
Paper 3
Quality Targets in Services for Young Children

European Commission Network on Childcare
and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment
and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women

Proposals for a Ten Year Action Programme

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■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	C5
Quality in Services for Young Children: the European dimension	
The purpose of this report	
The scope of the report	
The status of the report	
Preparing the report	
40 TARGETS FOR SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN	C11
Summary of main points from the Introduction	
Targets for the Policy Framework	
Financial Targets	
Targets for Levels and Types of Services	
Education Targets	
Targets for Staff Employment and Training	
Environmental and Health Targets	
Targets for Parents and Community	
Performance Targets	
CONCLUSIONS	C41

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■ INTRODUCTION

QUALITY IN SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN: THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

The European Union (EU) has developed its interest in services for young children for a number of years. The main reason for this developing European dimension is the Union's commitment to equal treatment for men and women in the labour market and its appreciation that this objective requires, among other conditions, safe and secure care for children while parents are at work. Over time, the various institutions of the EU have paid increasing attention to qualitative as well as quantitative aspects of services for young children:

- In April 1991, the European Parliament adopted a **Resolution on Childcare and Equality of Opportunity**. This called for “*a Framework Directive on Childcare Services... (to guarantee) the development of publicly-funded, widely available and **good quality** childcare services for children at least up to the age of 10*” (Network emphasis).
- In November 1991, the **European Parliament's opinion** (November 1991) on the Commission's initial proposal for a Recommendation on Child Care supported the need for “*access to locally based and **good quality** services*” (Network emphasis).
- In March 1992 the Council of Ministers adopted a **Council Recommendation on Child Care**. This recommended Member States to develop childcare services and emphasised that, in so doing, “*it is essential to promote the **well-being** of children and families, ensuring that their **various needs are met***” (Network emphasis).

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In 1986, the Commission set up a **Childcare Network**, as part of the Community's Second Equal Opportunities Programme. This Network, which consists of experts from all Member States and a Coordinator, has been particularly concerned with the development of services for young children. The Network continued its work under the Community's Third Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which began in 1991, and was renamed the **European Commission Network for Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities for Women and Men** (for reasons of space, it is referred to below as the EC Childcare Network).

This report has been drawn up for the European Commission by the EC Childcare Network, in response to a specific task given to the Network in the Community's Third Equal Opportunities Programme – to “*establish criteria for the definition of quality in childcare services*”. The Network has taken the Council Recommendation on Child Care as the basis for this report, since it represents the clearest expression of EU policy on services for young children, and has been adopted by all Member States. The Recommendation proposes a number of **specific objectives** for the development of services for young children:

- affordability
- access to services in all areas, both urban and rural
- access to services for children with special needs
- combining safe and secure care with a pedagogical approach
- close and responsive relations between services and parents and local communities
- diversity and flexibility of services

- increased choice for parents
- coherence between different services.

Taken together, these objectives form the basis for the definition of a good quality service system; fully achieved, they would ensure equal access to good quality services. However such objectives are not likely to emerge of their own accord. **Specific conditions** are needed to enable the achievement of these objectives, including:

- a policy framework for service provision
- coordination of responsibility for services
- a curricular framework
- appropriate staffing and staff conditions (including training and pay)
- appropriate physical environments
- infrastructure for planning, monitoring, support, training, research and development
- adequate financing of services and infrastructure.

The purpose of this report is to propose criteria for assessing progress towards achieving the Recommendation's specific objectives and establishing the conditions which would enable their achievement. We have called these criteria 'targets'. The report proposes **targets that the Network believes could be realised throughout the European Union within ten years – by the year 2006.**

Some targets involve the complete attainment of an objective or condition. Others involve partial attainment; in these cases, the Network does not believe that an objective or condition could be completely attained across the EU by 2006, bearing in mind the current situation and what can be realistically achieved over ten years. For example, the **objective** of equal access to quality services requires publicly funded services for all children whose parents want them to attend; but given the current low level of provision in many countries, the **target** proposed for children under 3 years is a minimum of 15% coverage within 10 years.

In short, the targets proposed in this report represent the Network's view of: what is **necessary** if real progress is to be made over the next 10 years towards achieving the objectives of the Recommendation and putting in place the conditions needed to enable the achievement of these objectives; and what is **feasible**.

Some countries will find the targets harder to reach than others, for a variety of historical, financial, political and other reasons. In some specific cases the EU may have a role to play in supporting the achievement of these targets through the use of Structural Funds. Other countries will find the targets easier to reach, or will have already reached some or many of them. These countries will want to continue developing their services; this report does not propose a final and static view of quality but is based on the perspective that objectives for services need to be constantly open to review and development. **Nothing said here therefore should be seen as justification for halting or reversing developments in Member States with more advanced services; the goal should be levelling up to a high level.**

Finally, it should be emphasised that **the targets (and the objectives and conditions to which they refer) form a totality**. Taking any of them in isolation may be meaningless and misleading. They are inter-dependent, so that one target may not be achievable without another; for instance, the education targets are related to targets for staff, training and the environment.

THE SCOPE OF THE REPORT

The report and the targets cover ‘*services for young children*’. What does this label mean? It comprises services for **children below compulsory school age**, which in most Member States is six years¹. These services include **collective settings** (nurseries, kindergartens, nursery schools, age-integrated centres etc.) and **family day care**.

The EU’s legal competence in this area is limited to children with employed parents. The Network takes the view that from a service perspective it is neither desirable nor necessary to treat this group of children and parents separately from other children. **The development of services for young children should be based on a policy that takes account of all children and carers and all of their needs**. While this report, with its targets, can be applied to services catering specifically for children with employed parents, it has been prepared on the basis of being applicable to all services for young children.

The Network deliberately avoids the term ‘childcare services’. For young children ‘care’ and ‘education’ should be inseparable and many ‘educational’ settings (such as nursery schools) make an important contribution to the ‘care’ of children. Attempting to distinguish between ‘childcare services’ and ‘education services’ for children below compulsory school age is neither conceptually valid nor useful in practice. The general term ‘services for young children’ has been chosen for this report to represent its broad concern.

The report therefore proposes a common framework of shared targets applicable across a wide range of services, the combination of ‘*diversity*’ and ‘*coherence*’ advocated in the Council Recommendation on Child Care.

There is, however, one important qualification to this broad approach. Ideally, the targets in the report should be applicable to all services, whether publicly or privately managed. Many private services in the European Union already receive funding and other support from public authorities; publicly supported services can be delivered either by public or private providers. But private services that do **not** receive public support, including funding, cannot reach all of the targets proposed in this report unless they charge parents substantial fees. To expect them to meet all of the targets would, therefore, lead either to increased inequalities between families, because the fees would be beyond the reach of many parents; or to the closure or driving ‘underground’ of many private services which cannot or do not wish to charge the necessary fees.

In these circumstances, the **full range of targets proposed in this report should only apply to publicly funded services** (whether publicly or privately managed). Private services that do **not** receive public funding and other support should only be expected to achieve certain minimum standards (for example, targets that ensure basic health and safety and a statement of educational philosophy). This unsatisfactory two-tier system can only be removed by ensuring that all children have access to publicly supported services.

THE STATUS OF THE REPORT

A number of assumptions underlie the Network’s approach to quality:

- quality is a relative concept, based on values and beliefs
- defining quality is a process and this process is important in its own right, providing opportunities to share, discuss and understand values, ideas, knowledge and experience

1. *The Network would like to see a similar exercise undertaken to define quality targets for services providing care and recreation for school-age children. A Network report on School-age Childcare in Europe (1996) is available in English, French, German and Spanish. This and other Network reports mentioned in this document are available from the European Commission (DGV/D/5), 200 rue de la Loi, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium.*

- the process should be participatory and democratic, involving different groups including children, parents and families and professionals working in services
- the needs, perspectives and values of these groups may sometimes differ
- defining quality should be seen as a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular review and never reaching a final, 'objective' statement.

These assumptions influence how the Network views this report. It is **not** an attempt to prescribe universal standards or systems across Europe. The European Commission, to whom this report has been made, neither has the competence nor the wish to do this. Nor is a prescriptive and standardised approach compatible with the Network's approach.

Instead, the Network's report has a limited contribution to make, but one which many organisations and individuals may find useful. It offers ideas, examples and guidance which draw on Europe-wide experience and expertise. For most targets in the report, at least one example is given where that target has already been achieved in a Member State (although as the report was prepared before Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU, no examples are given for these three Member States). No Member State, however, meets all the targets.

Others may disagree with our proposed targets. The Network has no monopoly on wisdom. But the Network hopes that the report stimulates discussion, sets testing but realistic challenges and supports the process of defining objectives and conditions and setting targets.

The Network also hopes that the report will contribute to the development of future EU policy, and in particular to two important and relevant objectives recently put forward by the European Commission:

- to assess "*the use of quantitative and qualitative targets for the improvement of childcare provision*" (**White Paper on European Social Policy**, 1994, Chapter V, paragraph 12)
- to propose "*measures aiming at setting higher standards for the care of children and other dependents*" (**Fourth Medium-Term Community Action Programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (1996-2000)**, 1995, Section 3.1).

