



Employment developments in childcare services for school-age children

Sweden

Introduction

1. Policy background

2. Childcare provision

3. Childcare workers

4. Gaps in childcare provision

5. Creating sustainable childcare

6. Case studies

Conclusions

References

List of interviewees

This report is available in electronic format only

Introduction

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on high quality childcare in Europe, both with respect to the sector's workforce and the changing needs of children and parents. There is a great need for measures to be introduced that support sustainable and formal job creation in care services for school-age children.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting to carry out a study on sustainable childcare services currently available for school-age children in the 25 Member States of the European Union (EU25). The study aims to support the debate on modernisation of care systems in Europe, to review existing information on childcare services and pinpoint gaps in the level of service in the enlarged EU, and to identify measures at national, regional and local levels to create sustainable childcare services for school-age children.

This report is one of six in-depth country studies that have been conducted in order to complement the more general review of childcare systems in the EU25. It contains three examples of best practice identified from current Swedish childcare initiatives:

- Milstensskolan – an integrated school day
- Nya Varvets skola – age-segregated groups
- Ostergardsskolan – activities for children aged 10 to 12

Information was gathered through a combination of research and 11 stakeholder interviews.

The report is structured as follows:

- 1 - Policy background:** This section provides an overview of the historical background of out-of-school childcare and outlines the key policy drivers. It will also present a summary of current policies and regulations relating to out-of-school childcare.
- 2 - Childcare provision:** This section profiles out-of-school childcare provision in Sweden. It provides an overview of the division of responsibility (local/national) and gives a brief summary of the forms of childcare recognised by the Education Act. It also outlines differences in public and private provision as well as between different municipalities.
- 3 - Childcare workers:** This section provides a profile of Sweden's childcare workers. It provides a summary of the various jobs that exist in the out-of-school childcare sector and examines how a career in this sector compares to a career in education and other sectors.
- 4 - Future employment in childcare:** This section provides an analysis of the current gaps in out-of-school childcare provision and any related gaps in employment. It also examines future needs and recommends various measures that can be taken to tackle these gaps and shortages.
- 5 - Creating sustainable childcare:** This section attempts to define what quality in the Swedish context entails and from this definition it aims to examine recent trends in quality. It provides recommendations on measures that can be taken to tackle the apparent deterioration in quality.
- 6 - Case studies:** Best practice studies will be introduced.

Case study 1: Milstensskolan private school, Täby

Case study 2: Nya Varvets skola, Gothenburg

Case study 3: Ostergardsskolan, Skurup

Childcare policy to date

The roots of the Swedish out-of-school childcare system can be traced back to the end of the 19th century, when work shelters, influenced by the ideas of the German teacher Friedrich Fröbel, started to appear. In the work shelters, children of poor parents were taught to be diligent and dutiful as well as to learn simple crafts. The work shelters were predominately financed by charities and private donations.

In the 1930s and 1940s, public authorities began to assume greater responsibility for childcare and the view of childcare as a type of care for poor people was gradually disappearing. Despite this trend, work shelters (or leisure-time centres as they were renamed by the Swedish municipalities) were mainly found in the cities and attracted relatively small numbers of children. It was mainly children of single mothers who attended leisure-time centres.

However, as demand for female labour increased during the 1960s, there was increasing demand for a major expansion of childcare facilities. A special commission, the National Commission on Childcare, was therefore appointed by the government in 1968 to submit proposals for a childcare system capable of meeting social, educational and supervisory needs in Sweden. The work of the 1968 National Commission had a considerable impact on the direction of childcare in Sweden and the educational principles and ideas formulated by the commission still apply.

A rapid expansion of childcare provision followed the 1968 National Commission; however, local authorities were still unable to meet demand and waiting lists were prevalent. As a result, tougher legislation was introduced in 1995 under which local authorities became duty bound to provide childcare, for children aged one to 12 years, and to families in which parents were either working or studying. This rule together with the high birth rate in Sweden led to a record number of new childcare services in the 1990s.

