

United Kingdom (England)¹ (most of the following profile applies to England only)

Population: 60.2 m (United Kingdom). **Fertility rate:** 1.7. **GDP per capita:** USD 28 000. **Children under 6 years:** c. 5 000 000.

Female labour force participation: 69.6% of women (15-64) participate in the labour market, 40.4% of whom are in part-time employment (male part-time is 10.0%) (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005).

Labour force participation rate of women with children: 57% of mothers with children under 6 were employed, accounting for 58% of part-time employment in 2002; in 2003, 49.2% of mothers with children under 3 were employed.

Maternity and parental leave: 26 weeks of maternity leave paid at 90% of earnings for 6 weeks followed by a fixed rate for the remaining period (c. GBP 106/week from April 2005). 26 additional weeks unpaid leave are available plus a further 26 weeks unpaid leave if a mother has worked for an employer for more than 26 weeks. Paid paternity leave of 2 weeks at birth of child was introduced in 2003. The goal of a 12-month paid maternity leave has been set for 2010.

Average duration of parental leave: Missing.

Compulsory school age: School term after 5th birthday.

Social expenditure: 21.8% (2001) of GDP. **Child poverty rate:** 15.4% after taxes and transfers (UNICEF, 2005) (OECD average is 11.2%). Though still one of the highest rates in Europe, this figure represents a significant reduction of 25%, since a government commitment to reduce child poverty was made in 1998/99.

Funding of pre-primary educational services (ISCED Level 0): 0.47% of GDP (0.45% public and 0.02% private). The sum constitutes 8% of educational investment, covering 7% of education enrolments. In 2004, the United Kingdom committed substantial additional investment in this area.

Unit cost per child in pre-primary education: USD 8 452 (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). See note in text.

Funding of services for children under 3: Missing.

Average costs to parents: c. 45%. Costs to parents vary greatly according to service type and income category. According to estimates, costs for low- and medium income parent may be covered to 80%, but parents using private child care services (the majority) often pay full costs.

Legal entitlement to a free service: All children have currently 12.5 hours free early education provision from term after 3rd birthday to statutory school age (5 years), for the academic year (currently 33 weeks annually). This is to be extended to 20 hours by 2010 for 38 weeks. The entitlement will rise to 15 hours in 2007. Some Local Authorities are piloting free entitlement for disadvantaged 2-year-olds. A free out-of-school provision (OSP) place for

all children 3-14 years is also planned by 2010 either in Children's Centres or through Extended Schools programmes.

Major service types: State maintained Nursery Schools currently provide an educational programme for 3- and 4-year-olds for 12.5 hours per week, flexibly delivered (may be in half- or full-day blocks) during the academic year. Some provide full-time places of 6 hours per day. Reception classes, located within primary schools, are usually full time, but generally without an extended day: Many schools are now developing breakfast and out-of-school clubs for these children. Pre-schools/playgroups are occasional, sessional or all-day programmes serving children 2 to years of age; Children's Centre are designated one-stop-centres for parents and children, providing on a single site early education and care, family support, health services, employment advice, etc., all year round and on an extended day basis: "dawn to dusk". All forms of provision are now transforming to become part of a Children's Centre or Extended School. Local Authorities are responsible for quality improvement and ensuring seamless cover of ECEC provision for all who want it. A subsidiarity principle is at work whereby Local Authorities will provide services only if no private, voluntary or community sector provision is available.

Rate of access to regulated services: Children 0-3 years: about 20% of children have access to licensed services; children 3-4 years: 96%; children 4-5 years: full enrolment; data on OSP for children 6-12 years are not available.

Designation and qualifications of key staff: In maintained (funded by the State) nursery and primary education, teachers with 3-year or 4-year university degrees lead the early years programmes for 3- to 5-year-olds. Teachers are supported by qualified (to Level 3 Diploma) nursery assistants. In childcare settings, staff qualifications vary across services. 50% of staff in day nurseries have a Level 3 qualification or above, with 20% having a university or tertiary qualification, but 30% of staff in day nurseries have no qualification. 16% childminders are qualified to Level 3 or above.

Child-staff ratios: Family day care: 6:1 with less than 3 children under 5 years; centre-based care programmes: 3:1 for under 2 years; 4:1 for 2-year-olds; 8:1 for 3- to 7-year-olds; nursery schools and classes: 13:1; reception classes: 30:2 (a teacher and a Level 3 assistant).

