

OECD Country Note

OECD – Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Norway

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purposes of the Thematic Review

This Country Note for Norway is an output of the OECD *Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy*, a project launched by the OECD's Education Committee in March 1998. The impetus for the project came from the 1996 Ministerial meeting on *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*. In their communiqué, the Education Ministers assigned a high priority to the goal of improving access and quality in early childhood education, in partnership with families, with the aim of strengthening the foundations of lifelong learning (OECD, 1996). The goal of the review is to provide cross-national information to improve policy-making in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries.¹

Norway is one of twelve countries participating in the review between 1998 and 2000. The others are Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries provide a diverse range of social, economic and political contexts, as well as varied policy approaches toward the education and care of young children.

The scope of the review covers children from birth to compulsory school age, as well as the transition to primary schooling. In order to examine thoroughly what children experience in the first years of life, the review has adopted a broad, holistic approach to study early childhood policy and provision. To that end, consideration has been given to the roles of families, communities and other environmental influences on children's early learning and development. In particular, the review is investigating concerns about quality, access and equity with an emphasis on policy development in the following areas: regulations; staffing; programme content and implementation; family engagement and support; funding and financing.

As part of the review process, each country hosts a review team for an intensive case study visit. After each country visit, the OECD produces a short Country Note that draws together background

¹ A detailed description of the review's objectives, analytical framework, and methodology is provided in OECD (1998a).

materials and the review team's observations. The present report for Norway will be one input into the final OECD Comparative Report that will provide a review and analysis of ECEC (early childhood education and care) policy in all 12 countries participating in the review.

Norway's participation in the Review

Norway was the second country to be visited in the review. Prior to the visit, a Background Report on ECEC policy in Norway was prepared by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (BFD, 1998). Guided by a common framework that has been accepted by all participating countries, the Background Report provides a concise overview of the country context, major issues and concerns, distinctive ECEC policies and provision, innovative approaches, and available evaluation data. The Background Reports are an important output of the review process, because they provide a state-of-the-art overview and analysis of policy and provision in each participating country.

After analysis of the Background Report and other documents, a review team composed of OECD Secretariat members and experts with diverse analytic and policy backgrounds (see Appendix 1) visited Norway from 30 November to 9 December 1998. The 10-day visit was co-ordinated by the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (*Barne- og familiedepartementet* - referred to below as the BFD). In the course of the visit, the team met with many of the major actors involved in ECEC policy and practice and had the opportunity to observe a number of examples of early childhood programmes for 0-7 year olds in Norway (see Appendix 3). Discussions revolved around six main issues:

- 1 the ECEC context, major policy concerns, and policy responses to address these concerns;
- 2 the roles of national government, decentralised authorities, NGOs and other social partners, and the institutional resources devoted to planning and implementation at each level;
- 3 feasible policy options that are suited to the Norwegian context;
- 4 the impact, coherence and effectiveness of different approaches;
- 5 innovative policies and practices, and their potential for replication;

- 6 types of data and instruments that exist, or should be developed, in support of ECEC policy-making, research and evaluation.

Structure of the Report

The Country Note presents the review team's analyses of key policy issues related to ECEC in Norway. It draws upon information provided in the Background Report, formal and informal discussions, literature surveys and the observations of the review team. In addition to the present introduction which forms Chapter 1, the structure of the report is as follows:

Chapter 2: *Contextual issues shaping ECEC policy in Norway*. This section includes an overview of some demographic, labour market, gender status, economic and governance features. The selection does not do justice to the complexity of the Norwegian environment but will allow the reader an introduction to the context in which policy making for children takes place.

Chapter 3: *Overview of current ECEC policy and provision in Norway*. The description focuses on the broad structure of the system. Information is provided also on the respective roles of central and local government and on the policy context in which decisions concerning young children are made.

Chapter 4: *Issues arising from the visit* outlines the more important issues related to policy and practice in ECEC that were identified by the reviewers in the course of studying the Norwegian situation. The seven issues chosen are listed in the table of contents.

Chapter 5: *Conclusions* offers some concluding remarks that policy makers in Norway may wish to consider in their discussions of early childhood policy and provision.

Acknowledgements

This report acknowledges the rapid development and attention to early childhood education and care in Norway, in particular in the past 20 years, and the strong commitment to further improvement that was evident among all the groups that we consulted. We would like to thank, in particular, all those involved in preparing the Background Report and the comprehensive programme for the team review visit. The reviewers also wish to place on record their appreciation of the hospitable, open and informative meetings that were held throughout the review process and the extensive documentation that each group provided.

Throughout the Country Note, the analyses and suggestions offered are tentative, in recognition of the difficulty facing a visiting review team - no matter how well briefed - in fully grasping the variety and complexity of a country-wide system and the range of issues that need to be taken into account. While all the members of the team are experienced as researchers and policy analysts in the field of ECEC, they are clearly influenced by their own cultural perspectives and histories. A ten-day fieldwork period, even when multiplied by the number of members of a team, is limited in terms of the amount of data that can be collected and verified. The survey method employed relied heavily, therefore, on ethnographic cross-checking approaches and further feedback from experts in Norway.

The facts and opinions expressed in the Country Note are the sole responsibility of the review team. While we have received every help from the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs and from many researchers and practitioners in Norway, they have no part in any shortcomings which this document may present. To mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or error, it is assumed that the Country Note will be read in conjunction with the Background Report issued by Norway, as the two documents are intended to complement one another.

Terminology

All Norwegian terms are explained throughout the text. The predominant form of non-parental ECEC for children below compulsory school age is the *barnehage* (plural: *barnehager*), which means literally 'children's garden' or kindergarten; these institutions vary considerably in terms of ownership, management, and funding. The main responsibility for *barnehager* and for the well-being of young children under six lies with the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs (BFD). The age for compulsory school attendance in Norway is now set at six years. The school day in the first four grades is only 20 hours a week, that is, four hours a day. Children may therefore spend as much or more time in services providing care and recreation for school-age children outside school hours as in school itself. Responsibility for out-of-school care (*Skolefritidsordningen* or SFOs), as also for schools and training of *barnehage* staff, belongs to the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. Many local authorities - *kommuner* - have moved to integrating responsibility for *barnehager*, SFOs and schools into one department. The currency of Norway is the Norwegian Kroner (NOK). In June 1999, 100 NOK = 12.56 USD = 12.20 EUR.

Chapter 2: Contextual issues shaping ECEC policy in Norway

Demography

Norway is a country with a large land mass (323,899 km²) and a relatively small population of nearly four and a half million people, about a million of whom live within the boundaries of four main cities with a population of over 100,000 - Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger. Overall, the population density, at 13 people per km², is the lowest on mainland Europe (except for the Russian Federation). By contrast, the population density in France is 106, in the Netherlands 373 and in the United Kingdom 243.

In 1996, children (that is, aged 0 to 15) made up just under a fifth of the population (down from 26 per cent in 1960), while older people (65 and over) accounted for 16 per cent of the population (up from 11 per cent in 1960)². Norway has a relatively high fertility rate by European standards, 1.89 (total period fertility rate) in 1996, compared to 1.5 across the 15 member states of the European Union. Like the rest of Europe, however, the fertility rate is below the level required for population replacement (2.1) and has been since the mid-1970s. Between 1986-90 and 1996, the fertility rate increased from 1.82 to 1.89, and the annual number of births has likewise increased, from 50,000 children in 1984 to 61,000 in 1997.

Also like the rest of Europe, Norwegian women are having children at later ages. The average age of women giving birth increased from 26.9 years in 1980 to 28.9 in 1995 (the same age as the average for the EU). Women's average age at first child - when they enter motherhood - was 26.3 in 1994, having increased from 25.2 in 1980.

Nearly half of all births are now outside marriage (48 per cent in 1995), twice the EU percentage, and only equalled by other Nordic countries. Many of these births are to cohabiting but non-married couples, and are not an indicator of lone parenthood. In 1997, over a fifth of families with children (22 per cent) were headed by a lone parents (19 per cent by lone

mothers, 2.5 per cent by lone fathers), towards the higher end by EU standards, though slightly below the 23 per cent of the UK, the EU member state with the highest proportion of lone parent families.

Labour market and employment

The female employment rate at 74 per cent is well above the EU and OECD averages (57 per cent and 59 per cent respectively). Maternal employment rates are high: in 1996, 72 per cent of women with a child aged under 3 were employed, 77 per cent with a youngest child aged 3 to 6, and over 80 per cent of women with a youngest child aged 7 or older. Just over half of employed mothers with a child under 7 work in part-time jobs. Labour force participation of women has increased from around 45 per cent in 1970 to nearly 70 per cent in 1997, including substantial increases in labour force participation amongst women with children; in 1965, approximately nine out of 10 mothers with young children were not employed, while today the situation is almost reversed. Norwegian women have high levels of labour force participation over their working lives, both in absolute terms and in relation to other countries. OECD estimates that between the ages of 25 and 64 Norwegian women will be employed for 29 years and spend 10 years out of the labour market, compared to an average across all OECD member states of 22 years and 16 years respectively (that is, Norwegian women spend, on average, 7 years longer in employment than women in all OECD member states). Indeed, only Swedish women are estimated to spend longer in employment over this 40 year period of the life-course, at 32.5 years (OECD, 1998c).

There is no comparable information on employment rates among Norwegian fathers. However, the same OECD estimates show that Norwegian men are likely to spend 4 years longer in employment, between the ages of 25 and 64, than Norwegian women and 4.5 years less out of the labour market. Norwegian men also spend slightly longer (under 2 years more) in employment than the OECD average (33.2 years compared to 31.5).

Overall, Norwegian men still have rather higher employment rates than Norwegian women at all ages,

² Unless otherwise stated, the figures in this section come from Council of Europe (1996), OECD (1998 b) and Statistics Norway (1998)

as well as overall (73 per cent compared to 63 per cent among 16 to 74 year olds in 1996). But the difference is small and has been falling; for example between 1980 and 1997, labour force participation amongst all age groups of men either fell or remained unchanged, whilst it grew for all age groups of women except those over 66 years. Employed men however work longer hours on average than employed women (39.5 hours a week compared to 30 hours, in 1996), being much less likely to work part-time (10 per cent compared to 46 per cent). Overall 89 per cent of employed men work 37 hours a week or longer compared to 46 per cent of employed women.

Two factors help to explain the high level of employment among Norwegian women. First, Norway has a high level of employment in the service sector, which accounted in 1996 for 72 per cent of the workforce, compared to 64 per cent in OECD overall and 65 per cent in the EU - and employment of women is traditionally higher in the service sector than in manufacturing. Second, Norwegian women have high and rising levels of education, and exceed those of men in younger age groups; for example, in 1996, 27 per cent of men aged 25-29 but 34 per cent of women had completed education at college or university level, compared to 24 per cent and 19 per cent men and women aged 50 to 59 years. In 1995, 59 per cent of college students and 53 per cent of university students were women.

The OECD estimates of employment, referred to above, show clearly the relationship between education and employment. Norwegian women who have had tertiary education are expected to spend 35 years in employment between the ages of 25 and 64 and only 5 years out of the labour market. While women with education below upper secondary level are estimated to spend only 21 years in employment, not far short of the 17 years they are estimated to spend out of the labour market.

Gender

The high level of employment among women can also be seen as a reflection of the more general position of women in Norwegian society: substantial movement towards equality, but full equality yet to be achieved. In addition to an improving position in employment and education, outlined above, Norwegian women are increasingly represented in political institutions: in 1998, 47 per cent of Cabinet ministers, 36 per cent of members of the *Storting* (parliament) and 33 per cent of *kommuner* (local authority) politicians were women. Amongst full-time workers, women's

earnings in relation to men's have been rising without yet achieving parity (and it must also be remembered that, as noted above, employed women are far more likely than men not to work full time). In some areas, however, women remain very under-represented: for example, in 1992/93 only 10 per cent of board members of Norway's 200 largest private companies were women and there were no women managing directors, while in 1997 only 6 per cent of the most senior civil servants (secretary general level) were women, 5 per cent of officers in the military and 23 per cent of judges.

The movement towards equality occurs within, and is promoted by, a policy framework. A Gender Equality Act was introduced in 1979, which also established a Gender Equality Ombudsman and a Gender Equality Appeals Board. The introduction to *Women and Men in Norway 1998* notes that

these measures [that is, the Act] and others for promoting women's status in working life and politics characterised the policy in the late 1970s and 1980s....[But] the policy towards the year 2000 is aimed at improving equality within areas that have traditionally belonged to the private sphere. In the years ahead, equal pay, child care and violence against women will be especially important areas....the division of work between women and men will be in focus. An equality-oriented care policy will be based on the equal rights and responsibilities of both parents. This means the protection of mothers as employees and focusing on men's role as fathers (p.3).

Time use studies in 1990/91 show that on average Norwegian men spend just over two and a half hours a day on domestic work, while Norwegian women spend just under four and a half. Put another way, men devote 70 per cent of total work hours to paid work and 30 per cent to unpaid work including housework and care of children, while most working time for women is spent on unpaid work (58 per cent). However, as discussed below in relation to the new cash benefit scheme, these issues of gender roles in the 'private sphere' remain contentious, with gender equality and other policies not always consistent in direction.

