated that this strategy will elevate the quality and profile pre-school education throughout Sweden.

Box 2: Integrated services in Maria Gamla-Stan

Maria Gamla-Stan is one of the largest districts in Stockholm (60,000 inhabitants), located in one of the oldest parts of the city. The district has one of the highest densities of children in all of Europe. In order to better serve this young population, Maria Gamla-Stan has formed a Department of Children and Youth, with responsibility for child care, education, as well as youth and preventive services. In the Department, a multi-disciplinary team of staff work together to serve the multiple needs of children and youth together. As one municipal official noted, "We now look at children and youth together as our collective responsibility." By combining funds into one stream, forming 51% of the total budget, the district can more efficiently allocate resources for children than if the money was distributed across various agencies. Only three out of eighteen districts in Stockholm operate following this model.

A holistic approach has also been adopted in the many programmes that the district offers, e.g. Lilla Maria, a municipal school in Maria Gamla-Stan, has integrated pre-school classes, compulsory school, and leisure-time activities for 200 children between the ages of six and nine years old. Initiated by the teachers, Lilla Maria has aimed to take the best features of the three sectors and bring them together into one seamless programme. As a result, the school is open from 7h30 to 18h00 each day. Children easily transition from one hour of leisure-time in the morning, to five hours of school, to leisure-time activities at the end of the day. Parents pay only for the leisure-time hours.

In contrast to most schools, the six-year-olds have the opportunity to interact with older children, while following their own developmentally-appropriate activities. Children are organised into age-mixed groups of 36, with one school teacher, one pre-school teacher, and two leisure-time pedagogues. These groups are broken down into smaller "family groups" of 10 children with one responsible adult. In this way, Lilla Maria encourages staff with different disciplinary backgrounds and training to work together and to establish close relationships with children of different ages. Since all staff work some mornings and some afternoons, they have the opportunity to meet informally with most parents. In addition, they formally monitor children's development, using checklists and work sampling, and organise regular meetings with parents to discuss their documentation of each child's progress.

87. Other strategies are being employed to create continuity and coherence in the array of services in Sweden. The National Agency for Education has the role of supporting teachers across all services, a role that will enable them to foster incentives for linkages. In addition, the Agency has a monitoring role that may help in bringing greater cohesion in achieving the standards for education. The Agency has been helpful in supporting the development of informal networks among providers regardless of the type of service.

88. Another strategy gaining currency is the movement toward adapting the unique approach to early childhood services found in Reggio Emilia. The "Reggio-inspired" strategy is regarded as a unique way of ensuring reflective practice. It has been noted that "Reggio" is a way of protecting child care from becoming too school-oriented as it moves into education. The Reggio-inspired approach is now in some forty-five municipalities; summer institutes have been established, and a Reggio network links the five Nordic countries. Saluted with enthusiasm, Reggio is being studied and credited as promoting the goals of fostering active learning, community responsibility, child to child interactions and discussions, and renewal of the tradition of parent participation in Sweden. One informant noted that, "Reggio is being regarded as the prism through which to re-think early childhood education in Sweden." It provides the means to deepen educational outlooks and methods seriously and creatively, without imposing the school-like orientation so feared. As such, Reggio serves as an important tool for linking early childhood services

without demanding that they conform to a given standard. It is impressive that such a well-established system as Sweden's can look with genuine admiration, curiosity, and even modesty to another system of a smaller scale. It is a compliment to the Swedish education system and to their continual quest for inquiry and improvement.

89. In short, the provision of early childhood services has become programmatically far more diversified than in the past. Curricular strategies are becoming more diverse, as are the options that are afforded parents. This diversification underscores the respect for individuality and for parents' differing needs. Yet, supported by a common curriculum and organisational framework, there is a coherence to the services without over-formalisation and over-bureaucratisation.

Funding and costs

90. As noted earlier, the devolution of funding to municipalities has caused considerable change for families and the Swedish system of pre-school. The system, once considered to be universally available and universally equitable, is being altered. Recent studies from the National Agency of Education show, for example, that parents are likely to pay very different fees, depending on where they live. The difference between the cheapest and the most expensive municipality may be quite substantial. For example, fees for a high-income family with two children in full-time day care could be as much as SEK 50,000 annually. A single parent could pay SEK 17,600 per month for a child in leisure-time centre whereas another single parent living in a cheaper municipality would only have to pay SEK 2200. The share of disposable income spent on day care can vary from 2–20% for the same family. On average, families with children in day care would spend between 7–12% of their disposable income on pre-school services, depending whether they are living in a single parent or coupled family (Socialstyrelsen, 1997).