The report may appear to contain a contradiction. On the one hand, it is based on the idea that quality is a **relative concept**, implying the legitimacy of diversity reflecting plural values and beliefs. On the other hand, the format of the report is based on proposing a number of **common targets**.

In fact, even adopting the report as it stands would still allow considerable scope for diversity among individual services to define additional objectives and targets and to interpret some of the targets in this report; for example, the section on education targets proposes broad content and leaves much scope for diversity in the statement of education philosophy proposed for each service. It is important that individual services and service systems reflect local aspirations and priorities, set many of their own objectives and evaluate them. The Network would also accept that the targets in this report, or any other report, should be subject to regular review and revision.

Having said that, the Network takes the view that the interests of children, parents and society require certain common objectives to be defined and applied, at least to all services that are publicly funded. These reflect values and principles that are considered to be of over-riding importance in any society. They provide reference points against which progress and shortfalls can be measured. In short, a balance needs to be struck between a completely **open and relative approach** and certain '**core' values and objectives** and certain conditions which are necessary to achieve them.

But, that balance and the content of the core values and objectives must be the subject of open and democratic discussion. Hence the critical importance of the **process of defining quality**. That process needs to be dynamic and continuous. It should also be multi-level, complex and democratic, because the process of definition needs to involve a wide range of groups with an interest in services for young children, including children, parents, staff, local communities and public authorities.

This difficult issue of balance emphasises the importance of a final point. Good quality services require **strong technical input** from practitioners working directly with children, managers, researchers and other skilled professionals, applying effective techniques and possessing a substantial repertoire of skills to encourage children's development and learning. But good quality services and the continuous process of defining quality equally require a **sympathetic and informed culture**. This means a high and sustained level of public and political awareness of the needs of children, parents and families; recognition of the social and economic importance of meeting these needs; an understanding of the issues involved in doing so adequately; and a society in which open discussion, analysis, experimentation and innovation about philosophy, objectives, methods and practice in services are encouraged and supported.

PREPARING THE REPORT

The report has been prepared over an eighteen month period. Drafting has been undertaken by a small group, with meetings of all Network members to discuss drafts. We have tried to work in an open and democratic manner.

The report draws on ten years of work by the Network. From its establishment in 1986, the Network has regarded quality as important both for children and for gender equality, since poor quality services constrain the employment opportunities of women with children and create poor working conditions for the large number of women who work in services for young children. The Network's first report, **Childcare and Equality of Opportunity**, published in 1988, concluded that "*services must provide not only quantity but good quality*" and that "*work is urgently needed to define, monitor, develop and maintain quality*" (page 270).

In 1990, the Network held a European seminar on "**Quality in Childcare Services**" in Barcelona, from which came a seminar report, published in the same year, and a discussion paper "**Quality in Services for Young Children**", published in 1991. The discussion paper was translated into all Community languages and widely distributed; it has generated a lot of interest and debate in Member States but also in other countries.

The Network distributed the discussion paper to more than 3,000 international, European, national, regional and local organisations with an interest in services for young children, gender equality and other issues relevant to the reconciliation of employment and caring for children. This distribution provided the opportunity for a consultation exercise; organisations were invited to comment on the discussion paper and were offered a short structured questionnaire to help organise their responses. The results are summarized in the Network's 1993 Annual Report.

This process has been important, as a model (albeit limited and imperfect) of how we think the issue of quality should be approached and because it has enabled Network members to learn from each other as well as from the organisations that replied to the consultation process. It has shown us more clearly where there are differences of approach – to children, to services and to other relevant issues. But it has also shown us that many values, ideas and methods of work are more widely shared across different Member States than we had expected.

■ 40 TARGETS FOR SERVICES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

This section presents the 40 targets proposed by the Network. These targets are organised into areas or blocks: Policy; Finance; Levels and Types of Services; Education; Staff Child Ratios; Staff Employment and Training; Environment and Health; Parents and Community; and Performance. The section begins with a summary of points from the Introduction which provide an essential context for the targets.

SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS FROM THE INTRODUCTION

- This report has been prepared within the framework of the **Council Recommendation on Child Care**. The Recommendation proposes a number of specific objectives for the development of services for young children which form the basis for a definition of good quality.
- The report **proposes criteria – targets – for assessing progress** in achieving the Recommendation's objectives and establishing conditions needed to enable their achievement.
- **'Services for young children'** comprise services providing care and education for children below compulsory school age, including collective settings (nurseries, kindergartens, nursery schools, age-integrated centres etc.) and family day care.
- The targets apply to **publicly funded services** (whether publicly or privately managed). Private services that do **not** receive public funding and other support can only be expected to achieve certain minimum standards. This two-tier system is unsatisfactory and can only be removed when all children are assured access to publicly supported services.
- The targets are for attainment **within ten years – by 2006**.
- The targets are inter-dependent: **they form a totality**. Taking any of them in isolation may be meaningless and misleading.
- Quality is a **relative concept** based on values and beliefs, and defining quality should be a **dynamic, continuous and democratic process**. A balance needs to be found between defining certain common objectives, applying to all services, and supporting diversity between individual services.
- There can be no final and static view of quality. Countries which achieve – or have already achieved – most or all of the targets will want to go on developing their services. This report does **not justify halting or reversing developments** in Member States with more advanced Services.

■ I. TARGETS FOR THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

DISCUSSION

The overarching principle of a comprehensive early years policy is to provide flexible, coherent and high quality services with equality of access for all children, whether or not their parents are in employment. Like other education or social services provision where policy is framed, planned and monitored at a national/regional level to ensure all citizens benefit, **high quality services accessible to all children can only be achieved within a national policy framework.** This is so, however diverse the services and whatever the patterns of service delivery, and whether services are in the public or private or independent sector. Most Member States of the European Union have already gone some way to developing such a framework.

A national policy is a comprehensive attempt to address and resolve the issues of services to young children, of diversity within a coherent framework and of high quality within cost parameters. It identifies principles and goals for services, it sets out a programme to implement the policy, it outlines strategies for implementation, it lists specific targets, and it does all this within a clear resource framework. Legislative, administrative and political action is necessary, nationally and regionally/locally, to make the policy work. Whilst the particular format of the policy framework and the manner of its implementation are clearly matters of national and regional discretion, good quality and equitable services have only been achieved – and indeed can only be achieved – where there is such a policy framework.

In a fragmented system, apart from the inequities of access, the gaps and the duplications, there are few norms, little exchange of information or comparisons and no systematic discussion or development. There may be isolated examples of outstanding practice in the absence of a comprehensive policy framework. But there are no guarantees that the lessons from such provision can be understood and explored or even noticed; the same is true for bad provision.

To deliver a policy which crosses traditional institutional boundaries and deals with issues which may have been neglected or simply never addressed, or which, for the first time, are being coordinated, is a sophisticated exercise. The implementation of any new policy requires support and advice, planning and monitoring², research and development and the personnel to undertake these activities efficiently.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING POLICY FRAMEWORK TARGETS

TARGET 1: Governments should draw on professional and public opinion to provide a published and coherent statement of intent for care and education services to young children 0-6, in the public and in the private sector, at national and at regional/local level. This policy should set out principles, specify objectives and define priorities, and explain how such initiatives will be coordinated between relevant departments.

TARGET 2: At national level one department should be nominated to take responsibility for implementing the policy whether it does so directly or through an agency; at a region-

2. A Network report – *Monitoring Childcare Services for Young Children (1994)* – includes recommendations on the information required for an effective system of monitoring.

al/local level there should be a similar designation of responsibility, whether services are directly administered by the regional/local authority or whether contracted out to other providers.

TARGET 3: Governments should draw up a programme to implement the policy which outlines strategies for implementation, sets targets, and specifies resources. At a regional/local level, the department or agency responsible should similarly draw up a programme for implementing policy and developing practice.

TARGET 4: Legislative frameworks should be created to ensure that the targets are fully met within specified time limits and reviewed regularly, and which should outline the competencies of regional and/or local government in fulfilling the targets.

TARGET 5: The government department or agency responsible at national level should set up an infrastructure, with parallel structures at local level, for planning, monitoring, review, support, training, research and service development.

TARGET 6: The planning and monitoring system should include measures of supply, demand and need covering all services for young children at national, regional and/or local level.

EXAMPLES

SPAIN: In 1990, after five years of research and debate, far-reaching educational reforms were introduced when a new education law (LOGSE – *la Ley Organica de Ordenacion General del Sistema Educativo*) was passed. This legislated for a reform of the whole education system, and defined education services as covering children aged 0-18 years. As a consequence, all services for young children (from 0-6 years) were integrated within an educational framework and became the responsibility of education authorities. These services can be organised as separate systems of nurseries for children aged 0-3 years, and nursery classes attached to primary schools for 3-6 year olds; or else as separate centres for children aged 0-6. Regions/cities have considerable discretion in implementing the act. The basic training for all those working with children aged 3-6 years, and a proportion of those working with children aged 0-3 years, has become a teaching qualification, and universities have reorganised courses to offer appropriate training.