Standard of living

Norway has a high economic standard of living. In 1996, per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$36,020, surpassed among other OECD states by only Switzerland, Luxembourg and Japan. Purchasing

Power Parities (PPPs) indicate economic living standards in relation to the cost of goods and services in each country³, and therefore provide a better basis for cross-national comparisons. Applying PPPs, Norway still occupied the fourth position among OECD states (with, in 1996, per capita GDP at \$24,364), still behind Luxembourg (\$32,416) and Switzerland (\$25,402), but now also behind the United States (\$27,821) but ahead of Japan (\$23,235). On both counts, Norway has the highest economic standard of living among Nordic countries.

One final economic indicator seems of great importance in setting the Norwegian context. Only 4.4 per cent of children (aged 0 to 17 years) live in poverty, defined as having an equivalent household income below 50 per cent of adjusted equivalent income for all individuals. Moreover, this estimate for 1995 is little different to estimates of 3.9 per cent for the mid-1980s, suggesting little if any deterioration in the economic position of children. By contrast, the figure for the whole population is 8 per cent, with highest poverty levels among 18 to 25 year olds (17.7 per cent) and men and women over 75 (31 per cent).

Several factors seem to contribute to this low level of child poverty. First, the tax and benefit system has a substantial redistribution effect: before taxes and transfers, 13.3 per cent of children would have been in poverty. Second, the high level of parental employment outlined above boosts income, with an average after-tax income in households consisting of couples with children of 375,000 NOK in 1996. Third, Norway

has relatively low levels of unemployment, just 4.9 per cent in 1996 compared to an OECD average of 7.3 per cent and an EU average of 10.9 per cent (furthermore youth unemployment of over 12 per cent both contributes to the relatively high poverty level among 18 to 25 year olds, and implies unemployment rates below the 4.9 per cent average among parents).

Government

Norway has three levels of government: national government, with 16 ministries plus the Office of the Prime Minister; 19 counties (*fylker*), each led by a governor appointed by national government; and 439 local authorities or communes (*kommuner*). In general, there is a high level of decentralisation to communes, who have responsibility for example for primary health, care of the elderly, child welfare, early childhood services and primary and lower secondary schools. Upper secondary schools, hospitals and some more specialist services are the responsibility of elected bodies operating at county level (*fylkeskommune*).

In 1995, when Norway was running a budget surplus, current government expenditure as a proportion of GDP was nearly 46 per cent (compared to 34 per cent in the US, 42 per cent in the UK, 50 per cent in the Netherlands, 52 per cent in France and 64 per cent in Sweden). Total tax receipts of government were 41.5 per cent of GDP, similar to the EU average (at 41.8 per cent) but above the OECD average of 37.4 per cent.

³ OECD defines Purchasing Power Parities as being the rate of currency conversion which eliminates the differences in price levels between countries; so that a given sum of money, when converted into different currencies at these rates, will buy the same basket of goods and services in all countries.

Chapter 3: Overview of current ECEC policy and provision in Norway

The ECEC system in Norway

In some respects, Norway has a very simple system of early childhood education and care services (see Table 1 for a summary of information). The main provision for children from birth to compulsory school age (now six years, but seven until 1997) is the *barnehage* (literally 'children's garden' or kindergarten), and this (and other provision for children below compulsory school age) is the responsibility of one Government Ministry and one local authority department. *Barnehager* bring together two separate traditions: the educationally-focused *barnehage*, which first appeared in Norway at the end of the 19th century, influenced by the pedagogical ideas of Friedrich Fröbel; and the *daghjem* (literally 'day home'), whose precursor was the *barneasyl* (literally 'children's asylum'), first established in Trondheim in 1837, and whose purposes were more explicitly social, focusing on the needs of poor families, especially those in the labour force.

The first legislation covering both types of institutions was in 1953 and the first state funding in 1963. The first legislation that treated the two institutions as one was in 1975. Over time, therefore, these two traditions - the one more educational and middle class, the other more social and working class - have been brought together in today's *barnehager*, which are viewed as having an integrated care and educational role; indeed care and learning are seen as inseparable activities, an issue discussed further in Section 4. The 1995 *Barnehager Act* states that the first purpose of the *barnehager* is to 'provide children under school age with good opportunities for development and activity'.

Provision in *barnehager* grew very slowly - until the 1970s, since when it has grown very rapidly. In 1970, about 5 per cent of three and four year olds attended, and less than 1 per cent of children aged under three. By 1985, just over a quarter of children under seven (28 per cent) attended. By 1997, attendance had reached just over half for children under six years (51 per cent). The most rapid growth occurred in the 1990s; between 1993 and 1997, attendance rates for children aged one to five years grew from 47 to 60 per cent⁴. Moreover, attendance rates have increased

substantially despite increasing numbers of children as fertility rates have increased over the last ten years (see para. 13 above).

The 51 per cent attendance in 1997 represented 184,500 children at 6,240 *barnehager*. Very few of these children are under twelve months (just 1,580 or 3 per cent of the age group), in part a consequence of a well developed parental leave policy discussed below. Attendance increases by age: 31 per cent for one year olds, 49 per cent for two year olds; 68 per cent for three year olds and three quarters of four and five year olds (74 and 77 per cent). Attendance also varies according to the *kommuner* in which children live, as there are great local differences in levels of access: 6 per cent of *kommuner* offer access to less than 40 per cent of one to five year olds, 22 per cent to 70 per cent or more. There is no consensus about the reasons for these local differences, but they seem to include varying demand and economic conditions, and local political priorities. (On several occasions, it was suggested that more remote, rural and smaller *kommuner* have an interest in establishing good services to encourage families with young children to remain). It is the Government's goal that all children whose parents wish it should have a place in a *barnehage*, full-time or part-time, by the year 2000.

Some children, about 6 per cent, attend *barnehage* for a half day or less (that is, 15 hours a week or less), while just over a quarter (28 per cent) attend for 16 to 30 hours a week. Two-thirds of children attend for 31 hours a week or more, and most of this group (92 per cent) for more than 40 hours a week. Attending *barnehage* for longer hours (that is, over 30 hours a week) is more common among children under three years (72 per cent) than among children aged between 3 and 5 years (64 per cent).

Although there is one predominant type of institution in the Norwegian early childhood education and care system, the *barnehage*, these institutions vary considerably in terms of ownership, management and funding. Just under half of *barnehager* (47 per cent) are public, in the sense that they are owned and

⁴ The variation in age range used in official attendance statistics (e.g. 0 to 6, 0 to 5, 1 to 5) should be noted.

Table 1: selected information on barnehager in Norway

	Barnehager		
	Public	Private	Total
Number of places in barnehager (1997)			
- aged 0-2	28,138	21,941	50,079
- aged 3-5	79,409	54,750	134,159
- total (aged 0-5)	107,716	76,798	184,514
Proportion of age group attending barnehage (1997)			
- 0-1			3%
- 1-2			31%
- 2-3			49%
- 3-4			68%
- 4-5			74%
- 5-6			77%
- 0-6			51%
Total central government subsidies			
- 1990			1,921,000,000 NOK
- 1998			4,280,000,000 NOK
Annual average expenditure per place (1996)			
- child aged 0-2	100,000 NOK	90,000 NOK	
- child aged 3-5	50,000 NOK	45,000 NOK	
Sources of funding (1996)			
	%	%	
- parent fees	29	46	
- state subsidy	36	39	
- kommuner subsidy	28	8	
- other income	7	7	
Persons employed (1997)			
- styrere			6,145
- pedagogiske ledere			9,757
- assistents			27,054
- bilingual assistents			1,164
- other teaching staff			2,679
- other persons			4,994
- total			51,793

managed by a *kommune* (local authority), while the remainder are private (although as public *barnehager* are rather larger on average, they account for 58 per cent of all children attending). Private *barnehager* are owned and managed in a variety of ways - by parent groups, non-profit organisations, for-profit businesses and so on, although most operate as non-profit organisations.

All *barnehager* receive a state subsidy, all parents make payments for their children's attendance and all *kommuner* subsidise the public *barnehager* that they own and manage. However, *kommuner* vary in their policy towards subsidising private *barnehager* - some welcome private *barnehager* and give them the same support as their own *barnehager*, while others do not. The consequence is that there are, in effect, three types of *barnehager*, at least in relation to funding:

public; private which receive local authority support; and private which receive no local authority support. Consequently, the funding profile of public and private *barnehager* varies considerably: both get just under two-fifths of their costs from national government subsidies (36 and 39 per cent), but public *barnehager* get a larger slice of funding from local authority subsidies (28 per cent compared to 8 per cent), while private *barnehager* are much more dependent on parental fees (46 per cent compared to 29 per cent). Income from other sources accounts for 7 per cent of expenditure in both types of *barnehager*.

In 1988, the *Storting* (Norwegian parliament) agreed that the share of costs between the State, local authorities and parents for *barnehager* - whether public or private - should be 40/30/30. But as the above figures show, in practice the actual share of costs can be very

different for private *barnehager*. In 1996, total direct public expenditure on *barnehager* (that is, excluding tax relief discussed below) came to just under 6.6 billion NOK, of which 4.3 billion NOK came from central government and 2.3 billion NOK from local government (of which only 0.4 billion NOK went to private *barnehager*).

Because of the variations in public funding, parental fees are higher in private than public *barnehager* - except in those *kommuner* which operate a policy of equal treatment between the two types of institutions. Parental fees also vary between local authorities, and not only depending on whether or not a *kommune* subsidises its private *barnehager*. In some cases, the fees are the same for all families irrespective of parental income, in other cases some account is taken of parental income; and while nearly all *kommuner* reduce parents' fees for families with more than one child attending *barnehage*, the level of reduction varies, from 20 to 50 per cent. The net effect of this variable relationship between parental fees and ability to pay is that higher income parents pay less proportionately for a place in a public *barnehage* than lower income parents; it has been calculated that in 1998 the average annual *barnehage* fees for a family with an annual income of 100,000 NOK would be 19,530 NOK (that is, 19.5 per cent); 27,168 NOK for a family with an income of 250,000 NOK (that is, 11 per cent); and 29,572 for a family with an income of 375,000 NOK (that is, 8 per cent).

The total cost in 1996 of a place in a public *barnehage* was 100,000 NOK per year for children under 3 years and 50,000 NOK for children aged 3 to 5 years - although it should be stressed that this is an average figure, and some *kommuner* are actively working to find ways to reduce costs. Private *barnehage* costs are, on average, about 10 per cent less. This difference in cost is due to several factors, including lower staff costs in private *barnehager*, due for example in some cases to differences in wages, pension schemes and use of unpaid work. Of particular significance is the fact that public *barnehager* are more likely than private *barnehager* to have children with disabilities or otherwise in need of extra support (discussed in par. 65 ff. below).

To round off this picture of the Norwegian system, four other types of provision should be mentioned. First, there are *åpen barnehager* - 'open kindergarten' - where children attend with a parent or other carer. Then, there are family day carers, who can be divided into two groups. There are private family day carers, offering a totally private service to parents; and there

are family day carers organised into some kind of network - a *familiebarnehager* - which again may be publicly or privately managed and which is supervised by a trained *barnehage* worker, that is, one trained pre-school teacher to provide teaching guidance per 30 children. Thus, for example, in one area we visited, there were two *familiebarnehager* organised by the *kommune*, each one with 3 or 4 family day carers, and each with a base (in a *barnehage*) and support workers. Both children and their family day carers visited the base on a regular basis. Toys and equipment were provided from the base and children could be cared for at the base if for some reason their family day carer could not care for them. Family day carers were salaried employees, paid approximately the same as an untrained *barnehage* worker (that is, up to 190,000 NOK a year with additional allowances for food, heat and other expenses).

There are no official statistics on the total number of family day carers. In 1997, the tax authorities had about 10,000 family day carers registered as paying taxes, but there is also known to be a 'black market'. In a survey commissioned by BFD, in 1997-98, of parents with a child aged 2-3 years, 49 per cent said they cared for their child themselves, 37 per cent used a *barnehage* and 8 per cent a family day carer.

The fourth form of provision is the *Skolefritidsordningen* (SFO), which provides care and recreation for school-age children (now from 6 years upwards) outside school hours. School starting age has recently dropped from 7 to 6, resulting in 6 year olds now being in school and using SFOs, rather than being in *barnehage*. The school day in the first four grades is only 20 hours a week, that is, 4 hours a day; children may therefore spend as much or more time in SFOs as in schools. The service is mainly located in schools, although it varies whether SFOs have separate accommodation in a school or not. In some schools they do, in others they mainly use school classrooms. The costs are divided between the State (3,200 NOK part-time to 4,600 NOK full-time per year); parents (fees once again varying between local authorities); and the *kommune* (all costs of accommodation, heating, cleaning, management and extra staff for children with special needs). Attendance rates at SFOs for children vary considerably between local authorities, but in the two schools visited by the review team, attendance was very high, e.g. 80 per cent of 6 to 9 year olds in one, where 130 children attended the SFO, and 29 out of 42 6 year olds at the other school.