Auspices

Most of the following profile applies to England only. The United Kingdom decentralises responsibility for education to its constituent jurisdictions: Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, each of which have independent legislatures and ministries responsible for care and education. In the past decade, different ECEC profiles have emerged in the four jurisdictions.

Responsibility for ECEC policy in England is shared between national and local government. At central level, in an effort better to articulate ECEC policy and to overcome the division between education and care, the government has given responsibility for children's services and education to the Sure Start Unit within the Department for Education and Skills. The Sure Start Unit has the remit to work across government to achieve more integrated services for children and families. It functions as an interdepartmental unit accountable to both the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Work and Pensions. It is responsible for enacting the government programme to deliver the best start for every child by bringing together early education, child care, health, and family support. Sure Start and the Local Authorities work closely on

the delivery of early years and child care provision (the former Early Years Development and Child care Partnerships are now given a more advisory role). Starting from birth, the Sure Start strategy brings together health, early learning and parenting support in a way that is designed to meet the needs of local parents, their children and local communities.

Context

Labour force rates: In 2004, the labour participation rate for women aged 15-64 was 69.6%, increasing from 67.3% in 1990. Of those, 40.4% work part-time, compared to 10% of men (OECD, *Employment Outlook*, 2005). Mothers with a youngest child under 6 years had an employment rate of 57% in 2002 (increasing from 42% in 1990) while mothers with children under 3 had an employment rate of 49.2% (OECD, *Babies and Bosses*, 2005). Mothers of younger children are more likely to work part-time with the shift to full-time employment correlating with children's age. On average, mothers work 29 hours/week. The higher the number of children a mother has the greater likelihood she is not in paid employment. Flexible working arrangements are increasingly available with more than 25% of women having some form of flexible working arrangement.

Parental leave: In 2003, the government extended paid maternity leave from 18 to 26 weeks, augmented by capacity to take a further 26 weeks unpaid leave if the mother had worked for the employer for more than 26 weeks. The statutory maternity payment is 90% of full salary for the first 6 weeks followed by GBP 102.80/week for the remaining 20 weeks (or 90% of earnings if lower). In addition, since 2003, fathers who have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks have been entitled to 2 weeks paid paternity leave to be taken within 56 days of the birth. Since 1999, parents (both mothers and fathers) who have completed at least one year's service with their employer are entitled to up to 13 weeks' parental leave in the child's first 5 years (18 weeks up to age 18 if the child is disabled). Further changes have now been announced for implementation in April 2007: 9 months paid maternity leave (with a proportion able to be taken by the father) and a goal of 12-month paid maternity leave by end of next Parliament (please see the *10-Year Strategy* for more information on this topic).

Access and provision

Since 1998, ECEC provision in the United Kingdom has significantly developed, having begun from a low base relative to other European countries. In general, children 0-3 of working parents are cared for by private child minders, playgroups and day nurseries, constituting the highest proportion of private "child care" in Europe. Until the introduction of the Child Care Tax Credit in 1998 (now Working Tax Credit Child Care Element), children in these services were not eligible for public funding, unless they qualified for special services or were considered to be seriously at risk. From 3-4 years, almost all children enrol in nursery school and join playgroups, moving towards reception class at age 4. Four-year-olds are in either state-funded primary school reception classes (the majority) or in private nursery school provision. Compulsory school begins in England in the term after the 5th birthday has been reached, and most children of this age are in reception or primary classes, operated mostly by Local Authorities. However, the 2004 *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners* heralds significant change including a plan to address the division between education and child care and to merge services into a single integrated offer. By 2010, all 3- and 4-year-old children will receive 20 hours per week of free education (from 15 hours per week at present) for 38 weeks annually (from 33 weeks at present), with

in addition, a longer term goal of 20 hours per week of free, high quality out-of-school care. This extended offer will be more flexible: the aim is to make it possible for parents to use early education services flexibly across the week, including joining it up with care parents pay for – so parents can access a seamless package of care to suit them and their children. This is to be accompanied by a revised quality framework for the early years from birth to 6 years, and an integrated inspection of education and child care. The current provision patterns are as follows:

0-1 year: Most children in their first year of life are cared for by parents or, informally, by relatives. Approximately 20% of the age group are in formal care, predominantly private day nurseries and child minders (2001 figures).