Key policy drivers

Out-of-school childcare has been of high priority for more than three decades and it has traditionally been one of the cornerstones of Swedish family/social policy and educational policy. This is reflected in the dual function of childcare. On the one hand, it aims ‘to support and encourage children’s development and learning, and help them get a good start in life’, and on the other hand, it aims ‘to enable parents to combine parenthood with employment or studies’, and thereby also constituting a prerequisite for equality in society (Swedish Institute, 2004, p.1).

Although childcare is still an integral part of social and family policy, the educational policy aspect has gained an increasing focus as childcare has expanded and reached a greater proportion of children. The desire to further emphasise the educational orientation of childcare is reflected by the fact that the responsibility of childcare was transferred from the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs to the Ministry of Education and Science in 1996 and that the Social Services Act that used to regulate childcare was replaced by the Education Act in 1995. The aim of transferring childcare to the educational sector has largely been to build on the close educational links between pre-school, compulsory school and out-of-school childcare (Gunnarsson et al, 1999).

Current policies relating to out-of-school childcare

National childcare strategy

The general direction of childcare in Sweden was laid down by the 1968 National Commission and a strategy was officially introduced in the early 1970s. Apart from raising questions about childcare for school-age children and proposing a rapid development of the country’s leisure-time centres, the 1968 National Commission also condemned the outdated view that supervision was something you offered poor people while educational activities were for the

stimulation of better-off children. Care and education were to be merged in a completely new way. Children in hospital and immigrant children would be entitled to municipal childcare. This national strategy has since, with some gradual modifications, been followed and implemented throughout the last three decades (Swedish Institute, 2004).

Education Act

For a long time, childcare was regulated by the Social Services Act; however, in 1995 this act was replaced by the Education Act. The new legislation departed from earlier approaches in that it put stricter compliance on local authorities than previously, as they were struggling to expand facilities to satisfactorily meet the increased demand for childcare.

The Education Act specifies:

- that the task of childcare for school-age children is to complement the school, in terms of both time and content, and to offer children meaningful recreation and support in their development;
- the forms of childcare to be provided for children up to and including the age of 12 years and the tasks they are to perform during care time;
- an obligation on local authorities to provide high quality out-of-school childcare without unreasonable delay¹ and as close to the child's home or school as possible². This provision applies to all children whose parents are working or studying or who need childcare support. Moreover, it applies to those children that are judged to be in 'need of special support'³ irrespective of how their parents are occupied;
- requirements with regard to the quality of the childcare provided. Employees must have a suitable standard of training and experience to satisfy the children's needs in terms of both care and stimulating educational activities. In addition, groups of children should be kept to an appropriate composition and size, and premises are to be well suited to the purpose in hand. A more detailed analysis of the quality of Swedish childcare will be provided later in this report.

The Education Act legislates all forms of childcare and schools, but dedicates a chapter (chapter 2a) specifically to out-of-school childcare.⁴

National curriculum for pre-school and compulsory school

Since 1998 out-of-school childcare activities have been guided by various steering documents, including the national curriculum for pre-schools (Lpfo98). Although these documents primarily relate to pre-school and compulsory schooling, it is recommended that they are used as much as possible in out-of-school childcare. The reason for this is to support the integration of pre-school, compulsory school and out-of-school childcare (National Agency for Education, 2005). Both the pre-school and compulsory school curricula take the form of a government ordinance and compliance by schools is therefore mandatory. They specify the overall goals and general orientation of pre-schools, schools and out-

¹ Normally within three or four months of the parents having applied for a place.

² The Education Act does not specify a specific distance from the home or school.

³ This group is not clearly defined – it may include children with disabilities or children with more diffuse problems such as difficulties concentrating or psychological disorders (Swedish Institute, 2004).

⁴ Chapter 2a of the Education Act is available at: (<http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/02/15/38/1532b277.pdf>) (in English, 202Kb PDF).

of-school childcare in Sweden but do not state how the goals are to be achieved. It is up to those working in pre-schools, schools and out-of-school childcare to choose which approaches and methods to apply. The goals and general guidelines cover the following areas:

- standards and values;
- development and learning;
- children's own influence;
- cooperation between pre-schools, schools, out-of-school childcare services and parents;
- interaction with the pre-school class, compulsory school and the leisure-time centre (Swedish Institute, 2004).