In conclusion, we can see a system of ECEC dominated by group care in a particular type of centre, the *barnehage*, although there are considerable variations in the details of ownership, management and funding. The importance of this type of provision has grown over the last 15 to 20 years. In 1980, for example, the proportion of children aged 0 to 6 years cared for in *barnehager*, in private family day care or by relatives was very similar; by 1995 *barnehager* provided for considerably more children than the other two types of provision combined. Over the intervening period, the proportion of children at relatives and private family day care hardly changed, while the proportion at *barnehager* nearly trebled.

Staffing in ECEC

Barnehager have three main types of staff: *styrere*, head or leader of the *barnehager*, responsible for management; *pedagogiske ledere*, or trained teacher; and assistants. Out of a total workforce of 51,800 in 1997, 12 per cent were *styrere*, 19 per cent were *pedagogiske ledere* and nearly half (52 per cent) *assistents*. The remaining staff included 'bilingual *assistents*' (that is, working with children and parents from minority ethnic groups) (2 per cent), 'other teaching staff' (e.g. staff working with children with disabilities) (5 per cent) and 'other persons' (e.g. janitors and cooks) (10 per cent) (see Table 1). From these numbers, it can be seen that *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* account for a third (34 per cent) of all employees working directly with children. Moreover, due to shortages of trained staff, it has been necessary for some years to give dispensations to some *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* to work in these positions without having the otherwise necessary qualifications. In 1997, nearly a fifth of these staff (19 per cent) had such dispensations.

The legislative requirement from which such dispensations are sought requires all *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* to have qualified as a ECEC teacher (that is, both types of staff have the same basic training). This training takes three years of full-time study (although it is possible to take a four-year part-time 'distance learning' training, often used by mature students with some previous experience of work in *barnehager*), and takes place in 17 state colleges, alongside (but separate from) a variety of other vocational training, including school teaching (the course for which lasts 4 years), as well as in one private college specialising in early childhood training (Queen Maud's College of Early Childhood Education in Trondheim) and at a Sami College in the most northerly county of

Finmark. Admission to pre-school teacher education normally requires the completion of a three year study in general subjects at the upper secondary level.

To try and meet the rapid increase in demand for trained staff in *barnehager*, training places have more than trebled between 1987 and 1997, and between 1992 and 1997 the number of admissions to courses increased by 71 per cent; however the number of admissions fell sharply between 1997 and 1998 (by nearly 20 per cent), leaving some empty places. This reflects a falling off in applicants, which began in 1995, but was very marked in 1998. Moreover, there has been a drop in the grades of students admitted to courses, implying a drop in applications from better qualified students.

Although no special qualifications are required of *assistents*, a recent reform of upper secondary education has introduced a new apprenticeship model of training, consisting of two years of school and a further two years of apprenticeship in a workplace. One area for this new apprenticeship training is 'health and social studies', which includes an option for 'child and youth workers', covering work in *barnehager*, SFOs, clubs and other services. The first cohort of trainees completed their 2+ apprenticeship in 1997, when 1374 qualified. In 1998, the number was 1774. Likewise, there are no regulations concerning the training and qualifications of any staff in SFOs, some of whom may however have the new *assistent* training.

Trained staff may continue their education to lower or higher degree levels, requiring between four and six years full-time study, although having such qualifications confers no financial advantage. More generally, employers are responsible for providing further training and upgrading courses for their staff. In the public sector, there is a collective agreement about the development and training of staff, including five days per year when *barnehager* are closed for staff training and planning work. All local authorities must have development plans for their staff. In some *kommuner*, staff in private *barnehager* are enrolled into these plans as part of the local authority's support and supervision. However as with local subsidies, this depends on the policy of the *kommune* in relation to private *barnehager*.

The starting salary for staff in a *barnehage* depends on training and position. According to the May 1998 collective agreement between the local authorities and trade union, the minimum permitted is 160,700

NOK per year for *assistents*, 194,100 NOK for *pedagogiske ledere* and 227,300 NOK for a *styrere*. After 10 years work, the minimum salaries are 184,000 NOK for an *assistent* and 220,100 NOK for *pedagogiske ledere*. Higher salaries may be negotiated locally.

A school teacher (with an extra year of training) has a rather higher salary than *pedagogiske ledere*, starting at 220,000 NOK. S/he also has rather different working hours. The *barnehage* worker has a standard working week of 37.5 hours, which includes 4 hours for planning and other 'non-contact' work and the 5 days a year for further training. By contrast, the school teacher has 39 working weeks a year, one week of which is for training and planning, and is expected to teach 25 lessons a week of 45 minutes each; five hours a week are for other organised tasks at school and the remaining working time for planning and other 'non-contact' work. Trained pre-school workers who have moved into school as a result of the recent educational reform (discussed below) have a higher salary than their colleagues in *barnehager* (starting at 201,300 NOK a year) and similar working hours to school teachers, thus emphasising the discrepancy between work in *barnehage* and school.

Most staff in *barnehager* are female; in 1997, men constituted just under 7 per cent of all staff and 5 per cent of *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* (12 per cent of students training to be *pedagogiske ledere* were men). The Government is concerned to increase the level of male workers, setting a target of 20 per cent by 2000 and introducing a programme of action to support this change; most recently, in 1998, it has been determined that positive action measures can be adopted to favour male applicants for work in ECEC. This public commitment reflects a political view, shared by most parties, that men need to take an increased role with children, especially as carers. This emphasis on men as carers has two main motives: gender equality (with men needing to assume more responsibility for children as women take a fuller part in the labour market); and the right of children to meet both men and women. Male workers are seen as particularly important for boys; as childhood gets more institutionalised, and with only 14 per cent male teachers in schools for 6 to 10 year olds, boys can grow up never meeting male workers - in the words of the Government's Framework plan, 'since the great majority of children are likely to attend [*barnehager*], it is worrying from a gender equality perspective that [these institutions] seem set to remain a women's environment'.

Responsibility for ECEC

Since its inception in 1990, *barnehager* have been the responsibility of the BFD, and within the Ministry, of the Department of Child Care and Family Affairs. The Ministry also has responsibility for child welfare (in the Department for Child and Youth Affairs), while both the Ombudsman for Gender Equality and the Ombudsman for Children and Childhood are administratively attached to the BFD, although autonomous in their actions. The BFD has a wide remit for children, and has adopted a co-ordinating role on children across all Government Ministries. Each year the BFD presents a budget for children and youth, which brings together into one document the expenditure affecting children and young people from all Ministries, setting forth the Government's policy and goals in different areas together with the available government grants. In 1998, it convened a cross-ministerial Committee for Child and Youth issues, which meets regularly at a senior official level. The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs has responsibility for schools, SFOs and the training of *barnehage* staff.

The development of *barnehager* has been accompanied by a process of decentralisation of government (both in relation to this form of service, but also more generally). Until the mid-1970s, *barnehager* had to meet rather detailed and strict national guidelines and standards. But responsibility for ECEC at the local level has been increasingly devolved to the 435 *kommuner*. For example since 1984, local authorities have had the possibility to experiment with their political and administrative organisation, including their committee structure, being able to get dispensations to try new arrangements. This led to legislation in 1993 which gave all *kommuner* the right to decide on such matters. As a result of this loosening of central control, most local authorities have moved to integrating responsibility for *barnehager*, SFOs and schools into one department, and some have gone even further, integrating other child-related services (e.g. child welfare) into 'Departments of Growing Up'.

Another example of decentralisation is the devolution, since 1989, of certain responsibilities from the county governor (representing the central government) to the *kommuner*, leaving the main role of the county governor to administer state grants to *barnehager* and provide local authorities with information and some general supervision. Thus, responsibility for approving new *barnehager* and for granting temporary dispensations from educational requirements for *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* now belongs

to the *kommune*. Decisions of the *kommune* may be appealed to the county governor.

There is a national regulatory framework for *barnehager* provided by legislation, in particular the *Barnehager Act 1995*. This legislation lays down some staffing requirements, including a ratio of one *pedagogiske ledere* per 14-18 children over 3 years and one *pedagogiske ledere* per 7-9 children under 3 years, when the children attend for more than six hours per day, and that *styrere* and *pedagogiske ledere* should be trained ECEC teachers. However it gives considerable discretion to local authorities and individual institutions, for example to fix overall staffing ratios and to provide dispensations to unqualified staff, as well as more generally offering the possibility of adapting to local needs and conditions.

All *barnehager* have to be approved by their local *kommune*, which are also responsible for their supervision. Each local authority decides on how it will undertake supervision and inspection. Local authorities can also set conditions on private *barnehager*, in return for providing financial support. However private family day carers only need to be approved if they are part of an authorised family day care system (*familiebarnehage*) and are receiving state grants.

Another example of this general approach, of a national framework combined with decentralised implementation, is the *Framework Plan for Barnehager*, produced by the BFD in response to a decision of the Storting and introduced in 1996. The aim of the *Framework Plan* is 'to provide *barnehager* staff and co-ordinating committees with a binding framework to follow when planning, implementing and evaluating the content of their institution'. The plan sets out 'binding objectives for *barnehager*; requirements as to quality in everyday social interaction; five subject areas which all children attending *barnehager* should experience during the year (society, religion and ethics; aesthetic subjects; language, text and communication; nature, environment and technology; physical activity and health)'. However, while stressing that the *Framework Plan* sets binding objectives and sets expectations, the document is also at pains to avoid setting detailed guidelines, and freedom, adaptation and variation at local level are emphasised. Each local authority has a responsibility for the implementation of the Plan in individual *barnehage* - but it is for the individual *barnehage* to decide how to apply the Plan, through producing its own annual plan.

Decentralisation therefore goes beyond the *kommune*, to the individual *barnehage*, with considerable discretion and autonomy given - in principle at least - to these institutions and to both staff and parents. The 1995 *Barnehager Act* specifies that each *barnehage* shall have a parents' council, comprising the parents of all children attending, and a co-ordinating committee comprising equal numbers of parent and staff representatives. The former, according to the legislation, should promote the parents' shared interests and has the right to express an opinion in matters of parents' relationship to the *barnehager*, while the latter is defined as an advisory, contact-creating and co-ordinating body, which in particular should discuss the aims and practice of the *barnehage*, including having responsibility for drafting the annual plan for the *barnehage*.

Policy context

There are many policy areas which bear on the present and future position of ECEC in Norway. In this section, we will confine ourselves to four areas of particular importance.

Parental and other forms of leave to support working parents

A period of statutory paid³ parental leave of either 52 weeks at 80 per cent of normal pay or 42 weeks at 100 per cent (up to a specified maximum level) is available per family in connection with the birth of a child; in the case of adoption, the periods are 49 or 39 weeks. In fact this leave is technically maternity leave, although leave can be freely transferred to the father; however, the father's entitlement to leave depends on his partner's employment record (the mother has to have been employed in 6 of the 10 months prior to the birth for eligibility to leave). The mother must take three weeks of the leave prior to the birth and six weeks after the birth, while there is now a quota of four weeks which can only be taken by the father.

In addition, since 1994, a time account scheme has been introduced to make the leave entitlement more flexible. This means that parents can use part of their parental leave period as a time account which they can draw on to work shorter hours while receiving an equivalent proportion of their benefit to make up earnings loss. For example, they can choose to work 50, 60, 75 or 90 per cent full-time - either by working

³ Payment for statutory leave is a national responsibility, financed by the National Insurance system and administered by local Social Security offices.

a shorter day or fewer days per week; so converting their full-time leave entitlement into a longer period of reduced working hours with a reduced benefit payment stretched over the longer period. This time account period can be used for between a minimum of 12 weeks and a maximum of 104 weeks.

Basic parental leave is widely used. In 1998, all mothers who were eligible⁶ for paid parental leave took advantage of this benefit (so reducing demand for ECEC for children under 12 months), and the recent introduction of a four weeks' leave quota for fathers has led to an immediate high rate of take-up by men⁷. The time account scheme is not widely used. A survey has shown that only 1.5 per cent of the fathers and 3.5 per cent of the mothers used the time account scheme in 1996.

In addition to this parental leave and time account scheme, employees with a child under 12 years of age are entitled to up to 10 days paid leave per year if the child is ill. Parents with more than two children are entitled to 15 days a year. As this is an individual right, that is, each parent is eligible, lone parents are entitled to 20 days leave. Leave may also be taken under the same conditions if the person responsible for the child's care is ill. Additional leave is available to employees with chronically ill or disabled children under the age of 16.

School starting age

For many years, compulsory schooling began at 7 years, but for some 30 years there has been a debate in Norway about lowering the age to 6. From 1991, it became possible to experiment with various options, including taking 6 year olds into primary school. But as part of a major educational reform introduced in 1997, compulsory school age was reduced to 6 years. The reform emphasised that the first four years of school (grades 1 to 4) should draw on the traditions of both *barnehage* and school, with the first grade (for 6 year olds) placing particular emphasis on play.