91. An ideological argument could be made that differential fees are just, in that they establish fees in accordance with ability to pay. In practice, differential fees raise issues of concern. For example, there are single, low-income parents who are often left with less than the level of social assistance after having paid for the child-care costs. The model family study of the National Agency of Education illustrates how parental fees in 90% of municipalities would have this effect for low-income single parents. Equal access to child-care services may thus be limited as some parents cannot afford to pay the fees. In response, some municipalities waive fees for low-income groups. Yet, great differences between municipalities remain, rendering equity of access still questionable.

92. An allied issue relates not only to single parents, but to all families. With a shift toward increasing dependence on parent fees and a reduction in state expenditure, there is a point at which either families will be too financially pressed to use the services, and/or the services will degenerate to a quality that is not desirable. Moreover, the heavy reliance on parent fees suggests a switch from strong egalitarian state support to a fee-for-service system. Though seemingly a small shift, it represents a different ideological position regarding service provision.

93. In recognition of these problems, the Social Democratic Government has committed itself to put forward a parliamentary proposal for the introduction of a flat-rate set fee in September 1999. This unique system would mean that no parent would pay more than SEK 700 per month for pre-school services, with a reduced fee of SEK 500 for the second and SEK 300 for the third child. From an earmarked state grant, municipalities would be reimbursed for any loss of income, which would later be replaced by a general state grant. This reform will substantially lower the fee for 80 percent of the families and will ease difficulties caused by income-related and time-related fees.

94. The government will also propose a free pre-school service for four- and five-year-olds in pre-school classes for three hours a day, thereby addressing issues of equity of service for all children. If the proposals go through, parents would be less likely to refrain from using the pre-schools because of high fees, which would support the educational agenda and the principle of enabling every child to partake in life-long learning from an early age. It would also underscore the move from day care being a support for employed parents to an educational entitlement for young children, as that provided in France and Belgium where free nursery education in the school system is available for all children ages two and a half years and older.

Access and equity

95. For the most part, young children in Sweden enjoy remarkable access to programmes and services. Beginning with parental leave, young children may be in the full-time care of their parents until the age of one. Following that, youngsters have access to a diverse array of options. As noted earlier, data indicate that in 1998, 73% of all five-year olds were in pre-school setting, with 61% being in pre-school or leisure-time centres and 12% being in family day care. At six, nearly 98% of Sweden's children are in pre-school classes or compulsory school. Indeed, access to pre-school services has never been higher than it is today. "Full coverage" in relation to existing legislation has basically been achieved.

96. As robust as these figures are, a problem of quality has arisen. Children ages 1-6 in Sweden are entitled to services if their parents work, are engaged in further studies, or if they are in need of special support services. For youngsters who fall into these categories, the entitlement works well, as according to Ministry of Education figures, 98% of municipalities now provide child-care services within three to four months from the date of demand. However, in some instances, a price has had to be paid. A rapid expansion in services to meet the accessibility mandate took place in the early 90s, during a period of strict budgetary constraints. With the tightened legislation of 1995 that obliged municipalities to provide child care services without unreasonable delay, municipalities were in some cases unable to create the extra places with sufficient (by Swedish standards) additional personnel. Existing staff and buildings were stretched to cover the significant increase in children applying for places, which led to larger groups of children being looked after by fewer staff. According to our informants, this has led to larger groups of children with fewer personnel to look after them, a situation which, in some instances, cannot be said to be compatible with the aims and standards established for ECCE in Sweden. The consequence, as noted earlier, has been somewhat of a quality decline, if quality is assessed by adult-child ratios and the placement of more children in physical spaces suitable for fewer youngsters.

97. Other groups of children currently entitled to services are those children with special needs. From observations, it appears that these youngsters are well-served both in terms of the ratios and in terms of the quality of their experience. Whenever possible, efforts are made to integrate children with special needs into the mainstream. Services for children who were not integrated appeared to be excellent, augmented by support from social service and mental health agencies. Parents of children with special needs seemed genuinely appreciative of the supports they and their children received. In some cases, respite care was offered to parents with severely handicapped children.

98. If this is the situation for children entitled to services, what about those excluded from services? Who are they? Children who are excluded fall into several categories. They may be the children of immigrant parents who are not yet employed or who may not possess the requisite skills to become employed. Increasingly, the importance of providing services to this population is being recognised as critical. This is the case because of the inequities that arise when the children who need services the most (arguably these youngsters) are denied them. Moreover, as the value of early intervention, particularly with regard to the acquisition of a second language, is generally acknowledged, it is difficult to ignore this

population. Some Swedish municipalities recognise the importance of this issue and have begun to offer outstanding services in areas where high concentrations of immigrants reside. Rinkeby, one such example, offers an outstanding array of services to this population and could be used as a model upon which to adapt such services nation-wide.