General recommendations

The National Agency for Education has been commissioned by the government to draw up general recommendations on how the Education Act could or should be implemented by local authorities. These general recommendations are available for all forms of out-of-school childcare services, i.e. family day care, leisure-time centres and open leisure-time centres.

Recent policy changes in out-of-school childcare

Integration and cooperation – pre-school, school and leisure-time centre

In recent years, many municipalities have decided to bring schools and out-of-school childcare services, particularly leisure-time centres, closer together for both educational and financial reasons and today most collaborate to some degree. To control finances, better use of buildings and staff are encouraged, while the active cooperation among different categories of staff is seen as a way of improving the quality of activities in out-of-school childcare services, as well as in schools. It is also anticipated that more cooperation among different staff will help develop a common view of a child's learning and development (Gunnarsson et al, 1999). To date, the overall result of this initiative has been positive: it has been highly valued by staff and perceived as continuing 'in-service training' through daily activities in cooperation with team members with different training and skills (Gunnarsson et al, 1999). During the interview process, several leisure-time teachers have also expressed their satisfaction with the fact that they get the chance to follow the children throughout the day and not only during leisure-time activities. As a result, the leisure-time teachers have developed a closer relationship with the children. The integration of schools and leisure-time centres has also solved transport issues for children who used to attend leisure-time centres that were situated far away from schools.

Maximum fees

In the 1990s, fees for childcare became more expensive and were increasingly linked to family income and the child's hours of attendance. An increase in family income was, therefore, often of little financial advantage. This threatened to undermine the willingness of parents, particularly mothers, to resume working after a period of unemployment or to work longer hours. As a result, a system of maximum childcare fees was introduced in 2002. This involved setting a ceiling for the amount parents could be required to pay for childcare services. In childcare for school-age children, the maximum fee charged has been set at 1%–2% of the family's income (depending on the number of children attending childcare services). In 2004, this ceiling was SEK 840⁵ (€88) per month for the first child and SEK 420 (€44) per month for the second and third child (Swedish Institute, 2004).

⁵ SEK 1 = €0.10426, €1 = SEK 9.5914, as at 7 November 2005.

Although the ceiling on fees is voluntary for local authorities, 288 of 290 local authorities introduced the system of maximum fees during the first year of operation, and the remainder have since joined the system. The high adoption rate of this measure can largely be explained by the fact that those local authorities that do introduce the maximum fee system will receive state compensation for any loss of revenue as well as grants specifically allocated for improvement in municipal childcare services (Swedish Institute, 2004).

As a consequence of the new maximum fee system, the proportion of parental fees has been reduced from 18% in 2001 to 11% in 2002. Since this reduction, local authority revenue has been compensated by a state grant and the maximum fee system has not resulted in any deterioration in childcare standards. Surprisingly, however, an evaluation by the National Agency for Education revealed that the hours spent in out-of-school childcare services has remained the same, despite the fact that fees are no longer linked to children's length of attendance (Swedish Institute, 2004).

Government responsibilities for childcare

The division of responsibility between central and local government changed during the 1990s. Management by rule⁶ was replaced by a system placing greater emphasis on management by objectives and outputs. As a result, local authorities now have greater freedom to interpret overall childcare objectives as set by central government. The central government has also to a larger extent allowed local authorities to adapt government policies to local needs and has also increased the scope for entrepreneurial activity in local authorities.

National responsibilities

Since 1998, national responsibility for childcare for school-age children has been shifted from the Ministry of Health and Social Services to the Ministry of Education and Science, which is now responsible for outlining the overall childcare objectives. In conjunction with this change, the National Agency for Education took over the supervisory function of out-of-school childcare from the National Board of Health and Welfare. The tasks of the National Agency for Education include ensuring fulfilment of the national policies for childcare by means of follow-ups, evaluations and supervisory work. Furthermore, it is responsible for collecting and publishing official statistics on childcare, which gives the state and municipalities a sound basis for monitoring and supporting development.