DENMARK: Responsibility for all services for young children (from 0-6 years) is integrated within one department (social affairs) at national and local levels. The guiding philosophy, enshrined in the law, is that the services and home/family must supplement each other. The names of the different types of services in Danish (*vuggestue* – lounge; *bornehaver* – garden; *fritidshjem* – home) underline they are connected to the home rather than the school. There is a variety of publicly funded services, of which about 60% are administered directly by local authorities while the rest are independently run but have policy agreements with local authorities. Decision making is decentralized as much as possible, giving a high level of autonomy to individual centres, but within a common framework of law, administrative responsibility, funding and staff training and conditions. The system combines coherence in key areas with substantial diversity and flexibility.

■ II. FINANCIAL TARGETS TO BE INCORPORATED IN THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

DISCUSSION

Policies, however well-meaning, are unworkable without the resources to implement them. As we have stressed in the introduction the price of services for young children can only be met in the market place at the cost of equity; many families will be unable to afford the market price of services, and inequities between families in work and families out of work will thereby be accentuated, as well as unfairness of access and discontinuities for children themselves. In most of Europe this principle of public funding is accepted for at least part of the system of services for young children, that is for nursery education or kindergarten provision for children over three years, but financial support varies widely for other forms of services.

It is widely acknowledged that 0-6 years of age is an important period for learning, whether that learning is formal or informal. In some countries the period in a child's life from 0-3 years is widely recognized as the first stage of education. In others, children are assumed to be ready for early education or kindergarten only when they are 3 years old. Whatever the diversity of the system, if the policy assumes, as we suggest it should do, that services for young children are an important component of the education system, or of the education and welfare systems, then this should be reflected in public expenditure allocated to them.

We have proposed that this public expenditure should be **not less than** 1% of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) within ten years; we emphasise 'not less' because it is unlikely that 1% of GDP will fulfill the condition of 'adequate funding of services and infrastructure'. This target figure for public expenditure would cover the running and capital costs of services, as well as infrastructure, such as planning, monitoring, review, support, training and service development. For the sake of comparability between Member States, we propose that this target of at least 1% GDP allocated for services for young children should apply to services for children aged 5 years and under (not just children under compulsory school age) and would therefore include the costs of early compulsory schooling in countries where this begins before the age of 6 years.

In most Member States, public expenditure on education (including nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary education) accounts for between 4-6 % of GDP. Thus 1% of GDP represents, at present, about a fifth of the public education budget in Member States. On this basis, the target for services for children under 6 years of age can be regarded as a modest and minimum share of public resources for an age group which accounts for one third of the child population.

Data, for each Member State, are presented in the box at the end of this discussion section which show what 1% of GDP represents financially as well as public expenditure on education as a proportion of GDP. In considering this information and the proposed target for public expenditure on early childhood services, it should be remembered that substantial benefits result from public investment in early childhood services; these benefits include social, economic and educational gains for children, parents and families, and economic gains for society as a whole through increased participation by women in the labour force and better use of their skills and experience. Not only will public investment in these services produce important and widespread returns, but the **net** cost to public funds will be less than 1% of GDP as a result of increased tax revenues and reduced welfare payments.

Because of the fragmentation of services for young children and the division of responsibility and funding between different ministries and levels of government, it is currently impossible to compare total public expenditure on services for young children across all Member States. However in at least one Member

State, which has relatively well developed policies which recognize the importance of early years provision, it is estimated that the target of at least 1% of GDP is currently met and surpassed (see Denmark in the Examples section).

Allocating resources goes hand in hand with more stringent financial planning. Without a coherent and coordinated system of public funding, in which all aspects of expenditure on services to young children are considered together as a whole, policies are less likely to be implemented, targets will remain unfulfilled, evaluation is incomplete, and inefficiencies and duplication in the system are likely to be exacerbated. In some countries it is possible to provide accurate and detailed financial criteria about levels of expenditure on young children; in others the figures are unreliable or non-existent.

As outlined in the previous section, the infrastructure of implementation is considerable. The support and advice, planning and monitoring, research and development must also be paid for. The financial targets also indicate how this can be done.

Whilst nursery schooling is a free service in Member States, parental contributions are expected for other publicly funded services for young children. The percentage of total cost met through parental contributions differs somewhat between Member States, but mostly varies between 15% and 25%³. There is, however, an important distinction to be made between the percentage of the total costs of services which comes from parental contributions, and the proportion of family income paid in parental contributions. By focusing in our target on the proportion of family income paid in parental contributions we are addressing the principle of affordability.

	Gross domestic product (milliard ecus) (1992) ⁴	1% of gross domestic product (milliards)(1992) ⁵	Public expenditure on education as % of GDP (1992) ⁶
Austria	143.2	1.43 ecus (OS 203.1)	5.8
Belgium	169.1	1.69 ecus (BEF 66.1)	6.0
Denmark	110.1	1.10 ecus (DKK 8.6)	7.6
Finland	81.9	0.82 ecus (FIM 4.8)	8.3
France	1020.2	10.20 ecus (FF 69.8)	5.5
Germany	1498.5	14.99 ecus (DM 30.3)	4.1
Greece	60.1	0.60 ecus (DRA 148.2)	No information
Ireland	38.7	0.39 ecus (IRP 0.3)	5.6
Italy	944.8	9.45 ecus (LIT 15082.2)	5.1
Luxembourg	8.2	0.08 ecus (BEF 3.3)	No information
Netherlands	247.6	2.48 ecus (NFL 5.6)	5.6
Portugal	74.3	0.74 ecus (ESC 129.3)	5.5 (1991)
Spain	444.1	4.44 ecus (PTS 588.3)	4.6
Sweden	190.7	1.91 ecus (SKK 14.4)	7.7
United Kingdom	805.6	8.06 ecus (GBP 6.0)	5.2

3. For further information on what parents currently contribute towards the costs of services, see the Network report **Costs and Funding of Services for Young Children** (1995), available in English and French.

4. Source: Eurostat (1994) *Basic Statistics of the Community*, 31st edition, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Table 2.1.

5. Based on yearly average exchange rates for 1992 (*ibid.*, Table 2.29)

6. Public expenditure on education covers all levels up to and including tertiary, and includes public subsidies to the private sector. Source: OECD (1995) *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators*, Paris: OECD. Table F01

Parental contributions are generally means-tested, although systems of means-testing vary widely. The levels of payment made by parents to publicly funded services also vary considerably. It is often not clear what rationale exists to justify the charging policy that has been adopted. Our examples illustrate the necessity for a well-grounded and accountable system of charging. The contribution formula arrived at should take account of income and other family circumstances and be particularly sensitive to the needs of low income or one parent families.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING FINANCIAL TARGETS

TARGET 7: Public expenditure on services for young children (in this case defined as children aged 5 years and under) should be not less than 1% of GDP in order to meet targets set for services, both for children under three and over three.

TARGET 8: A proportion of this budget should be allocated to develop the infrastructure for services. This should include at least 5% spent on support and advisory services including continuous or in-service training and at least 1% for research and monitoring.

TARGET 9: There should be a capital spending programme for building and renovations linked to the environmental and health targets.

TARGET 10: Where parents pay for publicly funded services, the charges should not exceed, and may well be less than, 15% of net monthly household income. The charges should take into account per capita income, family size and other relevant circumstances.

EXAMPLES

DENMARK: The Danish Ministry of Social Welfare estimates that total public expenditure on services for young children aged under 6 years will be DKK 10,93 billion in 1994 – DKK 5,4 billion for children under 3 years and DKK 5,6 billion for children aged 3 to 6 years. This is equivalent to 1.2% of the estimated GDP for 1994. These figures however do not include capital costs or infrastructure costs (for example, the costs of providing a 3.5 year basic training for workers in services for young children).

FRANCE: Costs of publicly funded services for children under three years (except for 2 year olds attending *écoles maternelles*, which are free of charge for parents) are shared between parents, local authorities and employer contributions. The *Caisse Nationale d'Allocations Familiales* (CNAF) is a national agency which has become increasingly important for determining policy and stimulating service development. Parents are charged fees, recommended by CNAF, which are set at 10 – 15% of net household income. On average, parental contributions cover 28% of costs of publicly funded services, with most of the remaining costs coming from local authorities (46%) and CAFs (23%) which are the regional funds of CNAF and are financed by employer contributions.

SPAIN: The city of Barcelona commissioned a research study in 1988 to determine what effects different kinds of charging policy had on different types of family and to what extent fees contributed to the cost of services. The study reviewed the fee structures in a number of local authorities, in Spain and further afield. As a result incomes were grouped in three bands according to the average income of earners in the family, with weighting for other family circumstances. It was then possible to set the level of fees within each band, taking account of income and other family circumstances, and ensuring that overall parental contributions met approximately 30% of the costs of the service.