⁶ In 1998, 73 per cent of mothers were eligible for paid parental leave, which means that 27 per cent were not eligible either because their income was very low (an annual income below 22686 NOK) or because they had not been employed for 6 of the past 10 months prior to birth.

⁷ Before the introduction of a period of leave reserved for fathers, only 1.2 per cent of fathers took some period of leave. In 1998, under the new quota arrangement, 78 per cent of eligible fathers have taken the leave period reserved for them (Statistics Norway, 1998)

Staffing in Grade 1 is shared between school teachers and ECEC teachers, and ECEC teachers may work with Grades 2 to 4 following a one year conversion course.

This change has had three immediate consequences. First, it has freed some space in *barnehager*, previously used by 6 year olds. The government has encouraged this provision to be used for children under 3. Second, it has changed the environment and experience of 6 year olds, from the *barnehage* to a mixture of school and SFO. Third, it has had an impact on the early years of schooling because of the emphasis in the reform on bringing together *barnehage* and school traditions.

Children with special needs

Barnehager are recognised as having an important role for children with various special needs, including children with disabilities and those deemed to be at risk or from families who need preventative work. Since the creation of a law in 1975, linked to the closure of special schools, all children with special needs have, according to the Primary School Act, a legal right to special education/special educational help before school age (there is no lower age limit). The municipalities are responsible for providing this help and for funding it. According to the Barnehage Act, children with disabilities shall be given priority admission to a place in a *barnehage* provided that it is deemed by expert assessment that the child will be able to benefit from attending the *barnehage*. The expert assessment shall be undertaken in collaboration with the parents. In such cases, the local authority is responsible for providing and financing such support as is needed for the child at the *barnehage*, for example additional staffing.

In 1997, nearly 2 per cent of children in *barnehager* had a disability, and 3 per cent received additional support. As already noted, public *barnehager* have a higher percentage of such children than the private ones. Around 80 per cent of all children with disabilities in *barnehager* are in public *barnehager*. Research has shown that almost all children with disabilities have a place at a *barnehage*.

Children from linguistic, ethnic and cultural minorities have no legal right of access, but the State gives special grants to local authorities who provide *barnehage* places for these groups, to enable the employment of bilingual assistants. The State also finances 15 hours weekly attendance at *barnehage* for eight months for newly arrived refugees. However, attendance by minority ethnic children at *barnehage*

appears to be low, with only 39 per cent in the largest towns having a place according to a recent report.

Other policy measures

In August 1998 the Government introduced a new policy with potentially major implications for *barnehager*, the 'cash benefit scheme'. Under this scheme, the parents of a child aged 12-36 months who does not attend any form of *barnehage* will get a monthly benefit roughly equivalent to the level of State subsidy for a *barnehage* place, that is, 3,000 NOK a month. The reform began for children aged 12-24 months in August 1998 and was extended to children aged 25-36 months in January 1999. Although the main condition of the measure is that a child should not attend the local *barnehage* (or reduce time spent there for a reduced cash benefit), there is nothing to prevent parents who claim the benefit from using some other, private form of care, such as private family day care.

The argument to support this measure is that it enhances parental choice and is more equitable, since it ensures similar public subsidies to parents whether or not their child has a place in a *barnehage*.

In addition, the measure was thought likely to have consequences for *barnehager*, possibly reducing demand for places for younger children. For example, a survey of mothers with pre-school children undertaken a few months before the implementation of the new measure reported that just over a third of mothers with a child at *barnehage* (37 per cent) said they planned to use the new scheme, implying that two-thirds felt, at that point, that they would not do so, leaving their children where they were (overall, including all mothers in the sample whether or not they were already using a *barnehage*, 59 per cent they would use the benefit, 17 per cent said they would not and 24 per cent were undecided). However, at the time of the visit it was too early to judge the actual effects, and how far stated intentions were translating into action.

Finally, there are various forms of financial support for parents, including a universal family allowance for children under 16, with an additional payment to lone parents; a tax allowance (or cash benefit for non-earners) to parents with a child under 19; and a further tax allowance to offset documented expenses incurred in connection with the care of a child under 12.

Chapter 4: Issues arising from the visit

The 'Norwegian Child' and Norwegian Childhood

In Norway, there is a strong idea of how the Norwegian child should be and what it means to live a good childhood. This is reflected both in official documents (for example, the *Framework Plan for Barnehager*) and appeared frequently in conversation with parents, policy-makers and practitioners. This idea of the child and childhood is both productive of policy and practice, but it is in turn reproduced by policy and practice. Who is this child? What is this childhood? Childhood is recognised as an important stage of life in its own right, so that the child is not just important as a 'becoming adult'. In the words of the *Framework Plan for Barnehager*,

*...childhood as a life-phase has a high intrinsic value, and children's own free-time, own culture and play are fundamentally important...the need for control and management of the [barnehager] must at all times be weighed against the children's need to be children on their own premises and based on their own interests.*⁸

Viewed from this perspective, it becomes important to protect childhood from too much adult control and steering. As one *kommune* official put it in discussing SFOs, 'adults should not take childhood away from children, but bring it back to them', while in a wider discussion in the same *kommune*, it was emphasised that 'here and now' is very important, not just the future - childhood is valuable, and not just to be seen as a 'becoming'. The *Framework Plan*, refers to the importance of children's 'free space' being protected, 'to ensure that their lives are not totally controlled by adults'.

The intrinsic value of childhood is also expressed in the idea of 'children's culture', a term used widely by policy-makers (there is a Nordic Council Committee on Children's Culture and the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* refers to children's culture, which is 'passed on and developed by children learning from children'), by researchers and by local managers and

practitioners, for example the head of an SFO who described his objective as creating a 'living children's culture'. Thus children are not only part of a wider culture but create their own, which as one researcher put it involves process, product and a way of living (the product part is described in the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* as 'consisting of children's traditional rule-bound games, song and dance games, nursery rhymes and jingles, riddles, double entendres, jokes and stories that may have been passed on for generations', although it is important to note that like all cultures, children's culture is not simply a process of re-production but of constructing new forms and contents, so that for example a major project in Finland - the *Storyride Project* - is documenting and collecting the stories children tell today as manifestations of children's culture).

The concept of children's culture also reflects a view of children as a social group within society, indeed a 'minority' group, not just dependent individuals. As a group they not only have their own culture, but also their own rights and, through the Ombudsman, their own advocate who has been providing a voice for children as well as finding ways for children themselves to make their voice heard. (Although it was our impression that the Ombudsman's work in this field has been more focused on older children than children below compulsory school age; we were also not clear how far the Ombudsman's work focuses on risks, complaints and vulnerable children, as opposed to promoting active participation of young children in everyday situations such as *barnehage*).

In turn, this leads to priority being given to certain values. Children should be able to participate in and influence the operation of the institutions they attend, the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* for example referring to the importance of children's participation in planning and evaluation. Children should have choice in what they do, which means for example adults not planning and directing them too much. So, for example, an SFO we visited provided no organised activities for two days a week, since they wanted children to make their own choices and initiate their own activities. High value is also placed on social relations, both between children and between children and adults, in particular as the means to

⁸ All quotations from the *Framework Plan* are taken from BFD (1996).

achieve social competence which is also very highly valued - 'it is important to learn to be socially competent', and 'we do this through living a good life with others'.

As a final example, the 'Norwegian child' should live an active and outdoor childhood. Strong emphasis is placed on the relationship between young children and their wider environment, in particular the outdoor environment and more generally, with nature. Apart from being fun and healthy, being outside throughout the year is about learning to live in and with strongly demarcated seasons and extreme weather conditions. Without learning to do this, and enjoy it, then life in Norway can be very constrained and difficult: learn to do it, and Norway offers wonderful opportunities whatever the time of year. In short, being active and outdoors is both an issue of health and an issue of value, or identity.

All these ideas are reflected in the pedagogy (and it is perhaps important to distinguish the concepts of 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogical work', which are strong in the Norwegian *barnehage* tradition, from 'education' and 'teaching' in a school tradition which is associated with more subject-based and formal learning). Children are understood to be competent learners from birth. They learn all the time and in all aspects of everyday life, so rendering any division between 'care' and 'education' meaningless; pedagogical work involves recognising and using all situations as offering opportunities for learning. The *Framework Plan* expresses this view of learning as follows:

Children learn through all experiences. The framework plan builds on a comprehensive concept of learning. This is in contrast to a view in which education primarily involves structuring and imparting a specific body of knowledge in the course of a limited period of time. Care of the child and interaction between the adult and child in care situations is seen as an important area of development through sensory experiences. Learning encompasses both formal and informal learning.

Children also learn through social relationships, with and from other children and other adults. Again in the words of the *Framework Plan* 'children learn to relate to others when they meet face to face in play and other interactions... Relating to others is possibly the most essential lesson learned in childhood'. Play is of central importance, since it 'promotes development in all areas'; learning specific skills or subjects (such as reading) is far less important.

Being outside as much as possible is a high priority in the daily pedagogical practice of *barnehager* (and other institutions for children). The *Framework Plan* emphasises that the *barnehage* has to contribute to:

...familiarising children with plants and animals, landscapes, seasons and weather... an objective is to develop children's love of nature, an understanding of the interplay of nature and between man and nature.... Nature accommodates a multitude of experiences and activities in all seasons and all weathers (emphases added).

We visited one *barnehage* which had access to a huge area of woods and seashore. One part-time group of children there had no indoor base, but are always outside using a Sami-style tent for shelter. The children from the indoor-based groups also spend a lot of time outside. Another *barnehage* has increased the number of children it can take by groups of children taking it in turns to spend a week completely outside (this has also served as a means to reduce running costs). In both schools we visited, children from grades 1 to 4 spend a day a week outside, while the SFOs also emphasise outdoor play (and offer skiing classes in January and February). Nationally, there is a government campaign to encourage children to exercise and be healthy, which is encouraging *barnehager* and schools to promote outdoor activities, active play and exercise.

This idea of childhood also affects ideas about the purpose of *barnehage*. These institutions do prepare children for later, in fact there was much discussion about children (especially from minority ethnic groups) starting school without this experience and their resultant difficulties, such as not having good Norwegian. But there was little discussion of longer-term outcomes, such as the consequences of attendance in relation to later school performance, and, we were told in the Ministry of Education, there is no talk in Norway of 'school readiness' (indeed, as discussed above and later in para 131ff), the recent reduction in the school starting age from seven to six has involved schools changing their pedagogical methods to take more account of the more informal and play-oriented approach of the *barnehager*). The *barnehager* seems to be recognised and valued as a place or forum for early childhood and for being a young child, as well as preparing the young child for later childhood. Thus a politician in one of the ruling parties said that he does not want children to be educated in the same way in *barnehager* as in schools, but wants them to be able to play and develop, put questions, have spare time, talk about their thoughts

and dreams and 'not be pushed by strong goals'. The *Framework Plan* talks about the importance of humour and joy in the *barnehage*, and the part played by the *barnehage* in 'what may be termed a happy childhood'. Perhaps too the *barnehage* can be understood as providing a place for children as a group and for the promotion of children's culture.

Yet there is also a feeling of these ideas of the Norwegian child and Norwegian childhood being subject to challenge or, at least, question. The increase in minority ethnic groups within what has previously been (with the important exception of the Sami) a rather homogeneous society, places this question on the agenda, an issue returned to below. For the moment, however, the situation was summed up by a civil servant who wondered whether Norway wants to give minority ethnic parents the right to choose how their children grow up or 'is Norwegian society so important that parents somehow need to let their children go'. The Ombudsman for Children was deeply concerned about the consequences of consumerism and the emergence of a 'commercial childhood', as businesses increasingly 'target' children; he reported that children are being sponsored by companies to wear their clothes, shoes etc. at *barnehage* or school, as a means of sales promotion, and that companies are looking at ways to get parents to part with money received from the new cash benefit scheme. Concerns were expressed about the decline of physical exercise and outdoor living among children; a researcher noted that this was also a gender and class issue, as girls take less exercise than boys and less educated parents are less likely to play or go outdoors with their children. The same researcher felt that many *barnehager* and schools had inadequate outdoor space (*barnehager* often being left with the space that nobody else wants to use), but argued that this might be resolved by restructuring the space that existed or relocating *barnehager* to areas with more space (if parents drive their children to *barnehage* anyway, why not drive a few kilometres more?). He also suggested that many subjects could be taught more outdoors.

Finally, Norway is particularly interesting because a tension of contemporary early childhood is made particularly visible, that is between discourses of childhood, parenthood or family and gender equality. The tension between the last two will be discussed further below in relation to the cash benefit scheme, and is already rather public through the debates surrounding this measure. Perhaps the tension between childhood and parenthood is less publicly visible. On the one hand there is the child who should

have opportunities for choice, autonomy and participation, should be seen as a member of a social group with its own rights and interests and is a competent learner from birth. On the other hand, there is the child as the responsibility of the parents, who should be given a strong choice in decisions about 'their' child, have the best opportunity to transmit their values to 'their' children, should be (again in the words of a politician) 'in charge'.