Local responsibilities

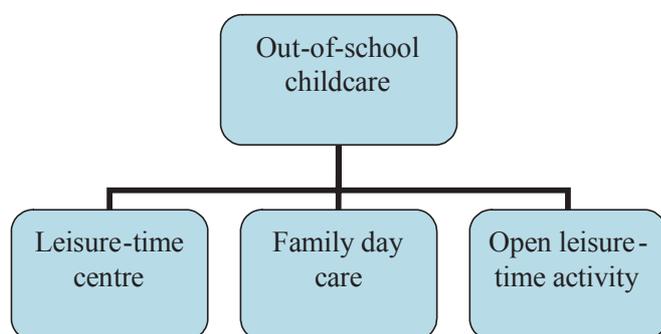
Local authorities are responsible for providing childcare. They are also responsible for quality and allocating necessary resources, in terms of both capital and revenue funding. The municipalities also decide on which methods and approaches that childcare institutions will adopt in order to achieve national goals and guidelines.

Types of childcare for schoolchildren

In Sweden, compulsory school starts at the age of seven years, but almost all six year old children attend voluntary pre-school classes. In principle, pre-school care thus encompasses children aged one to five years and out-of-school childcare is available for those aged six to 12 years.

In the Swedish context, out-of-school childcare is a collective, overall description of activities that occur during the hours of the day when children are not in school and during school holidays. The Education Act recognises three forms of out-of-school childcare – leisure-time centres, family day care and open leisure-time activities – as shown in the organisational chart below.

⁶ During management by rule, state control was much stricter. Targets for staff ratios and size of children's groups were set centrally and if these targets were not met by the local authorities the state would restrict the funding to these municipalities.

Figure 1: *Forms of out-of-school childcare recognised by the Education Act*

Source: ECOTEC Research & Consulting

Leisure-time centre

As defined by the Education Act, a leisure-time centre is an educational group activity for children for the part of the day when children are not in school and during school holidays. A leisure-time centre can be run as a completely independent activity but are often integrated with the school in various forms. This integration can apply to staffing, premises and/or the educational programme. The extent of this integration can be illustrated by the fact that 97% of all children registered in a leisure-time centre attend institutions that share management with a primary school or special school (Swedish Association for Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), 2005). Coincidentally, all leisure-time centres that have been chosen as good practice examples share their management with a primary school or special school.

Since 1990, the number of children registered in leisure-time centres has tripled (SALAR, 2005). This increase has partly been caused by an increasing number of children of school age, but also by the fact that leisure-time centres, since 1998, also care for children aged six years⁷. The most recent data from the National Agency for Education shows that some 75% of all children aged six to nine years and 10% of all children aged 10 to 12 years were registered in leisure-time centres in 2004. This makes leisure-time centres the most common form of childcare for school-age children.

Table 1: *Proportion of all children registered in leisure-time centres (public and private), 2004*

	Six to nine years	10 to 12 years
	%	%
<i>Leisure-time centres total</i>	74.5	10.0
Public	68.1	9.0
Private	6.4	1.0

Source: National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.

In 2004, more than 90% of the 4,648 existing leisure-time centres were provided by the municipality. The remaining 692 leisure-time centres were privately run (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260).

Most leisure-time centres are open all year round and daily opening hours are adapted to the work or study hours of parents, or to the needs of the child. Generally, leisure-time centres are open between 07.00 and 18.00.

⁸ Previously childcare for school-age children only encompassed children aged seven to 12 years.

Family day care

Family day care is an alternative form of childcare service for children that have a need to be in a smaller group⁸ (or for children and parents that prefer this form of childcare). Family day care may also be provided in those areas where the need is not justifiable to provide a leisure-time centre. In family day care, one adult is solely responsible for the children, the groups of children are small and of varying ages, and activities are usually located in the home of the family childminder. Sometimes family childminders cooperate with other childminders in the residential area and organise family day care as a group activity.

As in leisure-time centres, family childminders look after enrolled children for the part of the day when children are not in school and during school holidays. Most family day-care facilities are open all year round and daily opening hours are often varied to fit in with the working hours/study schedules of parents. Generally, family day care is available between 07.00 and 18.00.