III. TARGETS FOR LEVELS AND TYPES OF SERVICES TO BE INCORPORATED IN THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

DISCUSSION

Most countries in the industrialized world have accepted that children below the age of formal schooling benefit from some kind of collective provision, whether it is viewed as preparation for school, an opportunity to socialize with other children and adults beyond the family, or in order to enable parents to work. The need for children aged 3-6 years to have access to services with an educative content has also been widely acknowledged, although the care function provided by these services is not always fully recognized.

There is less agreement about the need for services to dovetail with the needs of working parents. In some countries services have only been part-time, the needs of working parents being regarded as an irrelevant or separate issue to the needs of the child. In these countries part-time provision is often viewed as the optimum provision for children.

In other countries, not only are services flexible enough to accommodate to the needs of working parents, but part-time services are per se regarded as unsatisfactory to meet the needs of children, much as part-time schooling would be seen as unsatisfactory at primary school age. In these countries the image of very young children is more robust – a view of early childhood in which children are seen as being able to make a range of diverse contacts with others and to develop significant interpersonal relationships with a number of caring figures. This view has resulted in services for children under three which stress the benefits and importance of stable daily experiences with other children and adults, in a carefully thought out context, rather than ad hoc contacts of very short duration.

There is however considerable divergence between countries as to how full-time and part-time are defined. Some kind of choice about flexibility of daily times and daily attendance seems desirable, to fit in with the requirements of parents and the needs of children, the more so the younger the child. The definition of full-time we have used is “cover for a working day”; but this can be offered in a variety of ways, for instance nursery education with wrap-around care, or all-day attendance at a children’s centre, or a combination of family day care and nursery.

For children under three widespread provision, whilst ambitious for some countries, is available in others. Provision in turn stimulates demand, as families become more aware of the possibilities open to them. In those countries or regions where levels of provision are high there has been a direct acknowledgement of female participation in the workforce and the need to support it by a package of services and benefits. In some other countries, the human consequences of female participation have been discounted by governments and public provision for this group of young children has been limited to children from distressed families. Working parents have had to seek solutions in the private market, where ability to pay is the main criterion for admission.

Although flexibility and diversity are aims for all services and services systems, because of strongly held views about what is best for the child and because of the high cost of services, an even broader approach is necessary for children under three. In some countries, Parental Leave is regarded as an alternative to services for very young children. Paid and flexible Maternity and Parental Leaves have an important role to play, but they should be accompanied by the provision of services to allow men and women choice and flexibility over the arrangements they make for their children.⁷

It is a truism that individual needs and circumstances vary considerably. Services need to take account of the needs and preferences of working and non-working parents or carers and their children, and of a variety of circumstances in individual families. In some countries there is widespread provision but a relatively inflexible system; services are widely available but uniform and limited in scope. Because services are standardized, administrators find it difficult to accommodate irregular hours of attendance or requests for longer hours. At the other extreme, in some countries there is fragmented provision and little in the way of a national system, but great innovation and diversity in certain locations and certain services.

It should be stressed that flexible hours – especially for very young children – does not mean a casual approach. A minimum level of stability and regularity and consistency of contacts with adults and peer groups is important for young children.

The notion of diversity can be interpreted in many ways: age ranges and how they are mixed; in the daily or weekly participation of parents, grandparents or other carers; management arrangements such as collectives; mixed service arrangements such as family day carers for children using nursery education; imaginative siting and transport arrangements, particularly for rural areas; incorporating additional services such as adult education; and so on. An imaginative and diverse service can encompass many forms of provision.

In some countries rural isolation is as much as or more of a consideration than urban pressures. There may be as pressing a need for employment but lack of transport makes it difficult to organise; or it may be that peripatetic services are needed to make sure all children have equality of access.

The issues of ethnicity, gender and disability have received a different emphasis and prominence in different countries. Nationalism, for instance, is an integrative and positive concept in some regions or countries, and an exclusive and negative concept in others. In one or two countries, the laws regulating services to young children and employment are explicit about the need to have regard for children's cultural, linguistic and religious background. In others the issue has not yet been considered.

Similarly disability has received more attention in some countries than others, and there are a variety of views about the need for integrated or separate provision for children with disabilities. There are those that argue that children with disabilities, particularly those with profound disabilities, should be fully resourced and have separate and focused specialist help. Others argue that mutual tolerance and valuation will only come through full integration of all services and that support should be made available within such services. As a target, we have insisted on the latter option, and specified that children should have right of access to local services, and the right to share these with other children. We realise that this is a particularly sensitive issue.

Gender stereotyping of children is less frequently acknowledged as an issue in services for young children than either ethnicity or disability – yet, like ethnicity and disability, these services can challenge or reinforce stereotyping. Discussion of gender issues in services for young children is complicated by the fact that in all countries employment in services to young children has traditionally been a woman's domain; opening up the service to men is therefore sometimes viewed as a threat to an area where women have more influence. The male and female role models available to young children through the curriculum as well as through changing patterns of employment should challenge traditional gender domains.

Well-meaning egalitarian ideals have also led to gender, as well as ethnicity and disability, being regarded as issues to be ignored, in the interest of treating 'all children the same' and thereby restricting discussion of what is normal and possible.

7. For further information on Parental Leave see the Network report *Leave Arrangements for Workers with Children* (1994), available in English, French and German.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING TARGETS FOR LEVELS AND TYPES OF SERVICES

TARGET 11: Publicly funded services should offer full time equivalent places for:

- at least 90% of children aged 3-6 years; and
- at least 15% of children under three years.

TARGET 12: Services should offer flexibility of hours and attendance including coverage for working hours and a working year if parents require it.

TARGET 13: There should be a range of services offering parents choice.

TARGET 14: All services should positively assert the value of diversity and make provision both for children and adults which acknowledges and supports diversity of language, ethnicity, religion, gender and disability, and challenges stereotypes.

TARGET 15: All children with disabilities should have right of access to the same services as other children with appropriate staffing assistance and specialist help.

EXAMPLES

DENMARK: Employment rates among women are higher in Denmark than elsewhere in the EU and services have reflected this demand. In 1995, there were places in a range of publicly funded services (nurseries, kindergartens, age-integrated centres, family day care) for 58% of children aged 6 months to 3 years and 82% of 3-6 year olds; in addition, nearly all 6 year olds attended special kindergarten classes in schools and 62% of 6 to 10 year olds had places in publicly funded services providing care and recreation for school children. In 1993, the Government made a commitment to provide a place in a publicly funded service for all children from 12 months to 6 years by the end of 1995.

BELGIUM: Publicly funded services offer places for every child aged 3-6 years and for 13% of children under three (excluding rising threes in nursery schools). A funding programme in the French-speaking Community subsidized by the National Office for Family Allowances provides flexibility in childcare services; homecare for sick children and extra funding when services open before 07.00 or after 18.00. Children with disabilities, social or psychological problems have access to all types of services which may receive a 150% subsidy for each child. The services are open to specialist help.

NETHERLANDS: There are a number of multi-racial Dutch projects. For instance SESAM in Utrecht offers places for children aged 0-12 and is open from 07.00 to 17.45, with slightly reduced hours in school holidays. There are age-integrated groups for children aged 0-4 years, and offering out-of-school care for older children up to 12 years. Children are grouped according to language and background. One group, for example, is mixed Dutch-Moroccan, another mixed Dutch-Surinam, another Dutch-Turkish. In each group the approach is bilingual, with teachers who speak each language.

FRANCE: Since 1975, the law has acknowledged the rights of access to education for those with disabilities, and in particular for children under six. This has involved a reconsideration of ease of physical access to all nursery buildings. Where places were previously reserved or prioritized for children with disabilities in specific nurseries because suitable access was available, an attempt has now been made to improve access in all nurseries and so avoid segregating children with disabilities in particular nurseries.

ITALY: A national framework law, adopted in 1992, establishes that children with disabilities aged 0-3 years “*should be guaranteed access to day nursery provision*” and “*the right to education for all disabled [older children] within the general school system, from nursery school onwards*”. The law envisages an educational plan tailored to individual needs and prepared in cooperation with parents, social and health workers and teachers in day nurseries and schools.

■ IV. EDUCATION TARGETS

DISCUSSION

In most countries most children aged 3-5 have access to nursery education or kindergarten that is a specifically education-oriented service. There is a widespread conviction that nursery education or kindergarten is not only positive in its immediate benefits to children and parents, but that it also mitigates against later school failure. Whilst we do not deny the latter, we argue that it is the quality of the nursery education or kindergarten, its philosophy, and its perceived benefits **in the present** that is the most important.

Nursery schooling or kindergartens may provide full-time provision, either on their own or with complementary provision available outside school hours for working parents; or in some cases, nursery schooling or kindergarten may be mainly available only for a relatively short period each day with no official consideration for the position of working parents. In the latter case there may be a parallel but separate service or services provided solely to meet the needs of working parents, or for children with a high degree of social need, and which downplay or do not recognize at all the child's need for a stimulating educative environment.