99. Other children who might be excluded from the entitlement to pre-school are those youngsters whose parents do not work. Such unemployment may be temporary or it may be lasting. A child may not have access to pre-school if one parent has never worked, or if one or both parents has lost a job, or if one parent is temporarily out of the workforce on parental leave to take care of a new child. Whether short or long-term, employment status as a condition of service seems to contradict the ethos and the intents of contemporary Swedish pre-school services. Many Swedes note that these services are not supported simply to meet the needs of working families or of the economy for a stable workforce. Rather, they have social merit, if not moral justification, with regard to inculcating durable societal values. As such, it would seem to the review team that employment status should no longer be privileged as the criterion of access. This has also been fully acknowledged by the government, who will prepare a bill for parliament this spring, which includes the right to unemployed parents to have access to child-care services on the same terms as working or studying parents.

Quality

100. Issues of quality have long received attention in Sweden, a nation that has consistently striven to produce excellent early childhood services. Quality may be defined from diverse perspectives, each of which is addressed below. First, quality may be addressed from the perspective of structural variables, those elements that are most tangible to identify. In this case, issues of group size, and teacher-child ratios should be considered. In Sweden, this is an area of some concern, particularly as the number of children in pre-school groups has increased by about 30%, from an average of 13.8 children in 1990 to 16.6 in 1998. There was also an increase in the number of children per adult (from 4.2 to 5.6 during this period). Additionally, the number of family day care homes with more than six children rose from 35% to 44% between 1991 and 1998. On one hand, these data may be considered as an increase in productivity, if productivity is measured in costs per hour. On the other hand, these changes do not necessarily bode well for children whose development is nurtured by close interactions with peers and adults, a condition that is minimised when the number of children per group increases while the number of adults decreases. In several home-based and centre-based sites visited, the team noted understaffing. The staff with whom we met also identified reduced staff numbers as a challenge in their daily work with children. In part, this may be due to the lack of available staff, but it may also be attributable to reductions in available funds per child.

101. A second perspective on quality is that derived from the perspective of the consumer or family. This view proffers that other variables (e.g., opening hours, access, and choice) are critical quality determinants. In this sense, Sweden fares well. The state is concerned about what its consumers want and monitors this with frequent surveys. Moreover, the state does provide an incredibly diverse array of options from which parents can select the type of service most appropriate to their needs. As noted earlier, there are varied forms or types of pre-school activities offered (e.g., centre-based, family day care homes, open pre-schools), a wide variety of different kind of programmes (e.g. Reggio Emilia and Montessori); and there are many different programmatic emphases (e.g., environmental, computer, outdoor, multi-lingual, and massage). Also, in its diversity, the system is responsive to diverse children and families. Various sectors of the population are well-served. For example, rarely has the team observed such careful handling of children with disabilities, from mild to severe. Moreover, the team had not observed such meticulous concern for immigrant children as was seen in Rinkeby. These are outstanding examples of how the Swedish system accommodates the diverse needs of parents and children.

102. Parents are also heavily engaged in the pre-schools, in diverse ways that also accommodate their needs—another signal of the consumer-friendliness of the Swedish system. In other nations, parent engagement is conceptualised as the amount of time parents are actually present in the pre-school setting. Swedish pedagogues learned long ago that such physical presence may not be the full indication of parental engagement. As such, Sweden takes its communication with parents and families seriously, training for it and assuring that staff have time to address this as an ongoing part of their work. Parents are engaged as children transition into schools and as children progress through them. Fathers are engaged, though not to the extent as mothers, but staff make efforts to include both parents. Parents may develop a social life that is linked to the pre-school setting. While not necessarily typical, pre-school centres can also serve as foci of social action, particularly with regard to improving the conditions of Swedish pre-schools. This was evidenced in the Reggio-inspired schools in particular.

103. A third way to discuss quality is from the pedagogical perspective. Since pedagogy is so important to Swedish pre-schools, there are numerous attempts to enhance children's pedagogical experiences. The role of the state and the National Agency for Education in developing the pre-school curriculum and providing training is notable. The curriculum serves as an elixir of quality. Without it, the emphasis on quality pedagogy that addresses state intentions for the pre-school would be absent. But the quality curriculum alone would not be sufficient. That it is accompanied by a commitment to questioning strategy, intents, and purposes, and to be constantly seeking to improve service is what distinguishes Swedish pedagogy. The importance of this kind of ongoing inquiry to keeping a state-wide pre-school system adaptive and vital is rather unique.

104. Monitoring is another way to assure quality control. Formally, monitoring is the responsibility of the municipality. The degree to which such monitoring is carried out varies considerably from one municipality to another. In some municipalities, school directors became responsible for monitoring pre-schools and family day care homes within a designated school district. Family day care seems to be more prone to infrequent monitoring, though distance between programmes, absence of monitoring staff, and the expense involved in conducting monitoring visits all account for its diminished use.

