

CHILDCARE SERVICES

Childcare governance

In Finland and Sweden local (municipal) authorities are responsible for providing childcare. The central government identifies goals, formulates guidelines and sets financing rules. In both countries, municipalities have to provide pre-school services and out-of-school-hours care as required by parental work commitments. In Sweden, this obligation concerns all children of one year and older, but unlike Finland, parents do not have recourse to the judicial system to exercise this right. In Finland, the childcare guarantee concerns all children who are not yet old enough to go to primary school (age seven in both countries). Throughout the year, Swedish municipalities have to provide a childcare place “without unreasonable delay”, i.e. within three to four months upon application. Legislation on local service provision may set general rules on basic standards, but otherwise does not provide an excessive number of detailed provisions on the nature and scope of service provision. Hence, the systems allow for variation in service provision across municipalities.

In England, each local authority is now expected to develop, plan and coordinate childcare and pre-school services including nurseries, children’s centres, day-care services, playschools and out-of-school-hours care. Working with their partners through children’s trusts (partnerships including local community representatives, Jobcentre Plus, schools, health agencies, NGOs and commercial private childcare providers), local authorities are responsible for local childcare facilities to serve local needs.

Types of childcare service

The provision of childcare services in Finland differs across municipalities, but broadly speaking there are three types of childcare: centre-based day-care facilities, group family day-care centres, and home-based family day care (Table 1). Most centres provide full-time care, i.e. services that start at 7.00 a.m. until the late afternoon (5.00 or 6.00 p.m.). Finnish municipalities also organize supervised play activities and open day-care centres, providing social networks for parents (and their children) who would otherwise provide personal care at home on a full-time basis. In 2000, Finland launched its “pre-school programme” for six-year-olds and municipalities have to offer this pre-school educa-

tion for free and comply with the new core preschool curriculum. In general this type of pre-school education is provided for five hours per day starting at 9.00 a.m. There are a few private day-care centres in Finland, covering 2 percent of children under age three and 4 percent of three to six-year-olds. Often such private centres provide specific services (e.g., an emphasis on music classes or foreign languages), and they are generally more expensive than municipal day care.

In Sweden, municipalities operate the pre-school facilities, which are largely centre-based day-care facilities. The obligation for municipalities to provide day care in line work requirements means that in general childcare centres are open from about 6.30 a.m. or 7.00 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. Since 2003, municipalities also have to provide free access to pre-school centres to all four to five-year-old children and pre-school classes for six-year-olds. To complete the scope of service provision, there are open pre-school services for parents who would otherwise provide full-time parental care, but who wish their children to interact with their peers for a few hours per day.

UK childcare policy has traditionally relied on private sector provision of day-care facilities, and as a result there is great variety in the type of childcare services that is available (Table 1). The multitude of services includes day care centres as, for example, day nurseries, children centres and family centres, and family day care services through childminders all registered with the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). “Sessional” day care, for example, in playgroups is typically available for children from two years of age, for about four or five hours per day. In addition, there is the free early education offer for all three- and four-year-olds of 55 free two and one-half hour sessions per term for six terms before reaching statutory school age – the first term following their fifth birthday. In the United Kingdom, the prevalence of providers varies with the type of service. Full day-care services are largely commercial (75 percent), while play groups are often organised by NGOs and churches. Out-of-school-hours care is likely to be organised by either NGOs or local authorities, while the free early education offer is predominantly organised by local authorities.

Participation in childcare

The use of childcare services by very young children is highest in Sweden (Table 2, Panel A). In 2002, about 370,000 children or 80 percent of all one to

five-year-olds in Sweden made use of a formal childcare service. Already 45 percent of children not yet two years of age use childcare, and childcare attendance grows rapidly when children get older: about 85 percent of the two-year-olds use formal childcare. In the other countries, the use of childcare among children not yet three years of age is much more limited. In Finland and Scotland about 45 percent of two-year-olds use a formal childcare service, while in these two countries, the use of childcare by children before their first birthday is highest in Scotland at 12 percent. In both England and Scotland just over a quarter of all children under age three uses formal childcare. By contrast childcare use among older children generally exceeds 90 percent in the year directly prior to entering school (Table 2).

Table 2, Panel B shows that in Sweden almost 90 percent of children age one to five are in centre-based care while only 10 percent use a family-based setting (use of family day care is particularly low among those not yet two years of age). Formal care in family-based environment is also uncommon in England and Scotland. By contrast, formal family-day care is common in Finland.

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Reference

OECD, *Babies and Bosses, Reconciling Work and Family Life*, vol. 4, Canada, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom, Paris 2005.