Instead or as well as nursery education, a few Member States have chosen to extend the age of formal education downwards by lowering the age of admission to primary school and admitting children to formal school from the age of four. This may appear to be a cheap and viable way to extend access to education, and in the absence of other services may appear to be popular with parents; but if the same level and standard of facilities were to be made available as in a good nursery setting, costs would increase significantly. A formal primary school environment, without safeguards of extra staffing or a more relaxed curriculum, is frequently a difficult situation for young children and is widely acknowledged by most experts to be unsatisfactory for them.

Whatever the system actually in operation in different Member States, there is a consensus about the importance of learning for children over three, and recognition of young children's capacity and eagerness to learn. In practice this has meant a focus on services with an explicit educative content delivered by personnel trained in pedagogical and educational methods.

Although options for nursery education and early years philosophies have been well developed in most countries there is more ambiguity about the balance of care and education for under threes. In many countries, nursery education is the function of the education ministry, but services for children under three are separately administered, and still regarded primarily as a health or care service. The caring aspects of services for children under three, such as constancy and sensitivity of staff, have been carefully analyzed and developed in some countries, but in general there has been less discussion about the educative content of services for children under three. In some countries, children's ability to learn and socialize at this age has been the subject of much research and other scrutiny. In other countries very young children's intellectual and social development is largely ignored as a factor in planning services or regarded as being best met in family or domestic settings; or where services are available a care and health orientated regime is thought to be sufficient.

In a few countries the age of 0-6 years is viewed as a recognizably separate stage of child development, with age-integrated services developed for this age group, provided within a social welfare framework. This is the Scandinavian model, and one also favoured in parts of Germany.

Although the emphasis shifts, and there is considerable scope for variation in content and method, according to local, regional and national priorities and cultural contexts, some overall explicit pedagogic framework is widely accepted as necessary for over threes, and in our view it is also justified for under threes.

We believe that for this group of younger children there are usually implicit rather than explicit views on which activities are the most important and what methods are used to introduce and support children in engaging with them. We consider that it would benefit children, staff and parents alike if these views were articulated and discussed.

We accept that views vary about how much the learning environment can be structured and the range of the curriculum; whether activities should be self-chosen and directed; and how much adults working with young children should actively encourage and intervene in the learning process. In some services the emphasis is on unhindered free play and free choice by children; in others there is a more didactic approach; in yet others a project based approach which emphasizes the complexity of the relationships and skills involved for both adults and children. Making the educational framework explicit enhances and clarifies the value of the education and learning which is taking place and widens the debate.

We stress that education is used here as a broader concept than “schooling”. It is about beginning to understand the significance of a print-rich and numerate environment, but also about the need for personal autonomy, self-sufficiency and self-care, and the need to acquire skills for social and group life. Almost all young children acquire some of these skills, whatever their circumstances. The issue is how collective settings can enhance such development and enable young children to be autonomous, to enjoy their lives and to relish learning. Different countries have addressed this issue in different ways.

Within the EU there is considerable diversity of language, culture and religion. Most member countries also have colonial histories and long-standing patterns of immigration from and dealings with Majority World communities. These relationships at best have also led to a broadening and enrichment of concepts of religion and culture, and have added still further to European linguistic diversity. Services for young children, along with other educational services, should be able to build on this diversity and actively combat racism and other forms of bigotry. Similarly, they should challenge other forms of prejudice and stereotyping, for example, concerning gender and gender-stereotyped behaviour among young children, and play an active role in promoting equality in all its aspects. Without awareness of these issues, and active and explicit policies, services may reinforce (albeit unconsciously) prejudice and stereotyping rather than contribute to removing them.

Initial training of staff deepens understanding of child development and widens ideas about the range of developmentally appropriate activities for children; but both need continuous updating, as with any other professional area. An essential aspect of maintaining the curriculum is therefore offering staff opportunities to keep up to date and extend or improve their methods through discussion, planning and in-service training (as outlined in the targets on staff and training).

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING EDUCATION TARGETS

TARGET 16: All collective services for young children 0-6 whether in the public or private sector should have coherent values and objectives including a stated and explicit educational philosophy.

TARGET 17: The educational philosophy should be drawn up and developed by parents, staff and other interested groups.

TARGET 18: The educational philosophy should be broad and include and promote inter alia:

- the child's autonomy and concept of self
- convivial social relationships between children, and children and adults
- a zest for learning
- linguistic and oral skills including linguistic diversity
- mathematical, biological, scientific, technical and environmental concepts
- musical expression and aesthetic skills
- drama, puppetry and mime
- muscular coordination and bodily control
- health, hygiene, food and nutrition
- awareness of the local community.

TARGET 19: The way in which the educational philosophy is put into practice should be stated and explicit. Services should have a programme of organisation covering all their activities including pedagogical approach, deployment of staff, grouping of children, training profiles for staff, use of space, and the way in which financial resources are used to implement the programme.

TARGET 20: The education and learning environment should reflect and value each child's family, home, language, cultural heritage, beliefs, religion and gender.

EXAMPLES

SPAIN: LOGSE (the 1990 education legislation) defined education as covering the ages of 0-18 and outlined two stages of early education – from 0-3 years and from 3-6 years. For each stage, it outlined broad pedagogic objectives. These objectives are reformulated at regional/local level and publicly funded services, whether nurseries for children aged 0-3 years or centres for children from 0-6 years, are expected to produce their own educational plans. In the autonomous regions of Spain, linguistic diversity is supported and Catalan, Gallego and Basque language and culture are all reflected in regional and local educative plans.

UNITED KINGDOM: Nursery education, although mainly part-time for 3-4 year olds, is delivered by qualified teachers (whose status and training equals that of primary and secondary teachers), working with nursery assistants. The nursery curriculum, for which there are usually written plans, anticipates many of the requirements of the UK national curriculum in terms of language, mathematics, arts and biological sciences; and a multi-cultural approach is encouraged through supporting cultural identity with relevant activities, books and other materials. This full curriculum is however put into practice through a methodology which stresses free play and autonomous choice for children.

GERMANY: Under the slogan “*entpädagogisierung*” (undoing pedagogics or anti-pedagogics) the concept is for workers to accompany children in their daily lives and to support them in learning how to cope. There are few detailed plans; instead programmes are developed spontaneously according to the situations that occur (*situations-ansatz*). Children are encouraged to play freely and input from the staff is structured by the interaction that goes on between children. The intention is to avoid being “school-like” but to provide a supportive social environment for children.

PORTUGAL: A primary school near Lisbon (*Santa Casa da Misericordia de Cascais*) offers a facility for children aged 0-11 years, and is open from 07.00 to 19.00. The very broad curriculum, which is based on the “modern movement” of Celestin Freinet, is planned in an integrated way across all the age groups and throughout the time children attend, so that after school activities are part of a continuous pattern of education and care within the school. The primary school is run by a Catholic aid agency, the Misericordia, but is publicly funded, and attracts a very wide social mix of children, from the very poorest to the richest in the community. Both children and staff are ethnically mixed. Children with disabilities who attend have specialist help available to them.

ITALY: In 1991, the Ministry of Education issued new “*Guidelines for educational activities in State-run nursery schools*”. These are not prescriptive, but provide guidance for curriculum and planning. They stress the right of all children to respect and recognition, and the enhancement of their individual, family, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious identity. They also identify goals, both general and more specific, for educational activity in nursery schools with respect to identity, the acquisition of autonomy and self-reliance and the development of cognitive, emotional and social skills.

■ V. TARGETS FOR STAFF–CHILD RATIOS

DISCUSSION

The aim of setting any conditions for staffing is to create conditions which will maximize or enhance the quality of relationships between adults and children, between children themselves and between the adults working in or making use of the service. Positive relationships, it is argued, create the most favourable climate for children to thrive, to develop and to learn. All the targets so far specified are contextualized, but for adult-child relationships the overall context is probably most critical. This target cannot be considered in isolation. The notion that high staff-child ratios are *per se* a guarantee of quality is simplistic. The concept that underlies the notion of high staff-child ratios, that a very young child learns best through the close emotional security of a relationship with one adult, is a culturally specific one and is not generally shared throughout all Member States. There are considerable differences in approach about how children are grouped, about whom are the best people to look after them and about other aspects of the circumstances in which they are looked after. We stress that these approaches and the concepts underlying them should be made explicit and thereby open to debate.

Apart from the level of training of staff, and the conditions in which they work, which are discussed in the next section, the **size** of the groups is a prime consideration in determining ratios in group settings. Some countries prefer narrow age groupings with 12 months age difference or even less within each group. Whereas in other countries, mixed age grouping is preferred, older children supporting and encouraging younger ones. In yet others, the group relationships are accorded less importance and children as individuals are free to move in an open-plan setting: staff responsibilities relate to areas or bases within this open plan setting, rather than to specific groups of children or to individual children.

The group size, the age range, the size and layout of the building, the type of the setting, the catchment of children who attend (for instance the proportion with disabilities or extreme social need) and the hours for which they attend, as well as whether places are part-time and doubled up or full-time, all contribute to how ratios might be determined.