1-3 years: Other than family and informal care (the majority mode of care for 1-year-olds), ECEC for this age group is mostly child care type provision. Few 1-year-olds attend playgroups or sessional care. Approximately 30% of the age group (556k in the 1-2 age cohort, and 570k in the year 2-3) attend child minders or private day nurseries (accounting for 86% of the provision), with a further 30% of 2-year-olds attending a playgroup or other sessional care, two-thirds of which are run by church or voluntary associations, and one-third by private persons or agencies. It is expected that “the (private day nursery) market is likely to consolidate into five or six major chains over the next five years, accounting for a larger percentage of market share” (*Nursery Market News*, 2003, cited in Cohen, Moss, Petrie and Wallace, 2004, *A New Deal for Children? Reforming Education and Care in England, Scotland and Sweden*, Policy Press, England).

3-5 years: Currently, a free early education place (2.5-hours, five days a week, 33 weeks a year) is now guaranteed for 3- and 4-year-olds. 96% of 3-year-olds are enrolled, of whom 54% are enrolled in the private and voluntary sector (DfES, Sure Start Unit, 2005). 98% of 4-year-olds are enrolled in a free nursery education place for at least two-and-a-half hours daily. Local education authorities currently provide 70% of early education places for 4-year-olds, mainly through nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes. The private sector (generally companies or trusts) provides about 20% of school places in independent, fee-charging pre-schools, while community and voluntary (non-profit) agencies provide 9% of places.

5-6 years: Compulsory schooling begins in England at 5 years. All 5-year-olds have a full-day (normally 6.5 hours daily from 9:00-15:30), early education place for the academic year (normally 38 weeks). Again enrolments are divided between the public and private sectors.

Formal, public *out-of-school time provision* (OSP) is developing, much of the new provision being funded by the New Opportunities Fund of the National Lottery. The number of places has increased from 137 000 in 1997 to 490 000 in 2004. The *10-Year Strategy* (2004) sets a target for the year 2010 of an affordable out-of-school child care place, linked to schools, for all children aged 3-14 years. It is envisaged that this place should cater for children between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. every weekday, all year round, and combine care with “enrichment activities”, including art and sport. Data on current access to this type of provision is unavailable.

Children with diverse needs

Since 1998/99, the United Kingdom has invested significantly in services for children most at risk, primarily by targeting the Sure Start programme to disadvantaged areas, on the

basis that this will reach a large proportion of children at-risk. This targeted approach is set within a policy of “progressive universalism” with services available for all, but with greater support for children and families who are most in need. In parallel, there has been a pledge by the present government to eradicate child poverty by 2020, with the current target being to ensure that there are fewer than 1m children in absolute low-income by 2010-11, compared with 3.4m in 1998. Within this objective, the aim is to halve the number of children experiencing a combination of relative low-income and material deprivation, from a 1998-99 baseline. A key element of the strategy for achieving this target is to provide affordable and accessible early years services so that parents from all backgrounds can work and ensure for their children equal educational opportunities to maximise their potential. According to UNICEF (2005), progress is on track to reach the reduction of child poverty goals.

Children with disabilities: The growing awareness of the benefits of mainstreaming children with special education needs led to the Education Act of 1993, which encouraged inclusion in schools, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which provided a revised statutory framework and guidelines for inclusion. The situation on the ground is varied with some boroughs being able to include up to 25% of children with additional learning and social needs, and in contrast, evident lack of progress in other schools and education authorities (Ofsted, *Special needs and disability: towards inclusive schools*, 2004). A growing body of opinion favours both inclusion and the retention of special schools (over a 1 000 in the United Kingdom), especially from secondary level onwards. Teachers observe that schools are generally not equipped to cater appropriately for children with special needs, and parents are often concerned about bullying or they fear that mainstream schools are too large and uncaring for children with special needs. A challenge to inclusiveness in the early childhood sector is that it is largely voluntary or private, and without strong public financing and support, providers are unlikely to accept children with special needs. For this reason, considerable funding to ensure support to children with special educational needs in the private, voluntary and independent sector has also been allocated. At the time of writing, a further report from government is expected.