105. Ultimately, the quality of any system of pre-school education must be gauged against the values that undergird it. What constitutes quality in Sweden, then, may not be exactly the same as what constitutes quality in other Nordic, European, or Western nations. In considering the intentions of the Swedish system—to inculcate a set of values, to encourage a commitment to solidarity and equity, and to foster a balance between independence and interdependence—the Swedish system excels. From what the team saw and heard, most Swedish children and families have options for services, and that each such service is framed by a set of values that promote the curious, spirited, socially-responsible and independent children that Sweden holds in esteem.

Staffing and training

106. In Sweden, the early childhood workforce is a highly trained and specialised profession. Almost 98% of personnel working in pre-school centres are trained to work with children: 60% of staff being university-trained pre-school teachers, while the remaining staff are qualified childminders. Only 5% of personnel are men. In family day-care services, over 70% of day-care mothers have been trained to work with children, having either a children's nurse certificate or a special training provided by the municipality. In general, staff are very well-prepared for their responsibilities, the costs of their pre-service training being fully taken in charge by the state. Municipalities are responsible for providing further in-service training courses. According to our informants, the length and quality of these courses vary quite considerably. There are few shortages of staff, although during the recession, many childminders were

made redundant. As we have seen above, the staff loss at this level led to less favourable staff–child ratios than Sweden had known previously.

107. At the core of Swedish professional development is a commitment to link theoretical and practical aspects of training, and to garner a thorough and practical understanding of child development. While in many countries, university preparation of teachers has lessened emphasis on pedagogical practice and on the acquisition of project skills, training in Sweden has retained and reinforced these elements. Further, in pre–schools themselves, there is a strong expectation that personnel will work in teams and reflect upon their practice together. Staff also have opportunities for less formal professional development through peer networks that are emerging in certain parts of Sweden.

108. Formal staff training includes both pre–service and in–service training. Childminders receive their pre–service preparation as a part of their secondary school experience, in a specifically designed, applied program, called the child recreation programme. In contrast, future pre–school teachers take, in secondary school, a more general social science programme that prepares them for higher education at university level, where after a further three–year course, they obtain their qualification of pre–school teacher. Typically, childminders are young when they are trained and often embark on careers in pre–school early in their lives. Up to fairly recently, they remained in their positions for many years, without considerable incentive to advance their formal education or to gain the necessary credit or experience to become pre–school teachers. At present, however, the pressure on childminders to become qualified as pre–school teachers is growing, as many municipalities, when hiring staff members, give priority to university–trained, pre–school teachers. This policy has resulted in competition for pre–school teacher training places at university, a factor that boosts the current quality of those entering the profession. Childminders are also eligible for this training and are given credits for their years of experience. Often the childminders (who are returning after years in the field) have their first–year classes separate from neophytes entering pre–school training for the first time. After the first year of their (re)training, childminders will often join the new students in the pre–school training programme.

109. In general, training takes the form of “programme–project oriented learning.” This consists of interdisciplinary courses where development, pedagogy, methodology, and psychology are combined with music, movement, drama, language, literature, mathematics, natural science, and social sciences. It is important to note that the courses are integrated, modelling the integrated approach that is expected of Swedish teachers. The training for the pre–school teachers and the leisure–time pedagogues is similar, with the exception that the placements are different. The pre–school teachers are placed in settings with young children, typically having several placements with different aged young children. Leisure time pedagogues are placed with older children for their field work. In both cases, the field work is closely supervised by a college or university faculty member. The practising students and their supervising teachers are brought together in a network so that there is the opportunity for rich discussion and reflection, a quality that characterises both the training and practice of pre–school education in Sweden.

110. While training is characterised by very high quality, there seems to be an insufficient amount of it available. This is partly due to the competition for university places – at least in the best universities – from aspiring young candidates and from childminders seeking higher qualifications, e.g. in the pre–school university college visited by the team only one in three students who applied were accepted into the course. The lack of expansion of pre–service training may also indicate the low status accorded to teachers of young children, even in this society where young children and the pre–school are so highly regarded. The paradox has not gone unnoticed by those concerned about early education in Sweden. Consideration is being given to garnering greater public support for increased investments in the training of early childhood pedagogues. A governmental commission has recently proposed that pre–school teachers and leisure time pedagogues should have an education equivalent to compulsory school teachers in length. It is thought that such a preparation, particularly one that emphasises child development and curriculum, will increase the

respect accorded to both professions and to child care in general. In practice, it would mean prolonged training. The first year would constitute a common core for the mixed group of students, followed in the succeeding years by a specialisation in their chosen areas of pre-school, compulsory school or leisure time pedagogy. A pre-school teacher should (according to this proposal) be qualified also to teach in the first three grades of compulsory school, allowing further bridges to be built between pre-school and primary school. The trend is therefore toward raising pre-service training levels across the profession by providing a common psycho-pedagogical training, with later specialisation to meet the needs of children in different settings.