The regularity of children's attendance at nurseries or other settings, and the times and rhythms of their day, vary considerably. Consequently in some countries, and in some services, the ratios also vary at different times throughout the day. A group of fifteen three year olds, for example, may at some periods have four staff, such as during lunch, and at other times, during naps, only have one member of staff. Sensitive deployment of staff to reflect these variations of tempo is important.

The working relationships amongst the staff, their mutual supportiveness and cooperativeness, are viewed in some countries as being essential to fostering good relationships with children. In these cases there is a strong tradition of staff collectives and an absence of any hierarchical structure. The cooperative organisation of staff, it is argued, in turn promotes cooperative relationships amongst children. In other countries the organisation and support of staff have received relatively little attention and very hierarchical settings are accepted without question. Whichever type of organisation, allowing a percentage of time for staff development is an essential part of forging both staff relationships and an ongoing critical evaluation of the curriculum being offered to children.

Similarly, there are many tasks such as cooking, cleaning and janitorial duties which are not directly to do with looking after and educating children. The ways in which these tasks are integrated into the routines for children may differ widely, and children may very well take part in some of them, for instance in caring for a garden, but the time spent by adults in such tasks is usually calculated separately from the ratios.

In most countries supply cover is readily provided when the ratios fall below acceptable standards. Lack of adequate supply cover is usually seen by staff as undermining their efforts and diminishing the quality of what they have to offer. Since consistency and continuity of staffing are widely recognized as an essential part of developing good relationships with young children, recruitment and employment policies should focus on staff turnover and staff sickness as a serious concern.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING TARGETS FOR STAFF-CHILD RATIOS

TARGET 21: Staff ratios for collective care should reflect the objectives of the service and their wider context and be directly related to group age and group size. They should usually be more than but should not be less than:

- 1 adult :4 places for children under 12 months
- 1 adult :6 places for children aged 12-23 months
- 1 adult :8 places for children aged 24-35 months
- 1 adult :15 places for children aged 36-71 months.

Ratios in family day care should not be less than 1 adult :4 places for children under compulsory school age, and the ratio should include the family day carer's own children.

TARGET 22: At least one tenth of the working week should be non-contact time allocated to preparation and continuous training.

TARGET 23: Adequate supply cover should always be available to maintain the ratios.

TARGET 24: Administrative, domestic, janitorial work should be allocated staff time or hours in addition to those hours spent with children

EXAMPLES

ITALY: In Italy, the national labour agreement for workers in nurseries (*asili nido*) establishes a ratio of 1 adult educator to 6 children (aged 0-3 years), and a 36 hour working week of which 30 hours are spent directly with children while the remaining 6 hours are for continuous training, contacts with parent and the local community, and planning and preparation work. In many services for children aged 0-3 years, small groups of narrowly age-banded children are regarded as the best method of organisation to maximize the development of good and supportive relationships amongst children. The notion of the group of children and how peer group relations are supported has been a key concept in planning services. A team of staff, whose shifts vary, will work with the same group of age-banded children throughout the day. While the ratio of adults to children will average 1 : 6 in a nursery, it will be lower (1 : 4) for children under 12 months, and higher than the average for children aged 2-3 years.

Besides the educators, working directly with the children, the services also include cooks, domestics and other auxiliary staff, usually 1 person for every 12-15 children. Sometimes, they work directly with the children, alongside the educators, in a planned framework of integration and cooperation.

PORTUGAL: There are a number of *creches familiar*, that is groups of between 12-20 family day carers attached to a publicly funded nursery. Each group is supported by at least two professionals, normally a social worker and an early years teacher. The family day carers each have four children aged under three years in their own homes. They receive training, technical and financial support from the nursery, and can use its facilities when necessary.

UNITED KINGDOM: Ratios recommended by the Government for nurseries and other collective settings in the welfare system are 1 adult: 3 places for children aged 0-23 months, 1 : 4 for children aged 24-35 months and 1 : 8 for children aged 36-59 months, while family day carers should not have more than 3 children under 5 years, including their own children. The recommended ratio for nursery schooling for children aged 36-59 months is 2 adults : 26 places, with 1 adult a qualified teacher and the other a qualified assistant.

VI. TARGETS FOR STAFF EMPLOYMENT

DISCUSSION

There are many ways in which diverse and high quality services for young children can be created and supported, but research indicates that the better the pay and conditions, training and support of staff, the better the quality of the service. Continuity and responsiveness of staff and their consistent relationship with the same group of children is more easily achieved when the staff themselves are paid above minimum wages, are trained and enjoy decent working conditions. Where these conditions do not apply, for example, in nurseries in the United States, turnover of staff has been shown to reach over 40% per annum.

There has been an active debate about the content and length of training for staff in services for young children. In a few countries, an emphasis is placed on most staff having a high level of basic training (at least three years training at a post-18 level), whether they work with children under or over three years. Other systems have lower requirements, especially for work with children under three years; for example, a two or three year post-16 vocationally based training or qualifications based on assessing workers' skills on the job rather than as part of a training course. It is argued that such approaches benefit women who have had a great deal of informal experience with children and might be excluded from more rigorous and higher level training programmes because they left school early or, for other reasons, have few or no academic qualifications. Similarly, there are various arguments about the level of training required by family day carers employed through public funds.

The compromise between these positions, discussed at a Network seminar held in Leiden in 1990⁸ and which is adopted here, is that a sophisticated level of training is as necessary for those working with young children as with older children, but that access to such training should be open and modular, so that it is possible to acquire the necessary training in various ways (for example, as a full-time course; on a "sandwich" basis whilst working; or in between work contracts), at various speeds with a variety of access routes and to halt at various stages of the training process. Bearing in mind the position of family day carers in particular, a modular training could offer different levels of qualification, depending on how many modules have been undertaken. For those who have a 16-19 vocational training, and have been employed in services for a long time, there should be opportunities to acquire the more sophisticated training, on the same grant eligible, module based system, but with recognition given to work experience.

In addition, as in any well-run workplace, training should be regarded as continuous. There should be regular opportunities for staff discussion, planning and in-service training, and these should be built into the paid working week as non-contact time. All staff, including auxiliary staff, should have access to these training opportunities. Staff responsible for cooking, for instance, should also have in-service access to dietary, nutritional, and health and safety training, and be regularly involved in planning for the religious and cultural requirements of children's diets.

There has also been an active debate in Europe about the employment of men in services. The target proposed here draws on a recommendation made at a Network seminar held in Glasgow in 1990⁹. It refers to men working at all levels, including directly with children, and not concentrated in managerial posts.

8. A report on the seminar, *Childcare Workers with Children under Four* (1990), is available in all languages except Finnish and Swedish.

9. A report of the seminar, *Men as Carers for Children*, is available in all languages except Finnish and Swedish. A discussion paper specifically on the issue of employing men in services for young children, *Men as Workers in Childcare Services*, is available in English, Danish, French, Dutch, Italian and Spanish.

In proposing the target, we realise that the issue is very sensitive, In some countries, the employment of men in services has led to major concerns about child abuse; we recognize these concerns but do not regard them as justification for not employing men. Another concern is that increasing men's employment in what is traditionally a woman's sphere of employment might reduce job opportunities for women. However, our targets envisage a substantial increase in levels of services, ensuring increased male employment without reducing women's opportunities. We also envisage that an increase in men working in services for young children should be matched by the parallel programme to increase women's access to areas of employment traditionally dominated by men.

We see an increased presence of men in services, working directly with children, as a means to challenge gender-stereotyped roles, as being beneficial for children and as a means to encourage greater involvement by fathers. So despite the concerns and difficulties, on balance we consider a target is justified and important.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING TARGETS FOR STAFF EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

TARGET 25: All qualified staff employed in services should be paid at not less than a nationally or locally agreed wage rate, which for staff who are fully trained should be comparable to that of teachers.

TARGET 26: A minimum of 60% of staff working directly with children in collective services should have a grant eligible basic training of at least three years at a post-18 level, which incorporates both the theory and practice of pedagogy and child development. All training should be modular. All staff in services (both collective and family day care) who are not trained to this level should have right of access to such training including on an in-service basis.

TARGET 27: All staff in services working with children (in both collective and family day care) should have the right to continuous in-service training.

TARGET 28: All staff whether in the public or the private sector shall have the right to trade union affiliation.

TARGET 29: 20% of staff employed in collective services should be men.

EXAMPLES

DENMARK: There is a mix of services, including day nurseries, kindergartens and mixed age centres, either run directly by local authorities or publicly funded and independently managed. The basic training is a 3.5 year, post-18 course, which can be undertaken on a modular basis. Many take the course as mature students, having first worked as untrained assistants in a centre. About 60% of the workers in Danish centres have this

basic training; workers are also entitled to continuous training. There are Trade Unions for trained and untrained centre workers, as well as for family day carers, and most workers in services for young children belong to one of these Trade Unions.