The number of children in family day care reached a peak at the end of the 1980s, but since then the number of children registered in family day care has steadily declined. In 2004, only 4,510 children attended family day care, which represents 1% of children aged six to nine years and 0.2% of children aged 10 to 12 years (see Table 2 below). The fall in the number of children in family day care can largely be attributed to the fact that more municipalities are happy to organise childcare for school-age children in the form of leisure-time centres.

Similar to leisure-time centres, more than 90% of all family day care is provided by the municipality.

Table 2: *Proportion of all children registered in leisure-time centres (public and private), 2004*

	Six to nine years	10 to 12 years
	%	%
<i>Family day care total</i>	1.0	0.2
Public	0.9	0.2
Private	0.1	0.0

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.*

Open leisure-time activities

The concept of open leisure-time activities was introduced in the Education Act in 1995 and constitutes an alternative to the leisure-time centre for children aged 10 to 12 years and complements schoolchildren in family day care. Open leisure-time centres do not offer the same care and supervision as leisure-time centres or family day care, but in return activities are more adapted to the needs of children aged 10 to 12 years. Open leisure-time activities can be organised together with a leisure-time centre or with associations, such as sport clubs. The main difference between leisure-time centres and open leisure-time centres is that enrolment is not obligatory in the latter.

Although some children under the age of 10 years attend these activities, the Education Act states that it is not sufficient for municipalities to only offer open activities for schoolchildren younger than 10 years of age.

⁸ This group of children may include children with special needs (i.e. children with disabilities or children with more diffuse problems such as difficulties concentrating or psychological disorders).

Despite the option of offering open facilities for 10 to 12 year olds, many municipalities only offer places in leisure-time centres. Indeed, in 2004, open leisure-time facilities were only provided in 68 of Sweden's 290 municipalities, which represents less than a quarter of all municipalities (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248). Moreover, where open leisure activities are provided they are of low priority, both in terms of staff and other resources. As a result, open leisure-time facilities rarely complement schools in a meaningful way and the lack of resources in terms of staff and facilities makes it impossible to offer children meaningful leisure and support in their learning as specified in the Education Act.

The weekly opening hours of open leisure-time centres varies from less than 15 hours to 21 hours or more. In 2004, more than 70% of Sweden's open leisure-time centres were open more than 16 hours per week. Statistical evidence also shows that municipally-run centres have got a significantly greater proportion of open leisure-time centres that are open for 21 hours or more per week. Some 566 open leisure-time centres existed in 2004 and nearly two thirds of them were integrated within a school (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248). There is no data on the number of children attending open leisure-time activities as it is not compulsory to enrol.

Characteristics of out-of-school childcare provision

As can be seen in Table 3 below more than 90% of all children registered in out-of-school childcare attend facilities that are publicly provided. For children aged 10 to 12 years the proportion of children registered in family day care is as high as 97.5%. This means that only 8.5% of registered children aged six to nine years and 9.9% of children aged 10 to 12 years attended a private childcare institution in 2003. The most common form of private or non-municipal provision of childcare is leisure-time centres run by associations, which account for about 6% of all children registered in out-of-school childcare. Other forms of non-municipal care include company-run care centres (1% of all children registered in out-of-school childcare), staff cooperatives (less than 1% of children registered) and parent cooperatives (1% of children registered) (Swedish Institute, 2004).

The political debate in respect of private versus public out-of-school childcare provision is largely linked to the provision of private and public schools, as almost all leisure-time centres share their management with a primary school or special school. Although there are some ideological differences between the different political parties, there is a broad consensus that non-municipal models for childcare can be enriching and developmental (see case study 1). Furthermore, it is important for freedom of choice and accessibility that activities are run in different forms and with different approaches (Gunnarsson *et al*, 1999).

Table 3: *Proportion of children in public and private out-of-school childcare*

	Six to nine year olds (%)	10 to 12 year olds (%)
<i>Out-of-school childcare</i>		
Public	91.4	90.2
Private	8.5	9.8
<i>Leisure-time centres</i>		
Public	91.5	90.1
Private	8.5	9.9
<i>Family day care</i>		
Public	92.9	97.5
Private	7.1	2.5

Source: National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.

Note: Figures for open leisure-time activities do not exist because children are not enrolled.