Of course, this is not a new debate - it arose also in relation to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the implications of children having their own rights for parents' rights and responsibilities. Nor is it an issue that can be resolved. It is one of the areas of conflict and lack of consensus within which ECEC operates and develops.

Issues of a diverse society

Norway has never been a homogeneous society. There has always been an aboriginal population, the Sami people, currently with a population of about 75,000 or nearly 2 per cent of the population, most of whom live in the northern part of the country or in Oslo. Like a number of other countries, the Norwegian majority appears to be in the process of questioning its past, sometimes oppressive treatment of this aboriginal people and seeking to develop a new, more equal relationship based on recognition of and respect for their identity and culture. For example, a Sami Assembly was established in 1989, elected by the Sami people and playing a consultative role in all questions concerning the Sami population. There are also various Sami media, including a radio station and newspaper.

The 1995 *Barnehager Act* states that *barnehager* 'for Sami children in Sami districts shall be based on Sami language and culture' while the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* has a chapter on Sami Language and Culture which recognises that the 'Sami language and culture are a part of our shared heritage which Norway and the Nordic countries have a special responsibility for defending'. Sami parents, it says, should be able to choose 'whether to seek a place for their children in a Sami or a Norwegian day care institution'. A Sami *barnehager* is defined as

one where the children in the institution have a Sami background...The institution's aim is to strengthen the children's identity as Sami by promoting the use of the Sami language and by imparting Sami culture... [The barnehage] is headed by Sami teaching staff.

The majority of Sami live in the North of Norway, especially in Finnmark and Troms. But there are population settlements elsewhere, and many Sami live in Oslo. In Oslo, there is one small *barnehage* exclusively for Sami children, with Sami workers, but in the North there is more provision of Sami *barnehager*.

We did not meet sufficient Sami people to know how they feel about the early childhood services available to them. However one Sami father we did meet in Oslo pointed out that while he wanted his daughter to know the Sami language and other aspects of the culture, as a Sami he also wanted to live in modernity. The issue, fascinating and unpredictable, is whether and how new and more complex identities are being constructed by Sami children, which draw on different cultural traditions and influences, and whether and how this is addressed in the practice of Norwegian early childhood services.

Over the last 25 years or so, Norway has become a more plural society, as various groups have entered the country for economic, political or other reasons. Overall, these new minority ethnic groups constitute about 3 per cent of the population. In 1996, there were just over 28,000 children in primary school registered as 'non-native speaking', rather less than 6 per cent of all pupils, with the largest group being Urdu speakers (3,800) followed by English and Vietnamese speakers (each about 2,300). The number of children whose mother tongue is not Norwegian has grown rapidly in recent years, having trebled between 1986 and 1996, with a particularly marked increase in pupils from the former Yugoslavia.

As in other European countries, these groups are concentrated in certain urban areas, in particular Oslo and, within the capital, in certain districts. Thus, 16 per cent of Oslo population is from minority ethnic groups, but in one of the neighbourhood districts we visited - Gamle Oslo (Old Oslo) - the proportion was 37 per cent, most from Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia, and including many who came to Norway in the 1970s as economic migrants (as opposed to later migrants seeking refugee status). Again, as in other countries, the minority ethnic population is, at present, a young population, constituting more than half the children in Gamle Oslo, and 27 per cent of children starting school throughout Oslo.

It is important to remember that minority ethnic communities are invariably very diverse, and generalisations can be misleading and dangerous. However, taken overall, the minority ethnic population appears to occupy a relatively disadvantaged economic and

social position, with higher unemployment among women and men, higher reliance on social welfare, higher rates of school 'drop out' and so on. Children from these groups are also less likely to attend *barnehager*, which is viewed by policy makers and practitioners as contributing to poor school performance, not least because many children in these circumstances may start school with inadequate knowledge of Norwegian. Some argued that the new cash benefit scheme would worsen this situation, since minority ethnic mothers were thought more likely to apply for the benefit, not least because they were less likely to have employment or want to work. The substantial level of parental fees also militates against *barnehage* attendance by lower income families (even when children are over 3 and therefore parents are no longer eligible for the cash benefit), amongst whom minority ethnic groups are over-represented, even more so perhaps amongst families where the mother is not employed.

We visited a 'special' project financed by the National Government in Gamle Oslo, which offers a free, part-time *barnehage* place to all 5 year olds in the district in an attempt to address some of these issues and to encourage attendance by minority ethnic children. Part of this project actually shares a building with a 'traditional' *barnehage*, providing for children from 0 to 6, with parents paying fees and mostly used by children of Norwegian origin; while the 'experimental' centre, in contrast, provides part-time provision for five year olds, mostly from minority ethnic groups - and free of charge. The district's political leader described this experimental *barnehage* as part of the political process and one of several projects intended to integrate minority ethnic groups (the aim was to attract all 5 year olds into *barnehager*, but the estimate was that they were managing to attract 60 to 70 per cent). The effect, however, due in substantial part to the fee system operating in Norwegian *barnehager*, was in some ways to increase segregation, through the need to run a twin track system to ensure the possibility of some free places for five year olds.

A distinctive feature of the early childhood system in Norway is its explicit Christian basis. According to the 1995 *Barnehager Act*, 'upbringing in day care institutions shall be in conformity with Christian values'. The *Framework Plan for Barnehager* says, in relation to the basic values of *barnehager*, that they are required 'to base their activity on the fundamental ethics of Christianity which are assumed to enjoy widespread support in the Norwegian populace'. At the same time, 'children from different religions

should be able to feel pride and joy over their religious roots', and owners of private *barnehager* can 'reserve their position on the Act's Christian ideology'. We were not able during our visit to explore how this explicitly Christian value base affected the objectives and daily practice of *barnehager*, nor to consider its implications for developing a system that can be inclusive of minority ethnic children, many of whom might not be Christian. This seems, however, an important and challenging issue in the context of Norway's increasing ethnic diversity.

It seemed to us that Norway was at that stage of becoming a multi-ethnic society when the majority may see the minority as a problem or a challenge, or both, to be helped and integrated but also to some extent controlled and shaped. While the minority ethnic population itself has not the confidence or security to assert itself and make its voice heard. The result tends to be a one way process - 'what can *we* do for *them*?', 'how can *they* participate in *our* Norwegian society?' - with the focus on multi-culturalism (emphasising the need for the majority to recognise and value difference), rather than a process of dialogue and mutual change, which also recognises and addresses issues of racism in the majority population (emphasising the need to address devaluation and power relations). There are a substantial number of minority ethnic workers employed in *barnehager* - but largely as bilingual assistants, rather than as 'mainstream' pedagogical staff.

Perhaps it will be the new youngest generation - of Norwegian and minority ethnic origin - who take the opportunities to construct and explore new identities which are only possible in a multi-ethnic society and provide the possibility of that society learning to live with and benefit from diversity, otherness and confrontation. In this process, early childhood services may have an important role to play, but only if access is open to all, if the workforce comes to mirror the diversity of the population and if issues of multi-culturalism are linked to the development of anti-racist practice.

Policy priorities: the cash benefit scheme and access for all by the year 2000

Norway has two clear policy priorities relating to early childhood: a political goal of access to early childhood services - full-time or part-time - for all children whose parents want them to attend by the year 2000; and the cash benefit scheme, introduced in August 1998, which gives parents of one and two year olds an allowance roughly equivalent to the current level of state subsidy for children under 3 in *barne-*

hager - on condition their young children do not attend this provision (or alternatively, a reduced allowance is paid if children only attend *barnehage* part-time). This raises a number of implementation issues, which we return to below, but more fundamentally, a number of political or ideological issues.

There are three main arguments put forward for the cash benefit scheme. First, it will offer parents a choice between working and using *barnehager* on the one hand, and not working and providing full-time or part-time care for their young children on the other (some political parties wanted to go even further and withdraw all state subsidies from *barnehager*, converting these subsidies into a cash benefit for all parents, who could then use the money to subsidise any type of provision that they chose, that is, all money would follow the child rather than go to the institution). Second, it will introduce more fairness into the system, since previously parents using *barnehager* benefited from a state subsidy for their place, while parents who did not use the service did not receive a subsidy. Finally, the measure is intended to offer parents the opportunity to spend more time with their young children, in the context that many people in Norway believe that parents currently spend too little time with their children. Underlying this is also an issue concerning parental responsibility and values since as one politician said parents do not have enough time to transmit their values to their children; there is a concern about a reduction in parental responsibility and influence.

As well as support for the scheme across a number of parties, preliminary surveys also suggest considerable public support. As already noted, a survey of nearly 2,500 *mothers* conducted in Spring 1998 (that is, before the scheme was introduced) reported that nearly six out of ten mothers eligible for the benefit said they would use it, the rest being divided between 17 per cent who said they would not and 24 per cent who were undecided. Amongst those mothers already using a service for their children, just over a third said they would use the scheme. Significantly, the survey suggested that certain groups were more likely to use the benefit, including mothers in families where only one parent is employed or where one parent works only short hours (presumably usually mothers), mothers with several young children, and mothers in low income families or with lower levels of education.

The arguments against the new policy have been along several lines. First, it is argued that it is wrong to pay people for *not* using services. Second, that

children will lose out as there is a financial incentive for parents to carry on working but remove children from *barnehager*, and place them instead in private (and by implication inferior) arrangements, such as unregulated family day carers (i.e. the parents then pay the private carers roughly the same as they pay in *barnehage* fees, but now get the cash benefit). A variation of this argument is that children who are particularly in need of *barnehage* experience (e.g. from minority ethnic or socially disadvantaged families) will be even less likely to go than at present (and they are currently under-represented in *barnehager*), since parents who send their children both have to pay a fee for the *barnehage* and lose the cash benefit. Finally, there are gender equality arguments, that if 'parents' do take the benefit to reduce work hours or leave the labour force altogether, this means in practice mothers, whose current and longer term economic and employment position will consequently be weakened.

Some of these points are reflected in the report on the proposed scheme prepared by the Ombudsman for Children, in which he regretted that 'the non-use of *barnehage* is a principle in determining the payment of the cash benefit' and expressed concern that 'family economic considerations with respect to the cash benefit will result in a situation where families with small children who really need *barnehage* will choose not to participate'. While the Ombudsman for Gender Equality expressed concern that the cash benefit would make it easier for men to ask their partner to stay at home and more difficult for women to remain in contact with the workplace, increasing further job segregation and unequal pay. Representatives from a neighbourhood district in Oslo with a high minority ethnic population and concerned to increase attendance of children from these groups at *barnehage* believed that the cash benefit would undermine their work, in effect discouraging low income, minority ethnic families to use the service which they felt would benefit mothers and children (applications for the benefit were 75 per cent in this district compared to 25 per cent in more affluent nearby areas).

At the time of the team's visit, it was too early to assess the impact of this measure, although initial reports suggested a high level of applications in some areas; it is therefore impossible to judge the consequences (intended and unintended) of implementation. For example: to what extent will it lead to children being shifted from *barnehager* to cheaper forms of care by parents taking the benefit but continuing in employment (some commune staff

reported that fees charged by private family day carers were increasing in response to increasing demand)? To what extent will it lead to increasing social differences, if less educated and poorer parents do make most use of the benefit, while better educated and higher income parents continue to work and use *barnehager* for young children? To what extent will it lead to a reversal in the process of fathers taking more responsibility for children? Will it lead to parents spending more time with their children and if so will this mean both parents or only mothers? To what extent will it lead to a reduced demand for *barnehage* places for children under 3 years of age, with consequences such as increased fees or *barnehager* closing (a non-profit private organisation running 27 *barnehager* expected to close 4 *barnehager* in the next year, in city areas with high minority ethnic populations, partly in response to the cash benefit reducing demand and forcing up fees for remaining users; a representative from an organisation for private *barnehager* believed the cash benefit scheme would have an 'enormous' impact, with many centres closing, at least unless the public funding to private *barnehager* were improved)?

It may be that a reduction in demand for places in *barnehager* as a result of the cash benefit will make it easier to meet the other policy priority, of a place for all children whose parents want one by 2000. The transfer of responsibility for 6 year olds from *barnehager* to schools in 1997 had already contributed to increasing supply for children under 6 (priority was given to switching the 20,000 places formerly for 6 year olds to providing for children under 3 years). However, there is uncertainty about this since, as outlined above, the impact of the new measure is still unclear. Other uncertainties arise from the effects of increased provision on demand (i.e. demand tends to increase as provision extends), while the level of parental fee also presumably affects demand (so that any attempt to reduce parental fees for children from 3 to 6, discussed further below, might further increase demand, especially from lower income families). The uncertainties in assessing demand are reflected in the BFD's rejection of setting 'national' targets because of major local variations in demand, and have instead developed a survey package for use by communes to help them estimate local demand.