SPAIN:LOGSE required all those working with children aged 3-6 years, and 50% of those working with under threes, to be trained as teachers. A series of pilot training courses at universities was launched which offered opportunities to long-serving but unqualified workers to obtain the necessary qualification on an in-service basis and an 8 year dispensation was offered for unqualified workers to become fully trained. LOGSE also required local authorities to offer continuous training to those employed in education services. In the city of Barcelona, for example, in a five-year period the number of trained staff working in centres with children under three years rose from 20% to 80%. Nursery workers are employed for 36 hours, of which 6 hours in non-contact time set aside for in-service training and meetings. Nurseries are given a budget to employ their own training consultants to work on the curriculum or management areas they consider most relevant.

ITALY: In the region of Emilia-Romagna, where the nurseries are run as non-hierarchical collectives, continuous training is regarded as extremely important. Every year, the region organises in collaboration with local authorities, a programme of continuous training for workers in services for young children. In 1993, for example, 246 training courses were organised, funded by the region and municipalities; nearly 7,000 workers participated, including 3,900 from nurseries (*asili nido*) and 2,900 from nursery schools (*scuole dell'infanzia*).

In some areas of the country, services for young children provided by local authorities are supported by “*pedagogical coordinators*”; these support workers have a relevant degree and specialized training, as well as having direct experience of working in services. In Emilia-Romagna there are about 150 coordinators, each of whom works with a group of 5-6 nurseries and nursery schools. They are specifically responsible for organising the continuous training of workers and for developing projects to improve quality and act as a link between the local community, the services and research institutions.

■ VII. ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH TARGETS

DISCUSSION

Environmental standards are sometimes called “hardware targets”. That is, such aspects as size of rooms and number of toilets are easy to measure and count. Because they offer an incontrovertible standard they are sometimes given undue prominence in regulatory measures. We believe that although such targets are necessary, the approach – as with ratios – should be a broad one. The basis on which any discussion of environmental standards should rest is whether the environment meets the pedagogic aims of the service, as well as basic health and safety requirements.

‘Space is liberty’. This is a widespread view about the developmental needs of young children. The freedom to explore their environment, inside and outside, to move freely, and to have sufficient rest is important for the motor, social and intellectual development of young children. In some countries, notably Italy and Denmark, there are clear views about how pedagogic aims should determine the environment for children. In their view the organisation of light, space and colour shapes the activities which take place within it, and creates the atmosphere in which they can be pursued.

In these countries the capital investment in the design and provision of premises has been considerable. The physical environment of nurseries has become a matter of architectural, design and planning interest, whether the building is prefabricated, new-build or a conversion of existing property. In other countries no such interest is evident. Buildings are strictly functional, poorly prefabricated or inadequately converted from other uses. In some cases the need to meet space requirements has deterred any investment in services; and in yet others, whilst the public sector has been required to meet such criteria, the private sector is exempt from them. The need for security in some vandalized areas is regarded as precluding aesthetic – or any other – considerations.

Providing premises which meet space and other requirements frequently involves substantial capital outlay, and may be particularly difficult to achieve in urban areas where there are medieval, renaissance or other buildings of historical interest; where there is a high density of population; or where there is a substantial risk of vandalism. Conversely, rural areas, where populations are sparse, may make it difficult to justify capital investment, and more flexible solutions will be sought. Targets suggested here reflect the need to take account of such factors.

Our targets also allocate more space for children under three than over three because of the need to accommodate to their more complicated feeding, toileting and sleep patterns as well as to their play and learning.

Young children and those looking after them should be entitled to an environment which meets publicly acceptable health and hygiene requirements, and fire and safety regulations. On the other hand, such regulations have sometimes been devised to meet very different circumstances and may be applied rigidly and inappropriately in services for young children. The health and safety inspectorate scrutinizing services should have some knowledge of the aims and objectives of the services they inspect. Health, safety and hygiene requirements also differ considerably from country to country and reflect cultural as well as economic differences.

As discussed above, research strongly suggests that staff conditions influence the quality of the service. Working with young children is demanding and in most countries it is a recognized feature of collective services that adults have their own space. This space is needed for rest, administration, meetings and the use of parents: in other words to plan and organise collective life.

The cultural and social significance of food preparation and consumption varies considerably between countries. In some countries it is not an exaggeration to say that a midday meal is the pivot of the day. The range, quality and freshness of the food are constantly considered, eating is an important social occasion, and nutrition and time and place for digestion are health issues. In other countries food is a minor consideration, and where it is provided, it is pre-packaged and/or delivered from outside, and consumed as quickly as possible with little attention to its nutritional, educative or social potential. At the very minimum, cultural, nutritional and dietary requirements of young children must be considered.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH TARGETS

TARGET 30: All services, whether in the private or the public sector, should meet national and local health and safety requirements.

TARGET 31: The planning of the environment and its spatial organisation, including the layout of the buildings, the furnishings and equipment should reflect the educational philosophy of the service and take account of the views of parents, staff and other interested parties.

TARGET 32: There should normally be sufficient space, inside and out, to enable children to play, sleep and use bathroom facilities, and to meet the needs of parents and staff. This should normally mean:

- internal space of at least 6 sq metres for each child under three years and of at least 4 sq metres for each child 3-6 years (excluding storage and corridor or through-way space)
- direct access to external space of at least 6 sq metres per child
- an additional 5% of internal space for adult use.

TARGET 33: Food preparation facilities should be available on the premises and nutritional and culturally appropriate food should be provided.

EXAMPLES

GERMANY: The city of Frankfurt in 1985 commissioned a programme of 35 new nurseries, some of them on extremely difficult irregular sites. An architectural competition was held and new young architects were commissioned to design each nursery individually, with the proviso that they should appeal to children and that the structural space should support the children in their social learning as well as in their sensory learning. The designs had to incorporate ecologically sound use of heat, light and water; fit in with their surroundings; and reflect the priorities of the district in which they were located. One project, designed by a painter-architect is a kind of fairy-tale castle with onion domes and cozy corners, and the whole building is covered by a meadow planted with trees. Another building was on four storeys, and the lack of open space was compensated for by providing graduated terraces to the rear of the building, screened from the noise and traffic fumes of the main road.

DENMARK: There are now over 120 “*woodland kindergartens*” in Denmark. In this innovative service for children aged 3-6 years, a special bus staffed by trained workers operates every day (whatever the weather) to take children from the towns where they live into the countryside where they spend the day. There are campfires, huts built by children, and appropriate seasonal activities organised by the workers.

■ VIII TARGETS FOR PARENTS

DISCUSSION

Family lifestyles and structures have changed considerably in the last twenty years. It is accepted in most countries that parents and carers are diverse and that family structures vary. The first step has been for service providers to accept such diversity in the arrangements they make with and for parents. There has been increasing recognition that parents have a right to expect information about the progress of their child, but also information and decision-making powers on the activities that are provided, the rationale for them and on the resources that are used.

Some countries have arrangements where parents have a formal or semi-formal role as representatives in local or district management in early years services. In some countries there has been an additional stress on complaints procedures, that is on the right of parents to appeal or complain if they feel that they have been unfairly treated, and systematic procedures for investigating such complaints.

Young children are usually very close to their parents and using services is their first experience of separation. In most countries it is customary to have some introductory procedures for children starting to use a service, and some informal contact at the beginning and end of the day.

Most services for young children are local services and the children who attend them come from the local neighbourhood. The neighbourhood may be ethnically or socially diverse, but the diversity may not be reflected in the admissions to the service nor in the activities which take place in the service nor by the staff who work in it. The services should interact with the neighbourhood and beyond; for instance use swimming pools or gyms; visit local exhibitions, museums, parks or other places of interest; help organise local events or carnivals; visit local workplaces; patronise local shops; and travel on local transport. In depressed and vandalized inner city neighbourhoods, although there may be more resources outside than in the immediate neighbourhood, the daily reality of life for the local community cannot be overlooked, and the nursery or centre may well play a wider supportive role in helping to articulate local pressures and struggles.

In some countries there is an explicit attempt to avoid age segregation, and to see services for young children as one of many ways in which adults and children can enjoy one another's company. Services for young children can also open their doors to other groups, old or young, during the day or on weekends and during holidays.

In many countries there are close links between services for young children and other educative, social or district services, and the services, of whatever kind, fit in with the requirements of the larger system, but also contribute to their wider planning and political agendas. There has been some public discussion in a number of countries about the need for nursery education to make links with the formal school system; but rarely does the school system initiate contact with, acknowledge the contribution of, and systematically follow through the work undertaken by services for young children.

THE NETWORK RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING TARGETS FOR PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY

TARGET 34: Parents are collaborators and participants in early years services. As such they have a right to give and receive information and the right to express their views both formally and informally. The decision-making processes of the services should be fully participative, involving parents, all staff, and, where possible, children.

TARGET 35: Services should have formal and informal links with the local community or communities or district.

TARGET 36: Services should adopt employment procedures which emphasize the importance of recruiting employees who reflect the ethnic diversity of the local community.

EXAMPLES

FRANCE: In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in nurseries run by parent associations (*crèches parentales*); as well as managing these centres, some parents work with the children alongside regularly employed qualified workers. The number of places in *crèches parentales* has increased from 1,630 in 1986 to 8,300 in 1993. Their development has been encouraged by the Government through support from the *contrats enfance* programme and other sources of public funding; parents contribute about 35% of the cost, with the remainder coming from public funds.