Children from low-income families: For the United Kingdom, the proportion of children (0-15) living in low-income households in 2002-03, after taxes and transfers and before housing costs, was 21%. About 22% of children under 5 years are being raised by a lone parent (Department for Work and Pensions, 2004). Substantial attention has been given in recent years to reducing child poverty through supporting low-income families. Lone parents, in particular, are encouraged into work through child tax credits, including support for up to 70% of child care costs.

Ethnic and bilingual children: 9% of the British population is composed of ethnic minorities (in some areas such as London and the West Midlands, this proportion rises to above 15%). As research indicates that children from some ethnic minorities are seriously underachieving in education, policies to prevent discrimination and racism have been strengthened.

Quality

Licensing and regulatory regimes: A licensing regime applies to services for children under 8 where care is provided for more than two hours per day. Funded pre-primary education places for 3- to 4-year-olds are subject to the curriculum requirements of the QCA (the governmental Qualifications and Curriculum Authority). Where private or voluntary sector settings provide nursery education, different registration requirements

exist to those of schools offering pre-primary education. Monitoring of licensed and funded services varies also according to service type and their different regulatory frameworks (some child care, some education), although there is a commitment to integrate at some future date inspection processes for all care and education services. Licensed child-minding and day care, including family day care, crèche, day nursery and out-of-school provision, are inspected every two years. Funded pre-primary (nursery) education is inspected at least every 4 years (6 years in schools). The intention is to move from 2005 towards a common inspection frequency of 3 years for all care and education services for under eights, including schools. All inspection will be integrated under Ofsted.

Funding: Expenditure on pre-primary educational institutions as a percentage of GDP for pre-primary education is 0.47% (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). About 95.8% of this expenditure (0.45%) came from public sources and 4.2% from private (household) sources (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). 8% of all expenditure on educational institutions is directed to pre-primary whereas 7% of the children/students are enrolled at this level of education (OECD, *Education at a Glance*, 2005). According to the same source (Table B.1.1), the unit cost in early education services (3-6 years) is USD 8 452 per child – the highest of all the OECD countries. It is difficult to reconcile this figure with other figures provided in the same table, and with calculations of British expenditure provided by other OECD sources.²

According to 2002-03 National Audit Office figures based on DfES, Inland Revenue and other sources, the main contributors to funding ECEC are: families 45%, nursery education 38% (public), Sure Start general grant 10% (public), child care tax credit 5% (public), employers 2%. Based on a total investment of GBP 6.685 billion in 2002-03, government supply-side funding totalled GBP 3.6 billion in the same year; reached GBP 3.8 billion in 2004-05 and is due to rise to GBP 4.4 billion by 2007/08. This compares with an equivalent investment of GBP 1.1 billion in 1996/97. According to DfES sources, the increase in spending aligns with a major re-focus on ECEC services and provision in England, not least to address policy and quality issues. In the period 1998/99 to 2004/05, the government spent an additional GBP 14 billion supporting families and children with further substantial increases committed until 2008. A doubling of investment in early childhood services (excluding tax credits) is foreseen between 2004/05 and 2007/08, that is, an annual increase of 23% in real terms.

Most of the expansion of child care places has been a result of public subsidy both at provider and user levels. Providers receive start-up costs, and families (at low- and middle-income levels) receive tax credits through the Working Tax Credit Child care Element (formerly the Child care Tax Credit). This benefit pays up to 70% of child care costs, up to a limit of GBP 135 per week for 1 child and GBP 200 per week for 2 or more children and is available to parents who work at least 16 hours a week, including lone parents working at least 16 hours. (Note: benefit will increase from April 2006 to a maximum of GBP 300 per week, GBP 175 or one child, 80% of costs). Public subsidies through grants or fees can be paid to profit or non-profit providers, the latter being predominant in provision for children up to compulsory schooling, as the entitlement to a free education place is still only 15 hours per week for 33 weeks in the year. To be eligible for grants, providers must meet certain conditions, in particular, to be registered with and undergo inspection by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education), and to work towards government defined learning goals. Although tax and national insurance contribution exemptions for employer-supported child care have been introduced, few employers provide assistance, financial or otherwise, to child care.