Research and evaluation

111. A great deal of very high-quality analysis and research on early childhood epistemology and pedagogy is produced in Sweden currently. The question of whether such research is a product or a propeller of a social agenda committed to children is important to consider.

112. In the past thirty years, social research on children has been comparatively low in the intellectual hierarchy of topics to be investigated. What research existed was used essentially to validate the state's commitment to serving young children. Research of the 1960s and 70s was often undertaken to discern the impact of out-of-home care on children's development. As policies proliferated, increasingly research came to focus on the rationale for and nature of quality in diverse settings, including family day care. Moreover, with the majority of children receiving ECEC services, researchers are now interested in focusing on the children who are not receiving out-of-home care prior to enrolling in the pre-school class. In part, some of this interest may be motivated by Sweden's ongoing drive to improve their services.

113. Despite the rich traditions of inquiry and research that characterises early education in Sweden, funding for such efforts is limited. Much of the research on family day care, even today, is self-funded. To the extent that research is publicly funded, it is supported by the government and financed by the Foundation for Social Research. Given the quality of scholarship, the nature of intellectual inquiry, and the current transitions in the early childhood policies in Sweden, more research is encouraged.

CHAPTER 5: ISSUES

114. The Swedish commitment to young children and their families has been noted throughout this report. Yet, converting commitment into policy is never a simple task. In this regard, the review team identified three major areas for further consideration: (a) quality issues, (b) equity/fiscal issues, and (c) research, evaluation and monitoring issues. It should be noted that Swedish authorities also have identified these areas, and, in some cases, have developed strategies to address them.

Quality issues

115. Quality is at the heart of any pre-school programme or system. In Sweden, decentralisation coupled with increased pressures placed on the system sometimes yield quality inconsistencies in practice. This is true in spite of the very fine pedagogy that the team observed. In some locales, for example, there has been considerable pressure placed on staff to provide services to greater numbers of children. This is due to cost reductions in child-care expenditure in the 1990s coupled with the 30% increase in enrolment. Teachers expressed to the team that they feel pressured and have less time to devote to individual children or to planning, conditions that severely compromise quality.

116. To assuage these concerns, and to fortify the already strong system, additional emphasis might be placed on creating a research-based, representative national survey of quality from which national guidelines or recommendations regarding quality would result. For example, recommendations or practice guidelines might address specific ratios, group size, space needs, training, and planning time. Such variables are particularly important to the development of young children and might be helpful to equalise quality inconsistencies.

117. The team regards family child care as a critical part of Sweden's pre-school efforts. While accordion in nature, that is, characterised by constant expansion and contraction in funding and enrolment of children, it covers fully 12% of Swedish children aged 1 to 5 years. It has a long tradition in Sweden and responds to a minority parental preference for a more familial type of child care. As such, it merits to be regarded as a more integral part of the system, although from a governmental or municipal perspective, it may be easier to ensure quality in formal pre-school settings. Whether rightly or wrongly, the review team was given the impression that family child care is considered – by some municipalities at least – as a cheaper back-up or emergency form of care. This appraisal leads to fluctuations in the numbers of children allocated to family day-care homes and renders precarious the salaries of the providers. Supportive evaluation by school principals was also haphazard, depending to some extent on the personal interest of the local principal in child care in general. In such circumstances, day-care mothers can be quite isolated and may not be supported to provide the kind of stable, quality services that are characteristic of Sweden as a whole. Moreover, family day care is likely to contract even further when pre-school without charge is offered to parents for children from 4 years, particularly if provided through centre-based settings. There may however be a window of opportunity for family day care, especially in rural areas, if it can work with pre-schools, both centre-based and open, to ensure the after-school care of young children. For this reason, and in order to maintain choice for parents, it would seem to the review

team that better support and monitoring for family day care is needed and that greater efforts should be made to integrate the day-care mothers in supportive, quality networks, such as those linked to open pre-schools.

118. There is a great need in Sweden, as in other countries, to address the question of continued training, so as to upgrade skills and to maintain quality staff in the service of young children. As noted above, initial training is generally of excellent quality and forges strong links between theory and practice. The challenge at hand, then, is not only to consider training in light of the changing needs of the Swedish population (e.g., increased emphasis on multiculturalism and bilingualism), but also to make it more accessible to personnel in the field. There seems to be some concern that all who would like to avail themselves of these training opportunities are not able to do so. The review team perceived some unevenness in the provision of and access to in-service training opportunities, which seem to depend on the initiative of teachers or the municipal staff responsible for organising such training.