Regional differences

There are significant regional differences in the provision of childcare in Sweden. Table 4 below shows that metropolitan cities, suburb municipalities and large cities, i.e. municipality groups with high female participation rates, have the highest proportion of school-age children in childcare, while the sparsely populated municipalities show the lowest number. There are also significant differences in the types of provision that are found across the regions. Family day care is more common in sparsely populated areas and in other smaller municipalities than in the metropolitan areas, while the opposite is true for leisure-time centres. The proportion of children aged six to nine years in leisure-time centres were highest in metropolitan cities and in suburb municipalities and the lowest number were in sparsely populated areas, while the proportion of children aged 10 to 12 years registered in leisure-time centres was the highest in other large municipalities and medium-sized municipalities.

Table 4: *Proportion of children in out-of-school childcare by municipality type, 2004 (%)*

	Proportion of children aged six to nine years registered in			Proportion of children aged 10 to 12 years registered in
	Leisure-time centre	Family day care	Total	Leisure-time centre *
Metropolitan cities	83.1	0.4	83.5	8.2
Suburbs	82.1	1.2	83.3	10.2
Large cities	76.3	0.7	77	9.6
Medium-sized cities	68.2	1.9	70.1	11.6
Industry-based municipalities	63.7	1.4	65.1	9
Rural municipalities	65.3	2.3	67.6	11.3
Sparsely populated areas	58.7	1.6	60.3	7.4
Other large municipalities	68.9	2.4	71.3	12.5
Other small municipalities	64	2.9	66.9	9.6
All municipalities	74.1	1.3	75.4	10

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248.*

* For children aged 10 to 12 years only leisure-time centres are accounted for. This is because only a few children in this age group attend family day care.

Fees and funding

Although it is possible to distinguish between public and private provision in the Swedish context, the boundaries between these two are less clear when it comes to funding. This is largely because the Education Act states that municipalities should subsidise private childcare facilities if they meet the set standards for safety and quality, and if fees charged are not unreasonably high. Indeed, in 2003, the municipal subsidy in private leisure-time centres was SEK 26,300 (€2,742) per child which represents nearly 85% of the total cost per child (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248). The remaining costs in private out-of-school childcare are financed through parental fees and sometimes voluntary work from parents (mainly parent cooperatives). Public out-of-school childcare in Sweden is funded through a combination of state grants, local tax revenue and parental fees.

The total cost for leisure-time centres in 2004 was SEK 10.3 billion (€1.1 billion) which represents a cost of SEK 30,808 (€3,212) per registered child. The cost of family day care was SEK 3 billion (€312.8 million) or SEK 77,903 (€8,122) per child. This figure, however, includes all children aged one to 12 years, which may explain the relatively higher cost per child. The total cost for open leisure-time facilities was SEK 161 million (€16.8 million) in 2003 (SALAR, 2005).

The level of parental fees and construction of the fee system can be decided individually by each local authority. However, since 2002, all municipalities have introduced a system of maximum fees. Compared to other forms of childcare, parental fees in leisure-time centres account for the highest proportion of total costs per child and in 2003 they accounted for 15% of costs. This can be compared with parental fees in pre-schools and family day care, which accounted for 8% and 10% of total cost per child respectively (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248).

Regional differences

Similar to the provision of out-of-school childcare, there are also regional differences in the proportion of total costs financed through parental fees. Table 5 below sets out parental fees as a percentage of total costs per child in various municipality groups.

Table 5: *Parental fees as a percentage of total costs per child, 2004 (public provision)*

Municipality group	Parental fees as % of total costs
All municipalities	16
Metropolitan cities	16
Suburbs	19
Large cities	15
Medium-sized cities	16
Industry-based municipalities	15
Rural municipalities	14
Sparsely populated areas	12
Other large municipalities	15
Other small municipalities	15

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 263.*

Key points to note are that parental fees are significantly lower in sparsely populated areas compared to suburbs, which have the highest parental fees (19% of total costs). Parental fees in rural municipalities are also comparatively lower than in other municipality groups.