A large part of the public sector subsidy (the Sure Start grant) is channelled to Children's Trusts in Local Authorities, which commission and plan local services. This grant is used to deliver new child care places; to improve the sustainability of existing child care provision; to develop and support Children's Centres and Neighbourhood Nurseries (these now being transformed to Children's Centres); to develop the workforce; and to develop nursery schools. The grant brings together six previously separate funding streams, thereby reducing administration and enabling service planning and delivery to be more coordinated. Further subsidy is also available through the Local Authorities to support families with additional needs and to ensure that all 3- and 4-year-olds in the area get an early education place.

Public provision is provided to families both in the form of free services and indirectly through tax credits and grants that parents may use in any area of the marketplace. Fees in the child care sector are largely set by the market. To improve equity of access, a new proposal has been made to cap charges in service that are in receipt of public funding. Education is free for 5-year-olds, as compulsory education in England begins at this age. For 3- and 4-year-olds, each child has an entitlement to 15 hours weekly for 33 weeks annually. This means that parents of children in this age group must also find "wrap-around" services in the voluntary or private child care and pre-school sectors. Costs to parents vary greatly according to service provider, service type and income category. The average contribution of parents to child care is estimated to be 45% of full costs. Costs for low-income and some middle-income parent may be covered to 80%, but parents using private child care and pre-school services (the majority) often pay full costs.

Training requirements: Levels and types of qualifications differ by service type and setting. The national standards for under eights day care and child-minding require service providers to ensure that persons-in-charge and supervisors in group-based programmes hold appropriate Level 3 (professional diploma) or higher qualifications. At least half the staff in each setting must hold at least Level 2 qualifications (capacity to work under supervision on the care/development of children). Child minders are required to complete a Local Authority approved pre-registration course within 6 months of service commencement. Where service providers do not meet the requirements of the qualification standards, an action plan must be lodged with the Ofsted child care inspector detailing how the standard will be met over time and setting out the training to be undertaken to update skills. Several strategies are employed to raise recruitment and qualification levels in all forms of provision: increased funding, the capping of certain charge on providers and the relaxation of stringent child-staff ratios against higher qualification levels.

Staffing: The 2002/2003 Childcare and Early Years Workforce Survey indicated that since 2001, the workforce has become more qualified. In state-funded nursery schools and reception classes, regulations require that the children be in the care of a qualified teacher (university degree), but this requirement is not always met. Support to children in the classroom is provided by nursery assistants with a Level 3 diploma, that is, a professional diploma showing competence to work with young children without supervision. In child care settings, staff qualifications vary across services. 50% of staff in day nurseries have a Level 3 qualification or above, with 20% having a university or tertiary qualification, but 30% of staff in day nurseries have no qualification. 16% child minders are qualified to Level 3 or above. 80% of playgroup and day nursery managers are qualified at Level 3 or over. Across all settings, the workforce is 98% female. Full-time or part-time appointments vary

widely according to service type. The ratio of full-time to part-time workers in each service is as follows: primary school-site nursery/reception classes 66:33; primary school-site (reception class only) 50:50; nursery schools 63:27; full-day care 80:20; playgroup 10:90; holiday clubs 65:45; out-of-school clubs 23:77.

Work conditions: Statutory working hours, minimum levels of staff development and set requirements for annual staff development (in-service training) are not part of national reporting and may vary across the country. Wide ranging recruitment campaigns are in place. DfES recognises the importance of a clear progression structure for child care workers and this is being addressed in the pay and workforce strategy for children's services. The strategy will "review rewards, incentives and relativities across children's practice". It will contain action to make working with children a more attractive career option. Some of the issues covered in the strategy will be the development of flexible career and training pathways, the development of a Common core of skills and knowledge and the establishment of a Children, Young People and Families Workforce Council which will represent the interests of the sector. The Common Core will provide a foundation level of core skills and knowledge necessary for staff when working with children, young people and families; in different jobs in different services. It enables a shared understanding of key issues and the ability to move across professional boundaries. The Common Core also will provide the basic structure to steer the next more technical phase of revising national occupational standards, of creating a climbing frame of qualifications, and in particular, to guide the creation of a core early years professional profile in all settings.