Table 1

Diverse childcare services
Main characteristics of care facilities for children

	Age group	Type of providers	Overview of the service
FINLAND			
<i>Children aged 0–6</i>			
Day-care centres	4 months to 6 years old	Mainly run by municipalities	
Family day care		Operated by municipalities or private	
<i>Three-family day care</i>			Two or three families alternate to take care of children in a home-based environment. Generally on a full-time basis
<i>Group family day care</i>			Two or three childminders provide care in a facility generally provided by local authority. Generally full-time care
Playground activities	6 years old	Operated by municipalities or private	Care provided up to ten continuous hours
Open day-care centre		Operated by municipalities or private	
Preschool classes		Public	
<i>Children aged 7–12</i>		Mainly based in schools	Free "morning and afternoon" sessions provided in comprehensive schools for pupils in grade 1 and 2 (7 and 8 years old). Three hours per day arranged between 7.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m.
SWEDEN			
<i>Children aged 0–5</i>			
Preschool centres		Centre-based facilities mainly run by municipalities	Full-day care provided from 7.00 a.m. to 6.30 p.m.
<i>Family-based</i>			
Open pre-school		Family-based care provided by childminders Services providing collective activities for children who otherwise do not use pre-school facilities	Services provided for a couple of hours per day
<i>School-aged children (6–12)</i>			
Out-of-school care		Provided mainly in schools but also in childcare centres ("leisure time activities" centres)	

Table 1 (continued)

	Age group	Type of providers	Overview of the service
UNITED KINGDOM			
<i>Children aged 0–5</i> Full day-care centre	0–5 years old	Includes services provided outside the home. Most frequent are day nurseries (for-profit or not), Children's centres and family centres. Nursery schools can also provide care for children between three and five	Childcare provided for at least four hours per day
Sessional care	0–5 years old	Includes playgroups or crèches that offer short term childcare while parents are unable to look after children	Childcare is organised by session of less than four continuous hours per day. Children can attend two session per day but not more than five sessions per week
Nursery schools	3–4 years old	Provided by public, private sector and voluntary sector (in Scotland). Free of charge for parents when provided by the public sector and often at only a residual charge in the private sector	Educate preschool aged children. Generally open school hours (9.00 a.m. to 3.30 p.m.) during term time, sometimes morning only. Children usually attend for half a day
Childminders	Usually up to 8 years of age	Private service of a self-employed person who provides day care for more than two hours per day; usually based in the childminder's own home, with flexible hours	Childcare is provided according to parents needs
<i>School-aged children (5–12)</i> Out-of-school care	5–12 years old	Includes summer camps, holiday play schemes, breakfast clubs, after-school clubs. A range of activities are offered including sports, drama, arts, and crafts and music	

Source: OECD (2005).

Table 2

Use of childcare

Panel A. Participation of children in formal childcare is highest in Sweden			
Participation rate in education and care facilities, % of the child population concerned			
	Age 0– <3	Age 3 to age of compulsory school ^{a)}	Children under school age
Finland	25% 1% for <1-year-old children 28% for 1– <2-year-old children 44% for 2– <3-year-old children	68% 61% for 3– <4-year-old children 68% for 4– <5-year-old children 72% for 5– <6-year-old children 94% for 6– <7-year-old children are enrolled in free pre-school ^{b)}	50%
Sweden	65% 45% for children under 2 85% of children at age 2– <3	89% for 3– <4-year-old children 91% for 4– and 5-year-old children	81%
England	26% ^{c)}	82% 97% for 3– to 4-year-old children ^{d)} 93% for 3– <4-year-old children 100% for 4– <5-year-old children	
Scotland	27% 12% for <1-year-old children 23% for 1– <2-year-old children 47% for 2– <3-year-old children	80% 94% for 3– <4-year-old children 100% for 4– <5-year-old children 40% for 5– <6-year-old children	

Panel B. Children of all age-groups use centre-based care		
Proportion of children in each type of care		
	Age 0– <3	Age 3 to age of compulsory school ^{a)}
Finland		
Family-based care	48%	30%
Centre-based care	43%	62%
Other	9%	7%
Sweden		
Family-based care	10%	10%
Centre-based care	90%	92%
England		
Family-based care	9%	10%
Centre-based care	26%	40%
Pre-school	6%	48%
Other (nannies, au pair)	10%	14%
Scotland		
Family-based care	18%	6%
Centre-based care	82%	16%
Preschool facilities		78%

^{a)} Mandatory school age is 7 in Finland and Sweden, and 5 in England and Scotland. – ^{b)} Preschool is provided at age 6 in Finland and Sweden, 3 in the United Kingdom. – ^{c)} Estimates for year 2001 from Woodland, S., M. Miller and S. Tipping (2002), "Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare", Department for Education and Skills Research Report, No. RR348 London. – ^{d)} Office for National Statistics, Provision for children under 5 years of age in England, January 2004 (provisional). Available data for England is not directly comparable with information for the other countries, as data include non-regular care (e.g. baby-sitting services not included elsewhere), and because data have not been adjusted for multiple use of formal childcare services by one and the same child.

Source: OECD (2005).