Content of provision

Play, creative activities, children's own exploration of the surroundings and theme-based learning have for a long time been the cornerstones of educational activities in out-of-school childcare.

Play activities

Play and creative activities are given plenty of scope in childcare for school-age children. The importance of play is emphasised in the general recommendations for leisure-time centres, where it states that 'through play children get the opportunity to try out new ideas and thoughts together with other children'. Furthermore, it helps children in learning to test and develop their physical, psychological and social competences. Often rules need to be put in place so that play activities will work effectively. However, as the staff and children jointly create these rules, which can be followed or broken, children are trained in democratic thinking.

Theme-based learning

Another educational activity that has a long tradition in out-of-school childcare is theme-based learning. Theme-based activities imply that certain problems or concepts are focused on for a period of time, and analysed and acted upon from several perspectives. Examples of such themes include the local community, traditional holidays, or the season of the year. Other themes arise out of the children's own questions about gender differences, environmental pollution or endangered species. By dealing with a subject over a period of time and from many different perspectives and methods, children get the opportunity to use a variety of skills and thereby develop their knowledge and skills. This approach has involved opportunities to mix theoretical and practical methods of learning and has been greatly improved since schools and leisure-time facilities have become integrated (National Agency for Education, General recommendations with comments for leisure-time centres, 2000).

Child development in groups

Swedish childcare is distinguished by a notion of 'child development' in groups. It is often argued that children need to experience joy with each other in order to learn and develop. Moreover, a child's need for other children cannot be replaced by adults or toys and thus a child group can be seen as an asset in itself in child development (Gunnarsson *et al*, 1999).

Educare

Another distinguishing feature of Swedish childcare is that there is no distinction between education and care. Care has traditionally been seen as part of educational activities and a notion of 'educare' has been established. As a result, leisure-time teachers have extensive experience in seeing different sides of a child's development and research has shown that the 'educare' concept is deeply rooted among leisure-time teachers.

Special needs children

With regards to children with special needs, the general recommendations specify that they should be included in regular childcare provision and not by means of special treatment. This is because the generally high level of quality in leisure-time centres is seen as the best form of support that can be offered to children requiring special support.

Jobs in childcare

Staff in out-of-school childcare services in Sweden are generally well trained and almost all have some form of training for working with children. In 2004, the percentage of full-time staff with a degree in teaching was around 60% (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260).

The most common types of staff found in out-of-school childcare include leisure-time teachers, family childminders and childminders.

Leisure-time teacher

The majority of staff employed in childcare for school-age children are leisure-time teachers. Traditionally, leisure-time teachers have been responsible for children of school age during the part of the day that they are not in school. However, since more schools and leisure-time centres have integrated, the role of the teacher has changed. As has been noted, leisure-time teachers today frequently work in teams together with primary and pre-school teachers and often spend half of their day working with children during school hours (see case studies). In some cases they are even responsible for their own teaching. Subjects taught by leisure-time teachers include drama, music, sports and other creative activities.

Most leisure-time teachers interviewed find their role change stimulating, as they get the chance to follow the progress of the children through a greater proportion of the day. Furthermore, it has allowed a greater proportion of leisure-time teachers to become employed full time. Previously, most teachers only worked 75% of a full-time working day. Although the cooperation between leisure-time teachers and teachers has worked well overall, some leisure-time teachers during the interview process expressed their frustration over the fact that the cooperation only works in one direction – teachers rarely help out during the leisure-time activities. Moreover, as a consequence of the extra time spent in schools, some leisure-time teachers also feel that they have less time to plan activities in the afternoon.

In addition to this role change, the training of leisure-time teachers has undergone a significant change in recent years. Since 2001, the previously separate training programmes for pre-school teachers, primary and secondary school teachers and leisure-time teachers have been integrated into one education programme. Therefore, today all students – regardless if they want to work with one or 15 year olds – start with an 18 month basic education module. After the initial 18 month period, students choose between particular study areas and specialise in areas that are relevant to the age group that they intend to work with. The total length of the programme is three and a half years out of which 20 weeks are allocated to a work placement in either a school or childcare facility⁹.