119. Special attention should be accorded to the childminders. Although childminders were and still are considered an essential and valued component of the Swedish pre-school system, they seem to be threatened by two divergent forces. First, the pressures on municipalities to cut costs threaten the number of positions available to them. Second, policies to upgrade training requirements to university-level threaten the use of childminders in their present roles. The visiting team urges careful consideration of the costs and benefits related to a move to having only university-level personnel in pre-schools versus maintaining the current career ladder that includes various points of entry with a mix of professional backgrounds among staff working in the pre-schools.

120. Finally, programme quality is also conditioned upon what happens to children outside the classroom. To that end, and given that an increasing number of Swedish youngsters are coming from immigrant, low-income, language minority, and refugee families, linking with other service providers is critically important. The review team encourages the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Agency for Education to link with the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and municipal departments of social welfare so that the needs of these children can be fully met.

Equity/fiscal issues

121. Decentralisation is an accepted social policy in Sweden. Its obvious strength is that it permits municipalities to make the most important funding decisions regarding services to its citizens. Yet, some municipal decision-making has not always been positive, e.g. the lowering of the number of adults per child in pre-schools and the tendency to cut subsidies to family child care and open pre-schools. No doubt, these measures were taken under the pressure of economic recession or guided by the expressed preference of most parents for centre-based pre-school settings. However, as we have already indicated, low child-staff ratios favour quality and the presence of family child care and open pre-schools may well be more reassuring for certain categories of the population. Used intermittently, these relatively inexpensive services can introduce minority families to the rhythms of municipal pre-school centres. In consequence, the visiting team encourages the ministry and municipalities to re-examine their utility, even if a great majority of parents opt for the regular pre-school. Not only do they make available to parents other options but their continued existence may also prove useful in providing after-school care, if the proposal to provide free half-day services for all children becomes a reality.

122. As noted, two important proposals are currently being considered by the Swedish authorities to redress inequities; one is related to a flat fee and the other is related to the universal provision of pre-school services for four and five-year old children. Each of these proposals is a state commitment to

provide a more equitable provision of services across municipalities and across the population. The visiting team strongly supports both these efforts.

123. With regard to the flat fee, it appears that some parents are not electing to use child care because the costs have become prohibitive for them. This is particularly true in the case of single-parent, low-wage-earner families. In reality, however, these are the children and families who would benefit most from services. For those who can afford services, there is also some injustice, as some families are paying 2% of their disposable income for child care, while others are paying up to 20%. These complex issues test how the state defines equity and the degree to which it is ready to achieve it. The visiting team felt that the introduction of a flat fee would help make pre-school more affordable and therefore would equalise access.

124. A second strategy being considered, also supported by the review team, involves the universal provision of free half-day services for all children. This proposal is particularly attractive for several reasons. Designed to support women's employment in an era of full employment, Swedish policy provisioned for children to have access to services when their parents were employed. Once employment was terminated, irrespective of reason, children were no longer eligible for the service. This means that, in addition to parents who may have lost their jobs due to the recession, large numbers of the never-employed—often children from immigrant populations—along with families on parental leave are left uncovered. For some youngsters, this means the absence of services totally. For other children whose parents may have been employed, this work-related provision means that they experience disruptions in services. To stave off these problems, the proposed system of universal services for all four- and five-year-olds means that children will experience far greater continuity of service and that the inherent inequity of service, because it has been conditioned upon employment, would be eradicated. Not only is this more just, but it comports with the state's commitment to life-long learning in that it moves pre-school services from the social benefit category to a more universal, education orientation. Finally, it is critical that both of these strategies be accompanied by support for the quality provisions discussed above and the research provision discussed below.

Research, evaluation and monitoring issues

125. The review team noted some inconsistencies in the effective and equitable monitoring of services across different provision types. This was especially true in family child care. Perhaps this is due to the adjustment period as the transfer of state authority from one ministry to another takes hold. It may also be that school heads now responsible for monitoring are less familiar with its importance and its strategies. As a result, additional expertise may be required and training for the heads of schools should be considered. The National Agency for Education and its regional authorities need to foster close collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science and have sufficient resources, including staff with early childhood education and care expertise, to carry out these and other new training and support responsibilities.

126. Linked with the need for closer monitoring and support, this seems like an opportune time to expand the existing rich research and evaluation agenda. To be certain, the Swedish authorities do an excellent job of collecting and disseminating available data. To capitalise on this rich tradition, particularly given all the positive changes taking place in the Swedish pre-school system, additional support for these efforts is needed. Data on the continuity between the pre-school class and schools might be particularly relevant now, as might information pertaining to school transformation, the use of space, and the relationship between ratios and quality. Sweden might consider building on the exemplary research capacity it has worked to put in place to date. In addition to increasing funding for the very fine

theoretical research underway, the time is particularly ripe for investigating how research can be applied to policy and practice.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

127. The Swedish system of pre-school education is outstanding: (a) in its fidelity to societal values and in its attendant commitment to and respect for children; (b) in its systemic approach while respecting programmatic integrity and diversity; and (c) in its respect for teachers, parents, and the public. In each of these categories, the word “respect” appears. The team was profoundly impressed by the omnipresent spirit of respect and trust that characterised Swedish early childhood services. There was trust in children and in their abilities, trust in the adults who work with them, trust in decentralised governmental processes, and trust in the state’s commitment to respect the rights of children and to do right by them.