As yet there is no national strategy for implementing the political commitment on *barnehage* places. However, this is currently being addressed. At the time of the visit, the BFD were beginning work on a White Paper for delivery in 1999, which was intended, amongst other issues, to address strategies to meet

the need for access to services. Delivering such a commitment in a decentralised democracy raises difficult issues. There are cost implications. It cannot be done within the existing budget. BFD estimates, based on various assumptions about take-up and cost increases, suggest additional costs ranging from 11.1 to 14.5 billion NOK (these estimates are limited to extra places for children from 12 months to 6 years, and makes no allowance for places for children under 12 months). But even if the State supplies increased resources (and during the course of the visit, the 1999 national budget was agreed and included a cut in planned increases in State funding for *barnehager*), it is not clear how it can be assured that these resources are used for increasing places, at least without applying some degree of direction to local authorities, which would be unpopular and seen as going against the spirit of decentralisation and a tradition in this field of Government not forcing communes. Even if the money is channelled direct by the State to private organisations, the local authorities would still need to provide some additional funding under the present funding system.

If the State does not supply the resources, the situation is, if anything, more difficult. Local authorities would have to raise local taxes, itself unlikely across the board. There is no guarantee that all *kommuner* would do this and channel extra funds to *barnehager* without State direction - which would go against the grain of a decentralised democracy. An alternative approach to influencing the local development of *barnehager* would be to introduce a legal entitlement to a place, as already exists in Sweden and Finland. In this way the *kommuner* could find themselves legally required to ensure that adequate services are delivered. Once again however this raises the issue of how far the State should impose laws on local communes within a decentralised system, and clearly still assumes that additional resources are made available to enable communes to meet their commitments.

Funding of early childhood services

Nearly all centre-based services - *barnehager* - receive public funding. A State subsidy is paid to all centres, public and private, while *kommuner* pay subsidies to their own *barnehager* - but to only some private *barnehager*, an issue to which we return. This leaves nearly all parents contributing to costs by paying fees. These parents' fees vary from commune to commune (from 1,800 to 4,500 NOK per month) and are not always related to income or other family circumstances; consequently, as already seen, families with lower

incomes pay fees that are higher in proportion to income than families with higher incomes. In general, parents' share of total costs is high in relation to total costs (averaging 29 or 46 per cent depending on whether their children attend a public or private *barnehage*) as well as compared to the situation in other European countries⁹.

What is particularly striking is that though there seems to be consensus that attendance at *barnehager* is desirable for children from 3 to 6 years of age, there is no incentive to attend in terms of reduced fees. In this respect, the situation in Norway (and other Nordic countries) is in striking contrast to other European countries with services for this age group in the education system, e.g. France or Italy, where attendance at 'nursery school' / *école maternelle* is free of charge. The problem was thrown into sharpest relief in project in Gamle Oslo, intended to encourage *barnehage* attendance by all 5 year olds, especially from minority ethnic groups, discussed in para. 92 above. It was further highlighted by the district leader's expectation that the district would achieve the Year 2000 target of a place for all children whose parents wanted one - but only because many parents would not want a place because they could not afford the fees!

The high parental contribution is now embedded in a formula for cost sharing approved by the Storting in 1988, which proposed central government pay 40 per cent of costs, and local authorities and parents 30 per cent each. However, no one to whom we spoke knew on what basis this split had been decided, and we were told that there had not been a major political discussion at the time about the formula. The parental share of costs in Norway (and other Nordic countries) raises important issues. It seems to have its origins in the development of services for young children, outside the education system and originally as a means to provide care for working parents or education for the children of middle-class parents; not only was it assumed parents could pay, but also that parents should pay. But if services come to be seen as having a strong child-related element and educational function, then the issue is raised of reducing fees or removing them altogether, at least for some period of

⁹ The EC Childcare Network (1996) reports that the highest parental contribution for early childhood services in the European Union was in French nurseries for children under 3, where parents paid, on average, 26 per cent of costs. However, French parents pay no fees at all when their children go to nursery school from 3 to 5 or obtain a place in an *école maternelle* for their child before the age of 3.

attendance, equivalent for example to the school day (and the recent reduction of school starting age has meant that 6 year olds have gone from attending *barnehage* for which parents pay, to attending school, which offers a free service for 20 hours a week). At the very least the issue is raised of finding some strong incentive to encourage attendance by children from more economically and socially disadvantaged families - or, viewed from another perspective, of reducing costs which may act as a disincentive to attendance. In any case, the rationale for the level of parental fees needs to be reviewed, related to policy objectives and made explicit.

The situation in Norway is further complicated because the system of funding leads to major inequalities. The *Storting's* funding formula quite simply fails, in practice, to operate in private *barnehager*, which make a major contribution to overall provision; local authorities (overall) do not pay their share of the formula, contributing on average only 8 per cent of costs in 1996 (a decrease from 13 per cent five years earlier) and leaving parents to pay nearly half the cost. This is, it must be stressed, an overall figure and we visited one *kommune* which, like some others, operates a policy of parity between public and private *barnehager*, including a common admissions policy and a common fee structure.

It was unclear to us why this situation has arisen, how far for example it reflects differing political attitudes to private services and how far it represents communes with tight economies prioritising their own services. Either way, however, it seems unsatisfactory, given the strong reliance placed on the private sector in public policy. It is an issue that needs to be addressed, preferably in the context of the White Paper on *barnehager* due in Fall 1999, which will also include strategies for achieving the 2000 Target. Two options proposed by the chair of the *Private Barnehagers Landsforbund* (an organisation representing about a fifth of private *barnehager*) was that the State should take over responsibility for all public funding, or that it should take some measures (unspecified) to compel communes to pay their 30 per cent contribution. The representatives we meet from the *Barnehageforbundet* (a large non-profit private organisation running 27 *barnehager*) argued that the solution must be for the communes to pay their share, rather than for the State to step in, but felt that this would not happen unless they were compelled to pay in some way.

This inequality in funding contributes to a three tier system of *barnehager*: those run and funded by

communes; private *barnehager* which get some funding from their local commune; and *barnehager* which get no money from their commune. One consequence is that the third group are either more at risk of closure from economic insecurity, or else are not able to offer equal access either because they must charge parents high fees or else find funding from other sources which brings with it restrictive access conditions, e.g. employers who buy places for their employees¹⁰.

Inequalities between public and private *barnehage* funding are part of another dimension of inequality - between *kommuner*. This covers not only levels of provision, but also funding arrangements, including levels of parental payments and how these are calculated, for example, how far they are related to parental income and other circumstances. While diversity in many areas seems desirable and defensible, in this case concerning access local diversity would seem to be undesirable and difficult to defend, or at least there should be a presumption that it is undesirable unless good cause can be shown why it is in the interests of children and their families.

Staffing of early childhood education and care services

By comparison with its Scandinavian neighbours, Norway has a low proportion of trained ECEC teachers or pedagogues (*pedagogiske ledere*) in its *barnehager*. There are about 13,000 of these trained staff (including directors - *styrere* - of *barnehager*), and nearly 22,500 *assistents* (with a lower level training or no relevant training), so that just over a third of the early childhood workforce are trained pedagogues. By contrast, equivalently trained staff in Danish and Swedish early childhood centres (i.e., with at least 3 years, post-18 higher education) constitute about 60 per cent of all staff, with lower trained or untrained assistants making up a minority.¹¹ Despite this relatively low level of trained staff, according to the Norway Background Report there is a shortage of

¹⁰ In general, as with other Nordic countries, it is not common for employers in Norway to contribute to the cost of early childhood services, nor are they encouraged to do so. Broadly speaking, it can be said that these services are seen as a public responsibility, and admission as a social right rather than a labour market benefit.

¹¹ References in this section to Denmark and Sweden draw on a report prepared for OECD in May 1998 *Training and Education of Early Childhood Education and Care Staff*

these staff, and has been for many years. This shortage is most apparent in the proportion of persons employed as *styrere* or *pedagogiske ledere* for whom a dispensation has been sought on account of them lacking professional training. At the same time, *barnehage* staff show the highest turnover rate in the public sector (close to nurses), with trained staff having higher turnover than untrained staff.

Training places in colleges have been increased to match the expansion of *barnehager*. But colleges are now also experiencing recruitment problems, with some places remaining unfilled in 1998. The college we visited in Oslo had no problems filling its places, but had still experienced a fall in applications in 1998. This has been accompanied by a reduction in the grade averages of students accepted for courses, so that there are not only fewer students, but the calibre of the entering students is lower.

It is also striking that most students are young, coming to the work straight after school, with little or no work experience: indeed, the college we visited has a placement early in the course, partly so students can get some idea of what the work involves (this contrasts with the situation in Denmark where not only is there a strong demand for pedagogical training, but many students come to training after working as untrained early childhood staff, the average age of students being 27). Some colleges may also run part-time courses for more mature students who have been working as untrained *barnehage* staff. However the college we visited reported recruitment problems here also, which had forced them to withdraw one of their three planned classes for part-time students.

It is not clear whether this decline in student enrolment (and the wider issue of recruitment and retention of trained staff in *barnehager*) is a temporary phenomenon, or represents a longer term and significant problem for the early childhood sector. It may even be part of a wider and more systemic problem of staffing across a range of educational and care services, in an economy in which women (the traditional workforce in these areas) are better educated, and have a widening range of employment opportunities with better pay and stronger career possibilities. The Association of Local and Regional Authorities reported problems in recruiting not only *barnehage* staff and nurses, but also other health and welfare workers with higher level qualifications, such as social workers, doctors and psychologists - and also, again in the last year, staff to work with elderly people.

Two possible solutions to these problems of recruitment and retention concern raising the status of the work and attracting into the work groups who have not previously been employed in significant numbers. In the former case, the training for early childhood work is at a lower level than that of other groups such as school teachers, with a three year rather than a four year course (although the school teacher training only increased from three to four years in 1992); pedagogues wanting to work in schools with children in Grades 2 to 4 can do so, but must first take an extra year's training. The teachers of early childhood workers at the college we visited argued for a four year training, on the grounds both of more subjects to be covered and the need for more emphasis on practice - 'there are more things we need to know about, [but] we have no time to talk about how to do these things'. The trade union also supported this view on the same grounds. Others we spoke to were opposed to an extension of basic training, attaching more importance to better working conditions including in-service training.

Early childhood workers also have rather lower salaries than school teachers, and presumably much lower level salaries than can be earned in many private sector jobs outside the early childhood field (the trade union said that pedagogues had one of the lowest levels of pay if compared with other occupations with similar levels of training). They also have limited opportunities for promotion, as well as poorer work conditions than school teachers in terms of working hours and holidays (within the *barnehage* system, conditions may vary between public and private centres, with for example poorer pension rights in the latter). Pedagogues moving from *barnehager* to working in Grade 1 of schools therefore enjoy improved conditions. The teachers' trade union, which represents the educated pre-school teachers (*pedagogiske ledere* and *styrere*) as well as school teachers, also feels more generally that early childhood workers have low status.

The reform of the school starting age (discussed further below) has brought early childhood workers and school teachers into closer contact. They also train in the same colleges, although in the college we visited they shared no courses (this may however happen in smaller colleges). We were also told that the two professions now have greater respect for each other. However, there remain important differences in their orientation in the Norwegian (and Nordic) systems, where early childhood services have traditionally been outside the education system. In our meeting at Oslo College, it was emphasised that the

two professions had very different traditions, including different ways of understanding learning, and the early childhood workers were firmly committed to the view that care rather than being a necessary condition for teaching (i.e. children will only learn if they are well cared for) is an integral part of pedagogical work, care and learning being inextricably interlinked. The trade union which represents trained early childhood workers - as well as school teachers - also emphasised that the type of learning in *barnehage* is very different than in school: in school the teacher gives lessons, while in *barnehage* learning is linked to all activities and the *barnehage* pedagogue must therefore take a more holistic view of and approach to the child.

Norway is unique in explicitly addressing the gendered workforce in early childhood services at a national government level, with a target set of 20 per cent male workers by the year 2000. Various measures have been taken to support this commitment, including conferences, the development of a network of male workers and the preparation of documents and videos to stimulate discussion of strategies for recruiting more men to work in *barnehager*. Most recently (in July 1998), it has been agreed that, within the Gender Equality Act, positive action can be applied to the recruitment of men in early childhood, the first time such positive action has been applied to men.

On our visit, we found the response to this initiative varied considerably. Quite often the issue came across as low priority for the organisations and institutions we spoke to; the trade union was, for example, very dismissive, not viewing male recruitment as a priority and putting the gendered workforce down to poor pay and status. But in one commune we visited, the subject had been given priority, with a male pedagogue given time to work on developing a plan for increasing male workers in that commune, including a conscious attempt to concentrate male workers in particular centres, rather than scatter them around. At one *barnehage* in the commune, there were 5 male workers in a staff of 14, and the work included an open *barnehage* specifically for 'home based fathers with small children'. We were told that:

this is to be seen in the same context as the project 'men in kindergartens' [that is, working to promote male employment in barnehager]. It gives the possibility of meeting and talking about children and the care of children from a man's viewpoint. The children can meet other children and play and receive contact with other children of the same age

group. There is a male kindergarten teacher leading the project.