Child-staff ratios: In regulated child-minding (family day care), maximum group size is 6 (or 12 children if the child minder has an assistant) of whom no more than 3 (with some exceptions allowed) may be under 5 years old. In crèches, centre-based ECEC, accredited playgroups and accredited out-of-school provision, the maximum group size is 26, with ratios of 3:1 for children under 2, 4:1 for children aged 2 and 8:1 for children 3-7 years old. In kindergartens or pre-schools, the maximum group size is 26 with ratios of 10:1 if the head-teacher combines teaching with administrative tasks, or 13:1 if the head teacher is not engaged in teaching. In public pre-primary education (reception classes), there is no set maximum group size, although this does not usually exceed 26 children per adult. For children 3-4 years, the ratio is 13:1. The possibility of linking ratios with staff qualifications is being studied.

Curriculum and pedagogy: Significant developments to improve quality in early childhood settings have been introduced since 2000. In 2001, National Standards for under age 8-day care and child-minding services were introduced, setting a national benchmark of quality below which no provider may fall. In late 2002 a curricular guideline *Birth to three matters: A framework to support children in their earliest years* was introduced offering information, guidance and support to those working with this age group. A Foundation Stage curriculum (for 3- to 5-year-olds) was introduced in 2000 and confirmed in legislation as the first stage of the National Curriculum in 2002. A centrally organised support programme for the Early Years Foundation Stage led by a National Director with a team of regional Foundation Stage Advisors aims to improve the quality of the Foundation Stage and provide guidance to practitioners to deliver high quality early education experiences for young children. All practitioners access 4 days of training per year (2004-06) with various projects underway to develop the curriculum, including: an early speech and communication project (to improve practice and practitioner knowledge); training materials to embed the practice of listening to children; a project to promote and support

good quality outdoor play; and a project on the transition between the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. The Foundation Stage Profile is a continuous teacher-led assessment to accompany the Foundation Stage. It replaces the previous “Baseline Assessment” as the statutory assessment requirement for this age group. The Early Years Foundation Stage itself is being further developed to cover children from birth to 5 years, and will be accompanied by a new Quality Framework for the whole age group.

Monitoring and evaluation: The expansion in early years and child care services since 1998 has been accompanied by a greater emphasis on performance monitoring and evaluation as part of the overall government thrust to improve the performance of public services. A series of national level performance targets and outcome indicators for ECEC have been formulated, with an increased emphasis on evidence-based policy-making. To facilitate performance monitoring, use of central data collection systems has increased both to reduce the burden on Local Authorities and to achieve a coherent and consistent picture of national progress. Local Authorities have been made accountable for the quality of early years provision in their areas, while Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) has responsibility for the inspection both of child care (including family day care) and early education settings.

Research: The Sure Start Unit has in place a large research and evaluation programme (annual budget approx GBP 6 million/USD 10 748 400) to provide evidence related to developing early years policies. A longitudinal study of the Sure Start (local) programme has been established to track the development of children in Sure Start programme areas from infancy through childhood to examine the short, medium and long term impacts of the programme. There is also a large evaluation study of the neighbourhood nursery initiative underway. Another major research programme supporting quality improvement processes is the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE), a study examining the effect of pre-school provision on children’s outcomes from start-of-school to age 11. Findings from this study – that have shown the positive benefits of good quality pre-school education on subsequent child development – have been influential in shaping policy.

Parent and community involvement: Parental involvement is a strong plank of current ECEC policy in the United Kingdom. The Sure Start and Children’s Centre programmes emphasise parental involvement, providing parenting support and facilitating access for parents to training and development. In Sure Start local programmes, parents play a major role in running the programmes (the partnerships contain some 50% parent/community members). Parents are extensively consulted on the types of services they want. A recent impact evaluation of the project (NESS Impact Study, 2005, *Early Impacts of Sure Start Local Programmes on Children and Families*, Birbeck, University of London) shows, however, that Sure Start local programmes have had only modest effects on parents, either positive or adverse. The curricula frameworks *Birth to three matters* and the present Foundation Stage emphasise the importance of parental involvement in their child’s development and education. The new (draft) Early Years Foundation Stage document and new legislation (Childcare Act 2006) require that parents are involved in planning, development, delivery and evaluation of local services.

OECD policy issues

- In all areas reviewed by the OECD review team in 2000 – funding; policy coordination; expansion of access; staff recruitment and training; quality assurance and inspection regimes; work-family supports – significant progress has been made. The United Kingdom

government published their *10-Year Strategy for Child Care – Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children* (in December 2004) to reinforce this progress and call attention to the following challenges, which it will address over the coming years.