Societal values that support children and families

128. The Swedish pre-school curriculum begins with strong statements that reflect deep societal values—democracy, solidarity, the value of each child, individual freedom and integrity, equality between the genders, and respect for all human life and the environment. The team discovered that these were not merely words, a simple pre-ambule to what follows, but that they reflected the heartbeat of national desires and commitments. One can not fail to be impressed by the depth and dimensions of the welfare state, be it through cash benefits, health care, or comprehensive support for families to mention a few. Pre-school sits as a mainstream, if not centrepiece, social institution within this array of services. And, as such, pre-school services are a manifestation of the state’s profound commitment to its children.

129. Theoretical and pedagogical understandings of childhood permeate practice and policy. A commitment to democratic ideals exists in the way children are inducted into the system; a commitment to solidarity exists in that the system is deeply concerned with the well-being of all youngsters, among them children who are disabled or recent immigrants. There is a full appreciation for who children are and for whom they will become. Children are understood in the context of a family system that respects the dignity of the child and childhood. And while children fit into the family and state context, they are valued as individuals, each possessing unique strengths. In short, Swedish values are enacted daily and imbued early into children’s lives. Pre-school services and the state’s respect for childhood are important instruments that perpetuate Swedish culture and embody Swedish values

Commitment to an organised, flexible system of services

130. In Sweden, there is a strong commitment to developing not only value-driven programmes, but a value-driven *system* of pre-school services. The system is undergirded by a *coherent* vision of what the state wants for its children, by a set of values that frame the curriculum, and by a stable funding base. Given these factors, the system can foster programmatic diversity in a way that does not fragment, but actually fortifies service coherence. This commitment to a system of services is the result of careful planning that has led to the crafting of a set of clear strategies. For example, the pre-school curriculum builds coherence by providing a common guidance for all programmes. Moreover, the consolidation of services in the Ministry of Education and Science accelerates programmatic continuity and systemic coherence. It fosters links between programmes of pre-school and compulsory school, and between these

and leisure time centres. This consolidation accords visibility to young children and creates the opportunity for further systemic development.

131. The review team was impressed by the diversity of pedagogical efforts, the diversity of programmatic initiatives, and the diversity of pre-school structures. More than reflecting a fiscally-prudent market strategy and the desire to meet individual needs, such diversity signals the willingness to constantly seek improvement within a system that is already strong. The intellectual probing coupled with the desire to work with new ideas all signal a system that is dynamic, not static.

132. Another strength of the system is the respect accorded municipalities and in the acknowledgement of their ability to adapt to local needs. Generally, there is a strong belief that the needs of children must be foremost on the municipal agenda. As a result, a silent trust exists that municipalities will act in good faith and produce a system of services that clearly attends to the needs of children. This ability to cut across levels of government and political lines is what makes the system so effective.

Respect for teachers, parents, and the public

133. The team was impressed with the rich services for children, but also with the state's respect for the development of those individuals who touch the lives of children. Although additional resources are needed in this area, we recognise the efforts being made to create a suitable, stable supply of well-trained individuals to work in pre-school. Pre-service training in existence is an exemplary balance of theory and practice. The team appreciated efforts to establish links between child-minder and pre-school teacher training. It is quite positive that a system is being created to enable the accumulation of credits across these categories in ways that respect and build upon adults' differing needs. Finally, conceptualising pre-school teaching as a career, and working to improve salaries indicates a commitment to the field. The team was also impressed by the growing number of provider networks (e.g., male workers, Reggio-inspired, second language learners, and family child care). Their existence is an indication of the respect accorded peer support and of the state's belief in the capacity of individuals to work collaboratively and productively.

134. The team also appreciated the way another group of adults—parents—are respected. Respect for parents hallmarks Swedish policy. From the landmark family leave policies to the comprehensive health coverage, adults, in their roles as parents, are fully respected in Sweden. In part, this is due to the Swedish commitment to the value of the individual and to the rights accorded citizens in the welfare state. It is also due to the special place that children and parenting are accorded on the Swedish agenda. State policies enable parents to bond with their children in the critical early months of life. The understanding that early parenting needs and warrants support of both mothers and fathers is inspiring. The team was impressed with the Family House we visited, with its commitment to family support, in its flexibility, and in its non-stigmatised approach to offering truly integrated services—including health and mental health services—to young parents and their children. The involvement of parents in pre-school education was actively sought, even when such involvement was difficult to achieve because of the work and life schedules of parents. The team also recognised innovative ways of helping children make the transition from home to pre-school, along with diverse options for parent engagement.