PORTUGAL: *St. Amaro nursery school* is in a remote rural area. The teacher in charge is a man who works with one helper, a woman. The nursery school is open from 09.00 to 16.00 with an hour for lunch. It is for children aged 3-6 years, and 14 children attend. Children print their own school journal which is distributed in the local village, make their own cheese and are involved in other agricultural projects. They visit local shops, farms and factories. Parents come to work with the children on harvest projects and for traditional festivals. The goal is to integrate the nursery into the local community.

DENMARK: There is a long tradition that parents and staff collaborate closely over individual children and the everyday routine of services. Cooperation between staff and parents takes place via daily discussions, meetings with groups of parents and informal gatherings (for example for a meal, an outing or a lecture): these activities are very popular. But from 1993, parents also have more formal influence on the services their children attend. Services run by local authorities, which account for about 60% of all services for young children, must have a committee with parents making up a majority of members. These committees take decisions about the budget and overall pedagogical policy, and participate in decisions about the employment of new staff.

ITALY: In many municipalities, a great deal of attention has been given to the role of parents in services for young children. At the formal level there are elected management boards, established under municipal regulations, with parent and staff representatives; group or class meetings; and special meetings or assemblies. At the informal level, there are parties, outings, evening workshops and individual interviews between staff and parents, as well as daily greetings and communications.

UNITED KINGDOM: UK provision is diverse, but some publicly funded nurseries, usually those run by voluntary organisations, describe themselves as “community nurseries”. All children and all staff come from the local community. The nurseries cater for working parents and offer educational opportunities to non-working parents through informal classes and courses, for subjects as diverse as parenting skills and yoga or writing clubs. The nurseries are run by management committees, comprising parent, staff and community representatives. The management committee may have total control over finances and appointment of staff, as well as deciding on pedagogic aims and equal opportunities policies. Such nurseries may have extensive links with other groups in the local community, such as family day carers or out of school clubs, or even social clubs for the elderly, and offer them practical help and accommodation.

NETHERLANDS: A national association for parents using childcare, BOinK (*Belangen vereniging van ouders in de Kindergarten*), has been set up and funded by the Department of Welfare. BOinK will represent parents’ interests at a national level, and also provide advice and information at a local level.

IX PERFORMANCE TARGETS

DISCUSSION

It is relatively easy to provide **quantitative** measures of progress, such as numbers of children attending, costs, etc., but it is more difficult to provide **qualitative** measures. Yet these are as or more important. In a previous document (**Quality in Services for Young Children**) we have tried to raise some questions about quality – what it is and how it might be measured. These qualitative measures should be at the heart of an assessment and evaluation programme. Is the service fulfilling its objectives? Is the curriculum a rich one? How are workers and managers alerted to progress or problems in the service?

At the beginning of this report, we made the point that the goals or targets enumerated are interdependent. It is attention to a wide spectrum of criteria which constitutes high quality, not merely the qualities or activities of individual workers, however important they may be. In some countries there has been consistent public and professional attention given to a range of aspects of quality in services for young children – which is why some countries feature more prominently than others in our examples. In other countries, although there may be examples of outstanding practice, they are untypical, the exception rather than the rule.

Children are at the heart of the service and assessment most often focuses on the child who attends the service. There may be some assessment of children's progress, although it might take a very different form, depending on whether the perspective is an educational one or a social one. Sometimes this assessment is carried out with the help of parents, but more often it is a solely professional assessment. Precise monitoring of each child is time-consuming and may not always be useful. But some measure of progress and discussion between parents and staff, formal or informal, about what happens to a child on a daily, weekly or monthly basis is often welcome to parents as well as providing a necessary perspective on how well the service functions. In some cases not only is the progress of the individual child monitored but also the progress and cohesion of the group of which she is a part. In other countries the notion of group and group progress is somewhat meaningless.

In a collaboratively organised service, or services, where staff and parents regard themselves as being involved in a joint enterprise, assessments by parents of the service are important. This can be done in a variety of ways, through joint evaluation procedures or through questionnaires to parents.

In some cases, performance measures incorporate regular feedback from staff. The weekly working hours of staff include a percentage of time for collective as well as for individual training, and part of this time is given over to team or collective self-evaluation. In other systems, if it takes place at all, evaluation of staff is seen as a hierarchical and personal event, a senior member of staff offering supervision or counseling to a more junior member of staff using a casework model of practice.

Coordinators/inspectors/supervisors/consultants/researchers may offer an external, formative evaluation of progress. In some services there is a particular emphasis on research, and close links have been developed between the services and local research institutions, in order to provide an independent and rigorously critical analysis of the functioning of the services.

Services in a number of areas have collective management practices, and have deliberately rejected hierarchical notions of management at a service level. All staff are graded similarly for pay and conditions of service, and all carry the same responsibility for tasks. Elsewhere, more hierarchical systems have been developed, in extreme cases adopting internationally accredited management systems adapted from industry.

Whichever system is practiced, some oversight and direction of all the targets and standards is neces-

sary to develop and maintain “the ethos” of the nursery or collective setting.

In other countries, an external registration and inspection scheme is regarded as the best way of maintaining standards. However such a system depends on the framework of standards adopted for inspection and the resources available to providers to improve standards, and if either of these is limited, no amount of inspection will succeed in raising the standards beyond a certain point.

As we stressed at the beginning, in the section on financial targets, policies, however well meaning, are unworkable without the resources to implement them. More money spent does not necessarily make a better service; but where services are seriously underfunded, in crumbling or vandalized buildings, with inadequate or ill-paid staff, and few practical resources, the daily strains are intense. On the other hand, generous funding, without accountability, can also lead to malpractice.

The calculations about the cost of a service are rarely straightforward. One of the arguments commonly advanced in favour of the private sector is that all costs of necessity are extremely carefully calculated and the balance of income and expenditure is always known: the service is therefore more efficiently run. In the public sector costs may not be so carefully calculated; costs are historic, and/or subsumed under a variety of headings, and/or calculated for the service as a whole but not for individual parts of it. Comprehensive calculations are usually difficult, and workers in the service, and sometimes administrators, know little about the expenditure they incur and would find it difficult to estimate a per capita cost per child. Despite these problems, showing how money is managed and providing a financial account to parents and users of the service is the bottom line of the accountability of the service.

THE NETWORK PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING PERFORMANCE TARGETS

TARGET 37: Services should demonstrate how they are fulfilling their aims and objectives and how they have spent their budget, through an annual report or by other means.

TARGET 38: In all services children’s progress should be regularly assessed.

TARGET 39: The views of parents and the wider community should be an integral part of the assessment process.

TARGET 40: Staff should regularly assess their performance, using both objective methods and self-evaluation.

EXAMPLES

ITALY: Several municipalities in north and central Italy have worked, with the University of Pavia and training agencies, on developing parameters of quality, which include pilot projects for self-assessment, and evaluation systems which incorporate educational, organisational and management viewpoints. Some municipalities have additionally produced a cost analysis of services, which offers a breakdown of different aspects of the service, and at a management level, makes it possible to produce a quality/cost ratio.

BELGIUM: *Kind en Gezin*, the public agency which monitors and funds non-school services for young children, on behalf of the Government of the Flemish Community, has developed measurement scales to assess the educational environment in nurseries taking into account a number of quality dimensions. These scales are administered by Inspectors from *Kind en Gezin* during periods of participatory observation, lasting on average 4 hours per nursery. The scales have been used since mid-1992, and an evaluation is planned during 1994.

■ CONCLUSION

Quality Targets in Services for Young Children is the response of the European Commission Childcare Network to the task set it in the Community's Third Action Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men – “*to establish criteria for the definition of quality in childcare services*”. The report puts forward 40 targets, organised under nine headings which the Network believes all Member States can achieve within 10 years. Each of these targets is realistic and, as shown in the examples given, has already been achieved within one or more Member States. The targets, however, are inter-dependent, forming a totality; they are not intended to be considered or developed in isolation.

The targets are the result of ten years' work by the Network, whose members have brought a wide range of experience and perspectives to this work. It has been a genuine exercise in cross-national exchange of experience and collaboration. The targets reflect a convergence among members of the Network about principles and objectives in services for young children.

This convergence, however, is combined with recognition of diversity at all levels – from individual Member States – and the value of this diversity. The targets do not require standardisation of service systems, philosophies or methods of working, but support for common objectives and principles and a commitment to work for their application to services.

Reaching these targets would not be the end of the search for quality; that is a dynamic and continuous process, involving regular reflection and review. But reaching the targets would go a long way towards assuring equal access to good quality services for all young children in the European Union. Good quality services for young children are a necessary part of the economic and social infrastructure. Equal access to these services is essential for equality of opportunity between men and women; the well being of children, families and communities; and productive economies. It is a goal to be espoused at all levels – local, regional, national and European – and a goal for which all of these levels can and should work together.

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