

UK learns from Swedish child care [GB] ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

In Sweden - unlike much of the UK - proper child care is not a privilege of the motivated middle class but a right enjoyed by every parent.

Decades ago, the Swedes understood that the labour market was going to change, with women working even after having children.

Now their education and child care system reflects this foresight, with children being catered for from the age of one.

Gunnel Selling-Norell is a "rektor" in Harnosand on Sweden's east coast, the principal of primary and secondary schools as well as a "leisure-time centre" which caters for pre-school and after-school classes.

This "whole day" approach to schooling has been proposed as a model for the UK to follow in a report by London University's Institute of Education and the Children in Scotland agency.

During the 12 hours the Swedish children will spend time playing and learning on either side of a typical school day, being fed on site and supervised by a team of teachers and after-school workers with a co-ordinated curriculum governing the whole day since 1994.

There is co-ordination between the after-school workers and the teachers, with both working together and making sure play activities are complementary with conventional learning.

For the parents of four, five and six year olds, everything is free, and for younger children fees are proportionate to income and not comparable to access to child care in the UK.

The answer to how all this is possible is simple according to Ms Selling-Norell.

"We do pay a lot of tax."

Norway and Denmark have tried to create similar systems, but the emphasis on young children has been a success for Sweden.

- reprinted from BBC News Online

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