It seems unlikely that, at the present rate of progress, the target of 20 per cent male workers will be achieved by 2000. However, by its commitment and the accompanying work, Norway has made the issue of gender in early childhood services visible, no longer to be taken for granted. It has opened up debates about, for example, whether women and men have different ways of working with children, so called 'feminine' and 'masculine caring' which tends to lead to the idea that male workers do more outdoor and active play. This is related to a wider Nordic discussion of the concept of 'gender pedagogy', a recognition in pedagogical work of the gender of children, and which is receiving renewed interest in the context of current concerns that boys may not fit in so well in *barnehage* or school, both highly feminised institutions and at a time when an increasing number of families have no resident father.

The Norwegian debate about male workers (as in other Nordic countries) is primarily about how, rather than whether, to employ more male workers. What might be termed the 'discourse of danger' - male workers as potential risks to children - which is predominant in the United States and Britain, is far less prominent in Norway (and in other Nordic countries). Certainly there is an awareness of the issue, and the need to take some precautions (with all *barnehage* workers needing police certificates). But there is also a reluctance to make it a dominating issue - or as one male pedagogue put it 'we think about it, but don't make it a problem'.

Of course, there are many different views, but at least by raising the issue of gender in the early childhood centre, these differences are articulated and debated. In this respect, therefore, Norway has set an important challenge for other countries: its experience raises important questions. Also, in a world where young women are increasingly well educated, will early childhood increasingly face difficulties in recruiting and keeping a trained workforce, at least as currently constituted? Should the level of training and working conditions of early childhood workers differ significantly from school teachers, even if there are different concepts of learning and different methods of work? What should be the balance between trained and untrained workers in early childhood centres?¹²

¹² For further reading on debates and policy initiatives in Norway, and other Nordic countries, concerning male workers in ECEC, see Owen, Cameron & Moss (1998).

Structure, responsibilities and coherence

At a national level, there is a divided responsibility for services for young children. The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has responsibility for *barnehager* and other services for children below compulsory school age; while the Ministry of Education is responsible for training pedagogues to work in *barnehager*, as well as for schooling of children over 6 and the system of SFOs which provide for younger school-age children outside school hours (and which are discussed further in the next section). At a local level however, many *kommuner* have integrated responsibility for *barnehager*, schools and SFOs into one department. A few have gone even further, integrating other services for children (notably child welfare) into a Department for Growing Up - or even, in one or two cases, a range of other services such as health, social security and eldercare.

This raises a number of issues at national and local levels. Nationally, should Government follow the local lead and integrate responsibility for (at least) *barnehager*, schools and SFOs, as well as responsibility for training staff who work in these services (a reform recently completed in Sweden, where national government followed local moves to integrate, moving early childhood services from welfare to education)? If this were to happen, it seems that this would probably involve moving *barnehager* into education; no one we met suggested moving schools etc. into the Ministry for Children and Family Affairs, nor setting up some entirely new department.

Opinions varied on whether *barnehager* should move to education. Politicians from one of the governing parties stressed they did not want to see *barnehager* in the education system; they saw this service as very closely related to the family policy area and were concerned that a transfer to education would lead to more organising of children's lives. A 1989 report from the Directorate for Administration Development had proposed the transfer of *barnehager* to education, but this had not become a political issue and there had been no political discussion. On the other hand, the representatives of a *kommuner* we visited, which had an integrated Department for Growing Up, were in favour of ministerial integration - 'it is hard [to be governed by two departments] and it makes it difficult to be one department with one culture'. There was also support at the college training pedagogues and school teachers, not least because it was felt this would contribute to a wider understanding of *barnehager* as educational as well as welfare institutions and as a necessary part in the

education of children. Furthermore, it would remove the apparent anomaly of the Education Ministry being responsible for training staff for institutions for which it was not responsible.

At local level, where some degree of integration is already widespread, the issue seems to be more where this should lead: will administrative integration lead to new forms of inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional working (or even, perhaps, to rethinking the disciplines and professions of childhood work)? We did not see much evidence of this in our site visits, but we visited only a few *kommuner* and time was limited. However, we do have documentation of new forms of working developing in a district in Trondheim (Saupstad), where

- *barnehage*, school, SFO, cultural and child welfare services have been integrated into a Department of Growing Up 'with responsibility for a child's total environment';
- *barnehager* have been reconceptualised as resource centres for all young children and families, and schools as 'centres for children's services'; and
- within school catchment areas, 'zone groups' have been organised which consist of health nurses, psychologists, social workers, *barnehage* workers and school teachers to work collaboratively to help 'children at risk'.

Unlike most European countries, except other Nordic countries, Norway has long had an integrated early childhood service. Having taken that important step, the question now is how that service relates to other children's services and whether it will become part of the education system - or even, though unlikely, some new concept of a 'growing up' ministry. This opens up possibilities for better and more effective forms of working and more efficient use of resources. But there are also concerns. A move to integrate national responsibility for *barnehager* with schools and SFOs could result in child welfare services being left behind in a separate Ministry, risking marginalisation and new barriers to collaboration. While integration might become part of a process of growing uniformity, in which important differences (for example, in traditions and practice) become lost within a dominating educational and schooling model, driven by an important but narrow set of concerns. In this respect, the Norwegian experience of reducing school starting age from seven to six is instructive, and it is to this issue that we now turn.

It should also be noted that integration is not the only way of creating new relationships between depart-

ments and services, and more co-ordinated working. At a national level in recent years, there have been a number of innovative measures to increase co-ordination across a wide range of ministries in relation to children and young people, and in which the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs plays the role of co-ordinator: for example, there is an inter-departmental Committee for Child and Youth Issues, concerning of State Secretaries from a range of Ministries; and each year the Ministry of Children brings together budget expenditure on children across all Ministries into one document, to show what share this group of the population is receiving, as well as formulating Government objectives and policy in different areas with respect for children. The Ombudsman for Children can also be seen as another organisation which cuts across many different areas of responsibility, to focus on children. We note these interesting developments here, but were not able to explore their workings in any depth during our site visit.

Reducing the school starting age

The reduction of the compulsory school age can be seen as part of a general trend across the Nordic area, and a movement towards what, at least at present, is becoming a European norm for starting compulsory education (the main exceptions being the Netherlands and the UK, both of which have a compulsory school age of 5, and admit many 4 year olds to primary school on a voluntary basis). Lowering school starting age was a subject of debate in Norway for thirty years or so, and even now there is not universal approval for the change, although it seems clear that the change will not be repealed.

The actual change, which involved 6 year olds moving from *barnehager* into primary schools, was the subject of substantial preparation, including experimentation in the late 1980s with three options for six year olds and the possibility, from 1991, of schools experimenting with programmes for six year olds. The reform was also backed by substantial investment, with a total of 20 billion NOK spent on implementation, for example providing new materials and improvements to the physical environment of schools. In general, the impression we received was that most people (policy-makers, politicians, practitioners, parents) felt the change had worked out remarkably well, despite some initial misgivings.

One of the important features of the process of change, which may be of wider cross-national interest, is the rethinking of the relationship between the *barnehage* and the school, including their respective pedagogical methods. Under the new

regime, both school teachers and *barnehage* teachers work with children in the new Grade 1 in school (*i.e.* 6 year olds); in one school we visited, with two Grade 1 classes, of 24 and 18 children respectively, there were two school teachers and one early childhood teacher (plus two *assistents* primarily working with two children with disabilities). Early childhood teachers can qualify to work in Grades 2 to 4 by completing an additional year's training (one *kommune* we visited was offering this training to pre-school teachers who had come to work with 6 year olds in school on an in-service basis through a contract arranged with a local training college). Furthermore, it has been recognised that the education across Grades 1 to 4 should be based on bringing together the pedagogical traditions from *barnehage* and school, leading for example to more emphasis on play in early years at school.

One consequence of the change in school starting age is that many 6 year olds now spend a substantial part of their time in SFOs, which also provide for children in Grades 2 to 4. Attendance rates vary, but in the two schools we visited were very high. It is also striking that, certainly in the SFOs we visited, there is an emphasis on their distinctness from school and education - they are for children, and children's culture - and are very related to the idea of the Norwegian child and Norwegian childhood (*e.g.* strong emphasis on being outside and physical activity in all institutions).

Yet despite their importance and their assertion of independence, SFOs seem in many ways to be in a weak position. They lack the strong, deep-rooted traditions of the *barnehage* or the school. They are now part of the education system and dependent on schools, in the sense that they are located in schools, often actually in classrooms (which can perhaps be confusing for young children), and the SFO leader is responsible to the principal of the school. At the same time, SFOs have not been universally welcomed into school and have often been seen as contrary to the school tradition, in which the child is at school until early afternoon, then goes home, does homework and plays; a challenge, as one Ministry of Education official observed, was to get some teachers to realise how times had changed. There are no national regulations, laying down minimum standards, for example for staffing. Consequently, there are no qualifications required for SFO staff, who are called *assistents*. They may have some relatively low level training, including the new upper secondary education apprenticeship qualification. But they are less well trained than teachers in schools or pedagogues in *barnehager*.

The Norwegian situation raises interesting issues about the purposes of non-school services for school-age children and the relationship between schools and these services. Should their focus be children's leisure time and the reduction of adult direction and goal-setting, a sort of antidote to school - or should they be drawn into the service of the school and its formal educational project? Should they be part of the education and school system, organisationally and physically, even at the extreme develop an integrated timetable with the school - or should their independence and separateness be emphasised? What type of worker do they need, and what training does that worker need? Will the school eventually become the central and comprehensive children's service, to which all else is subservient or will it remain just one of a range of institutions for children, with a distinct and separate role and identity?

Monitoring, evaluation, research and innovation

Traditionally, and in line with the experiences of other countries, evaluation does not appear to have attracted much attention in the Norwegian *barnehage* sector, although certain monitoring requirements were already stipulated in connection with the introduction of state funding under the modified Child Welfare Act of 1963. It was not, however, until the late 1980s - when public and hence political interest in ECEC mounted and issues of access, quality and cost-effectiveness became more central to policy making - that concerns were raised about the evaluation and monitoring capacity of the sector. In seeking to address these concerns, specific ECEC educational development efforts were launched in 1987. In 1991 widespread pedagogical experimentation and innovation work began with the aim of exploring the possibility of introducing *barnehage* methods into primary school, in the context of reducing the school entry age.

Throughout the 1990s the BFD has initiated research, development and evaluation studies in the field. The Ministry also allocates funds to the Norwegian Research Council, which matches questions formulated by government with the researchers capable of undertaking applied projects and investigations. *Statistics Norway* is the principal agent for the collection of official statistics on the ECEC sector. Both during the visit and before, when examining the background documentation, the team gained the impression that the country collects a variety of relevant statistics and indicators and also supports an

array of research and development activities with a more distinctive, qualitative orientation.

Despite this, however, the amounts of public funds that are allocated to ECEC research, development and evaluation activities remain rather modest compared with the size and importance of the sector. Central government expenditure on ECEC R&D and evaluation activities is estimated at less than 0.003 per cent of government outlays on *barnehager* in 1998. Given that central government expenditure on ECEC R&D is said to have decreased in absolute terms since the late 1980s while the sector continued to grow in numbers, there must have been a significant relative decline in R&D funding for the sector. However, under the system currently in place qualified staff are entitled to devote a considerable amount of their working time to R&D activities. However, there is little systematic knowledge yet about the cost, quality and effectiveness of this 'hidden' R&D effort.

ECEC policy and programme evaluation was given a major boost with the introduction in 1996 of the *Framework Plan for Barnehager*. The Plan demands that a concrete, explicit evaluation programme must be formulated and implemented as part of the annual plan of work of each *barnehage*. This programme should describe what is to be evaluated, against what criteria, how the information is to be compiled, who shall evaluate and when, and how the results should be presented and used by the various partners involved.

The concept of evaluation contained in the *Framework Plan for Barnehager* is distinctive, complex and challenging. It emphasises observation and documentation, analysis and interpretation, contemplation and self-reflection, and children's involvement - 'children should be enabled to participate in evaluating their own play and learning environment and should see that their opinions are taken seriously'. Emphasis is placed on the function of evaluation as stimulating democratic practice: 'the information [compiled in connection with evaluation] and documentation in itself is of less importance than the *reflection* and the discussions among the staff and with the parents to which the documentation can give rise'.

While it is too early in the process to draw any definite conclusions, the review team noted how the responses to the new requirements differed widely across institutions and sectors. Some *barnehager* already had explicit evaluation plans in place, usually with an emphasis on building group confidence, social competence and securing the quality of

personal relationships rather than on the assessment of children's 'school readiness' in domains such as literacy or numeracy - a concept which does not carry formal meaning in Norway. Possibly reflecting the high degree of autonomy they enjoy, other institutions had not or had only just begun to consider their options. Follow-up work may be needed in this area, in particular as regards the training of current and future staff to enable them to engage more effectively in both formative and summative evaluation work within the challenging and demanding approach proposed by the *Framework Plan*. There may be a parallel need, for the benefit of prospective workers in the field, to introduce a basic module on R&D and evaluation methods into the curriculum of ECEC teacher training programmes. Finally, there may be a need for improved co-ordination across levels of decision-making, given that municipal authorities appear to be best placed to encourage and oversee the development and implementation of institutional evaluation plans.