135. Finally, there is respect for another group of adults, notably the public. The collection and reporting of data affirms the right of Swedish citizens to know how children and pre-school services are faring in Sweden. In addition to the willingness to improve services, there is an openness about what does and does not work, and about what could be done to improve services. Pre-school education in Sweden, as a valued and respected service, has been made to be a matter of national concern.

136. Our analysis ends with two thoughts, one taken from our recent field experiences and one from an ancient adage. While in Rinkeby, the team was given a poem written by a young immigrant child. The poem spoke of Rinkeby “steaming with life” where each one is somebody’s special friend. Sweden’s early childhood education and care system is like Rinkeby—steaming with life—where in each and every programme, there is someone or something that is special. Second, it is said that the merit of any nation may be judged by how it treats its children—particularly the poor and needy. If that adage is true, then Sweden surely sits at an international pinnacle. Nothing honours Sweden more than the way it honours and respects its young.

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APPENDIX II: INFORMATION ON THE SWEDEN BACKGROUND REPORT

The OECD–project on Early Childhood Education and Care is supervised and organised in Sweden as follows:

Ms. Ingegerd Wärnersson, Minister of Schools and Adult Education
Mr. Staffan Bengtsson, State Secretary, Ministry of Education and Science
Mr. Tomas Eneroth, State Secretary, Ministry of Education and Science (in Mr. Bengtsson's absence).

Steering Committee:

Ms. Eva Edström–Fors, General Director, Ministry of Education and Science
Mr. Mats Björnsson, Head of Co–ordination and planning, National Agency for Education,
Ms. Monica Norrman, General Director, National Board of Health and Welfare,
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Ms. Barbara Martin Korpi, Deputy Director, Ministry of Education and Science.

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9 June to 18 June 1999

Wednesday 9 June

Swedish ECEC – national policy and context

9h00 – 10h00

Ministry of Education and Science – meeting with national co-ordinator and working group. Introductions and information on programme, working material etc.

10h15 – 12h00

Meeting with State Secretary, steering committee and working group. Information and discussions on Swedish ECEC.

13h30 – 15h00

Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. Information and discussions on family policy.

15h30 – 16h30

Ministry of Finance. Cost and financing of ECEC

Thursday June 10

Pre-school and school

Sites at Maria-Gamla Stan

9h15 – 9h45

Introduction from the City district

9h45 – 12h00

Pre-schools (incl. parental co-operative)

13h30 – 17h00

School with integrated pre-school classes and after school centres , open pre school/park play ground

Friday June 11

National supervising strategy and research

9h15 – 10h30

National Agency for Education. Director General, with staff

10h30 – 12h00

Meeting with ECEC researchers

International influences (Reggio Emilia)

14h00 – 17h00

Pre-schools of Hammarby with Reggio Emilia-inspired pedagogy. Introductions and guiding by researchers and members of the Swedish Reggio Emilia-institute

Sunday 13 June

Travel to Tällberg.

Monday June 14

The small rural municipality – Gagnef

9h00 – 9h30

Gagnef and ECEC – introduction by Municipal Head of Children and School with staff.

10h00 – 15h30

Sites at out door pre-schools, family day care homes, open pre-schools, family health centres.

15h30 – 16h30

Conclusion, discussion with municipal staff.

Tuesday June 15

The industrial municipality – Borlänge

9h30 – 11h30

ECEC in Borlänge. Meeting with the Chairman of Executive Board for Children and Education, with staff. ECEC planning, supervising, organisation, in-service training, evaluation etc.

13h00 – 16h00

Sites in pre-school open 24 hour, pre-school with environment protection profile, multicultural pre-school, pre-school with integrated disabled children

Wednesday June 16

Staff education

9h00 – 10h30

The College of Education in Stockholm. Head of University department, teachers and students.

11h00 – 12h00

The Association of Cooperatives

The Minister – policy, priorities, challenges.

14h00 – 15h00

Meeting with Ms. Ingegerd Wärnersson, Minister for Schools and Adult Education

15h00–16h00
Debriefing – review team

Thursday June 17

Multi-cultural ECEC

Rinkeby

9h30 – 14h30
Multicultural pre-schools, pre-school classes, language-schools for parents and children.

The Unions. The business community

15h00 – 16h00

Meeting with the Unions: Swedish Teachers Union (pre-school teachers and leisure time pedagogues), and Swedish Trade Union Confederation (childminders and family childminders)

16h00 – 17h00

Meeting with representative of the business community.

Friday June 18

Theme: Conclusions

9h00 – 10h00

The Children's Ombudsman

10h00 – 11h00

Debriefing

11h00 – 12h30

Conclusions – State Secretary, working group, steering committee, review team.