- Although free nursery education for 15 hours weekly is now available for 3- and 4-year old children, the session is insufficiently linked to other ECEC that parents need to arrange. Wrap-around services are not always available, and parents are often obliged to navigate a maze of different providers, professionals and agencies to obtain the services they need. Much of this fragmentation should be resolved through the new integrated Children's Centres.
- There are too few appropriately trained staff, especially in the child care sector. High turnover of staff (reaching 40% annually in some instances) is a threat to both quality and the attachment needs of young children. Plans are now underway to generate a new educator profile to cover the whole age group 1-6 years. The strategy sets out a radical reform of the early years and child care workforce that will work towards a better qualified, higher status workforce. More staff will be trained to degree-level, and all full day care settings will be led by graduate qualified early years professionals. In order to support expansion and meet standards, 80 500 new staff are expected to be recruited into the child care sector by 2006, and trained to Level 2 or 3. Targets, jointly set by Local Authorities and local Learning and Skills Councils, are in place to meet this challenge. Funding of GBP 129.9 million (USD 232 702 860) for the two financial years 2004-06 will be provided to Local Authorities for workforce development. In the recent reform of local government, a new "Transformation Fund" has been created part of which can be used to encourage the employment of graduates in early childhood services and pay better salaries in private and voluntary sector settings
- Affordability is still a real barrier to low-income (especially lone parents) and lower mid-income parents in accessing formal child care and school holiday care. Deprived families in affluent areas are likewise affected.
- The situation of children with disabilities and/or additional learning needs in early childhood services is not clear. Whatever about the validity of arguments to have more specialised environments for these children from late primary or secondary level, early childhood services would seem to be the most effective and protected level for the inclusion of all types of children. This seems to be the practice in Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden, the United States and other countries. Early childhood is also a critical moment where mainstream children are concerned. Research on community conflict tends to show that the seeds of prejudice – or of positive attitudes towards diversity – are sown very early in children's minds. Obviously, inclusion at this level must also be appropriate with additional resources (including specialised staff) allocated to centres enrolling these children. The Children's Centres are specifically charged with meeting the needs of children with disabilities and special needs.
- An important new development is the new Child Care Act 2006, which gives all parents a statutory entitlement to child care, integrated with early education. In the future, Local Authorities are charged to be "champions of parents" and managers of the "child care market", and not necessarily service providers.

Notes

1. The OECD review focused on England (50 million inhabitants), but the review team also visited Scotland, which has taken a different approach to ECEC policy. Please see the United Kingdom Country Note for more details on Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.
2. In the table in question, unit costs per child for Denmark and Sweden are given as USD 4 673, and USD 4 107 respectively. Denmark and Sweden currently spend about 2% of GDP on early childhood services, adopt pay rates for lead staff equivalent to British rates, practise far lower child-staff ratios in services for children 3-6 years (Denmark averages 7.2 children and Sweden 5.6 children per trained adult) and provide considerably longer educational sessions for 3- and 4-year-olds. In our estimation, the amounts attributed to Denmark and Sweden refer to the preschool class only. A significant increase in investment towards children and families has occurred in the United Kingdom over the last decade (see for example, the improvement in child poverty figures), but the extent of public expenditure on ECEC services is not clear. A comparative analysis of ECEC expenditure, based on information supplied by national authorities, appears in *Babies and Bosses* (OECD, 2005), which provides the following figures for Sweden (2002 figures) and the United Kingdom (2003 figures): child care only: Sweden 1.4% of GDP; United Kingdom: 0.1%; pre-primary education only: Sweden: 0.2% of GDP (accounting for 1 year only); United Kingdom: 0.2% (accounting for 2 years); out-of-school care: Sweden: 0.4%; United Kingdom: data not available and probably minimal. The same volume provides a figure of USD 4 096 invested per child in the pre-school class (6-7 years) in Sweden, and a figure of USD 3 986 invested per child by the United Kingdom in pre-primary education (3-5 years). Roughly similar figures are provided in Cohen *et al.* (2004). A more recent figure for Sweden provided by Martin-Korpi (2005) gives an annual expenditure figure of USD 12 354 per child in Swedish preschool services for children 1-6 years.