The White Paper, to be presented to Parliament in 1999, is likely to implicitly raise a number of issues about evaluation and monitoring. The paper will address questions such as whether and to what extent the needs for access are being met, whether fees for parents are acceptable, and whether provision is of sufficient quality. Answers to questions such as these will to an extent depend on the statistical knowledge base.

In addition to the challenges already noted, there are a number of areas where evaluation and/or research and development could be strengthened. An important and obvious area for research has arisen alongside the reform that brought six-year-olds as well as ECEC teachers into the first grade of primary school. Research studies have already been launched to investigate the consequences of differences in pedagogical styles and of mixed teaching teams for children's well-being and for teacher training. Another major issue for evaluation concerns the quality of provision by public and private providers. A related issue, about which little is known systematically, is whether and how differences in economic standing and quality of living standards between municipalities affect the quantity and quality of ECEC provision. Finally, there may be a need to rethink what data and other information municipalities that receive targeted funds from national sources should provide to government authorities, in particular about unmet demand. At present it is not clear how many additional places - if any at all - will be needed in the course of the next two to three years. A major

element of uncertainty is introduced by the cash benefit scheme.

Better streamlining of data requirements at several levels of government could go some way to help fill a few apparent gaps in the statistical knowledge base, most notably with respect to government transfers and public and private cash flows to institutions. Available data are also insufficient to fully shed light on the extent of latent or unmet demand for places, in part because the methods used for establishing waiting lists appear to differ geographically and across sectors, both public and private. A third area where reliable statistics appear to be lacking is private family day care, where there are several open questions regarding the number of people involved and their working conditions. Given the nature of the activity perhaps not surprisingly, there is a lack of systematic knowledge about the after-school arrangements that are in place for 6 and 7-year-olds. The announced Government White Paper on a National Assessment System for Norwegian schools, which is expected to appear during the first half of 1999, will no doubt throw up a number of additional issues and questions with relevance even to the *barnehage* sector. One issue that is certain to come up is the measurement of quality, and this, in turn, is expected to throw up important questions about the various ideologies that lie behind ECEC structures and traditions.

But perhaps the single largest challenge for educational evaluation and policy analysis concerns the newly introduced cash benefit scheme. There clearly are high hopes and expectations, but there are also a number of questions and concerns, and some of these might well have political implications. How the cash benefit scheme will impact on current and future ECEC demand and supply, on the quality and equity of provision, and on the balance of public and private initiative, is by and large unknown. There are different, sometimes conflicting questions and related hypotheses; addressing them will require a broad programme within which different research studies and various methods and approaches can be accommodated. Prospective, longitudinal research designs are particularly valuable because it is with such designs that questions about the effectiveness of interventions and the analysis of multiple outcomes are best studied.

It will be of interest to all OECD Member countries to learn about the results of the multiple evaluation studies of the cash benefit scheme that have already been initiated by Norwegian government. With the initiation of these studies the government has taken

an important step forward in building and strengthening evaluation capacity.

Finally, as this Note shows, ECEC and related policies in Norway have a number of features which are either unique or more prominent than in other countries, but which are of wider relevance and interest. It would be of importance if research on these features were sustained (where it already exists) or increased, for example with respect to:

- children and the outdoor environment;
- children's culture;
- the fathers' quota and time account scheme (both use and non-use);
- gender issues in work in early childhood services and the effectiveness of measures to increase the number of male workers;
- the system of evaluation within *barnehager*.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Norway is a large Northern European country with a relatively small population. It is wealthy, has high levels of education and employment, has made substantial though unfinished progress towards gender equality, has a strong democratic tradition and a large measure of decentralisation of power to local communities, including in the field of early childhood education and care. Family life has undergone major change, not only in relation to parental employment, but also in terms of relationships and structures. The provision for early childhood has many positive features. There is an integrated system of services for children from 0 to 6, with a well-established and quite extensive system of publicly-funded early childhood institutions - *barnehager* - and a well-trained group of pedagogical staff. The gendered nature of work in early childhood has been recognised and is being addressed, with a commitment to having more male workers. There is also a well-paid and flexible system of Parental Leave, which recently has been adapted to encourage take-up by fathers with immediate and striking results. A change in school starting age, from 7 to 6, has been undertaken with care and thoughtfulness, and with apparent success, not least in providing some degree of dialogue between two pedagogical traditions.

Underpinning this is an interesting and well-articulated view about children, both individually and as a social group, about childhood, and about the place of children in society and in relation to their environment. At a time when debates about early childhood and early childhood provision are increasingly dominated in many countries by a narrow, instrumental and highly individualistic view, the Norwegian view offers an important alternative perspective and a reminder of the socially constructed nature of childhood - with all that follows from that, not least in terms of adult responsibility for how they choose to see and understand children.

This Norwegian view, or understanding, of young children and early childhood, together with the democratic and decentralised values referred to above, permeate the new *Framework Curriculum* as well as daily practice in *barnehager*, *SFOs* and schools. The most obvious example of this is the amount of time that children of all ages spend outside,

throughout the year; but there is also an underlying concern with the need to preserve childhood as an important life-stage in its own right and to enable children to live their own childhoods. The position of children in the society is also supported by a strong recognition of children's rights, expressed in the institution of the Ombudsman for Children and Childhood.

At the same time, Norway is by no means a homogeneous society - either in its population, which is increasingly ethnically diverse, nor in its beliefs. There are very divergent views held about how young children should be cared for, about gender roles and about the role of the state. These find most obvious expression in the lively debates surrounding the introduction of the cash benefit scheme, with its central condition that to receive the full benefit parents should not send their children to public funded *barnehager*.

Amongst so much that is positive, the review team noted some areas which they believe require further consideration (and which they are aware are also recognised by many people in Norway):

There are issues of equity and cost that need to be addressed. Despite the rapid extension of provision and the high level of subsidy, there remain major inequalities in the system, both with respect to access (with levels of provision varying between areas) and funding (with many private *barnehager* at a financial disadvantage compared to public ones, and parental fees varying). Overall, parental fees are high and a funding formula, which was proposed and adopted without any explicit rationale, has not been implemented. These issues can, individually and cumulatively, affect attendance of young children at *barnehager*, to the detriment of children from less advantaged backgrounds. There appears to be a risk that, without great care being applied, the cash benefit scheme may further exacerbate these inequalities.

There is a strong case for addressing these issues in relation to the commitment to provide a *barnehage* place for all children whose parents want them to attend, and in the context of the White Paper currently being prepared.

These issues of inequality may affect the increasing minority ethnic population in Norway, though there is growing recognition that Norway is an ethnically diverse society, with a range of policy initiatives responding to this recognition. Each country has found or will find its own way of being ethnically diverse, some more successful than others. Norway may be at a stage where it could benefit from taking stock not only of its own experience, but that of some other European countries, and formulating a longer-term view about policy and practice in early childhood services with respect to minority and majority groups.

There are issues of structure to be considered. At a local level, most authorities have moved to integrate responsibility for children's services, bringing at the least early childhood, schooling and SFOs within the same administrative framework, and going even further in some cases. Nationally, responsibility continues to be split between the BFD and the Ministry of Education. There are good arguments for this split responsibility nationally, but there are also counter-arguments which suggest the need to review these arrangements, to see whether national policy and administrative and legal frameworks need to follow the local facts on the ground - and if not, how this increasing discrepancy between national and local levels of government can be best managed.

Most staff working in early childhood services or SFOs have no training or a relatively low-level training. Trained early childhood teachers form a minority of the workforce. The rationale for this situation would repay review, possibly in the light of a wider review of staffing, considering issues of recruitment, retention and gender. Does the reduction in applications for training reflect a temporary problem or does it portend a more serious and structural shortfall, especially as young women face wider employment opportunities? Do more steps need to be taken to recruit male students and workers, not only to meet the target for male staff but to address a possible decline in women wanting to work in early childhood?

The staffing situation of SFOs is part of a larger issue concerning the position of this type of provision within the education system. It is a relatively new and fast growing service and, given the length of the school day, plays a major role in the lives of many children from 6 years upwards. Yet not only are its staff poorly trained, compared to staff in *barnehager* and schools, but it is subject to no national regulations. There is a sense, at least from brief acquaintance, that SFOs are the poor relation - or could easily become so. Careful attention needs to be paid to the position, status and autonomy of this important provision.

The Ombudsman for Children might have a more prominent role to play in the field of early childhood. At present there is considerable emphasis in policy on participation of young children in the services they attend, for example with respect to the evaluation of *barnehager*. Given this strong commitment in principle, it is important to turn this into practice: the Ombudsman's office could be one source of inspiration and action. More generally, given the complex and divergent views about the care of young children and the relationship between children, families and society, it is important for the Ombudsman to maintain a high profile role in exploring what might be the rights and needs of young children, as a social group located within society as well as the family, and how this group can express their views and perspectives.

Given the unique features of Norwegian early childhood policy and practice, and also the major policy changes of recent years, there are a number of important areas where further research and evaluation is called for. Attention needs to be paid to ensuring adequate support and training for the new approach to ongoing evaluation of work in *barnehager*, which also requires regular review.

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Appendix I

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Appendix II

Information on the Norway Background Report

The Norway Background Report was prepared and co-ordinated by The Royal Norwegian Ministry of Children and Family Affairs.

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Programme of the Review Visit

30 November to 9 December 1998

Monday 30 November

09h00 - 13h30

Meeting with key staff at the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs: information and discussion about the Background report and the main issues and concerns for investigation; information about cost and financing; information about the responsibilities of various levels of government for the management, monitoring and funding of ECEC; information about family policy in Norway; brief information about targets for improving the percentage of male staff in Norway.

12h15 - 13h30

Meeting with representatives from the department for Child and Youth Affairs: information about the child welfare system in Norway; information about the general child and youth policies in Norway.

14h30 - 15h30

Meeting with the Ombudsman for Gender Equality, Anne Lise Ryel: information about the Ombudsman's main tasks and her views upon ECEC.

16h00 - 17h00

Meeting with Minister of Education, Research and Church Affairs, Jon Lilletun, and senior officials in the Ministry about challenges concerning education of staff and transition from ECEC to school.

Tuesday 1 December

Morning site visits to a local area in Oslo "Old Oslo" to see the program for bilingual children. It is a new developmental program funded by the state and it gives free access to all five year olds in the area in order to integrate.

13h00 - 14h30

Meeting with Minister of Children and Family Affairs, Valgerd Svarstad Haugland, about political visions and challenges in the field.

17h00 - 20h00

Meeting at the Storting with representatives for the Committee of Family, Culture and Government Administration Affairs and the Committee of Education, Research and Church Affairs. All the political parties will be represented.

A short presentation from OECD.

The representatives give their opinion about questions concerning: "Barnehager" (ECEC), the Cash Benefit Scheme, other questions about family and child policy, education of pre-school teachers, recruiting students, the primary school reform, and other topics; questions and discussion.

Wednesday 2 December

09h00 - 11h00

Meetings with representatives from different political parties in the Municipality of Oslo.

11h30 - 13h00

Meeting with the daily leader of Barnehageforbundet, a private company which owns and runs twenty-five ECEC centres.

14h00 - 15h00

Meeting with representatives from the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities.

15h30 - 16h30

Meeting with representatives from the Norwegian Union of Teachers.

Thursday 3 December

09h00 - 11h00

Visit to Oslo College, Faculty of Education

Meeting with the pro-dean and the leaders of the departments for teacher training, pre-school teacher training and research and developmental work. They will give information about teacher training and educational research, and focus on the challenges in pre-school teacher training.

13h00 - 15h00

Meeting with the researchers from Norwegian Institute of Consumer Research (SIFO) and University of Oslo, Faculty of Psychology. The researchers will focus on their research in the field about quality monitoring and inspections, impact/effectiveness of policy/provision and parental satisfaction and user adaptation. They will also give their view on the need for future research in the field.

Friday 4 December

Site visits in Stjørdal. Visits to a school where they have combined ECEC, primary class for six year olds and out-of-school activities and see both private and public ECEC, and a meeting with local politicians and administrators.

Monday 7 December

Morning site visits in Oslo. The Sami pre-school, a family child care home base and a mother/child health centre.

14h00 - 15h30

Meeting with the Ombudsman for Children. The team will meet Ombudsmen who will focus on the tasks of the Ombudsman and give their view of the ECEC-sector.

Tuesday 8 December

Morning site visits to the municipality of Asker. Lilleborggen familiebarnehage plus another home belonging to this familiebarnehage (dividing the team in two groups), Solgården *barnehage* and a class for six year olds. The institutions will be asked to give information about running costs.

Afternoon meeting with a group of politicians and staff in ECEC in Asker.

Wednesday 9 December

09h00 - 10h30

Debriefing with representatives from the Ministry.

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