Family childminder

Family childminders look after children, often in their own home, for the hours in which the child is not in school. They normally take care of between one and five children and they often cooperate with other family childminders in the same residential area. There is no centrally developed training programme for family childminders, though it is recommended that they complete a childminder training course. Many municipalities offer 50 to 100 hours of mandatory course work as an introduction to the family day-care occupation, and provide guidance and support through specifically employed supervisors (Gunnarsson et al, 1999).

⁹ Students planning to work with 14 to 16 year olds or 16 to 19 year olds will study for four years.

Childminder

Childminders are often employed to assist leisure-time teachers in leisure-time centres; however, sometimes they may act as a family childminder by looking after children from three families in the home of one of the families. Childminders receive education in Swedish secondary schools, which offer a child and leisure programme. This programme was recently extended from two years to three years of schooling and provides the students with basic skills in childminding and development psychology, as well as offering compulsory courses in mathematics, language and social sciences. Due to the lack of staff with a teaching qualification, some universities in Sweden now offer a teaching degree designed especially for childminders wishing to complement their current education.

Salaries in childcare

Table 6 sets out the monthly salary in municipal childcare/schools.

Table 6: *Average monthly salary in municipal childcare, November 2004 (€)*

	Newly employed	Experienced	All
<i>Childminder</i>			
Median	1,679	1,814	1,793
<i>Leisure-time teacher</i>			
Median	1,939	2,075	2,043
<i>Primary school teachers</i>			
Median	2,106	2,523	2,398
<i>Pre-school teachers</i>			
Median	1,991	2,106	2,085

Source: *SALAR, 2005*.

Note: *Median salary means that 50% of the individuals within the group have a salary that is lower than or is the same as the median salary.*

A key point to note from Table 6 is that the monthly salary of leisure-time teachers and childminders is significantly lower than that of primary school teachers and slightly lower than that of pre-school teachers. However, Anna Tornberg, who is responsible for issues concerning childcare for school-age children at the Swedish Teachers' Union, stated that these gaps in salary levels have started to close in recent years. For example, leisure-time teachers and pre-school teachers have experienced the highest increases in salary levels in recent years. Moreover, in some municipalities, all types of staff in school, pre-schools and out-of-school childcare have the same starting salary. The Swedish Teachers' Union works hard to equalise any differences in compensation levels and envisages that the new integrated educational programme will help to achieve this.

The relatively lower monthly salary for childminders largely reflects their relatively lower qualification level.

Table 7 below sets out the average monthly salary for various sectors of the economy. When compared to the average monthly salary of public sector workers it is clear that leisure-time teachers have a significantly lower monthly salary of €2,043 compared to €2,315 for public sector workers. Although the difference in salary levels is slightly lower when compared to the average monthly salary of a female public sector worker, it remains true that leisure-time teachers are paid comparatively less. When compared to private sector workers and all sector workers, the differences in monthly salary levels are even greater.

Table 7: Average monthly salary by sector and sex, 2004 (€)

Sector/Sex	2004
Public sector	2,315
Women	2,200
Men	2,648
Private sector	2,544
Women	2,294
Men	2,700
All sectors	2,471
Women	2,242
Men	2,690

Source: SCB, 2005.

Image of a career in childcare

Despite the fact that most childcare workers, in particular leisure-time teachers, have the same or equivalent educational background as pre-school and compulsory school teachers and increasingly work together, the status of a childcare sector career is still lower than a career in the school sector. This is largely due to the comparatively lower salaries in the childcare sector, as discussed above, but also because of inferior working conditions compared to teachers in terms of planning time and holidays. This lower status of childcare workers is also because many people do not know what a leisure-time teacher is or does and do not appreciate the benefits additional educational activities have for children.

Bjorn Flising at the Department of Education at the University of Gothenburg tells us that significantly fewer students on the new teaching programme choose to specialise in leisure-time activities and he believes that this is a reflection of the relatively lower status of childcare workers.

According to a survey by the Swedish Teachers' Union, the most important issues for leisure-time teachers (in order of significance) is to:

- increase salaries;
- work with smaller groups of children;
- increase other people's knowledge about the importance of leisure-time education;
- get more time to plan activities;
- cooperate more with teachers.

As a result of the lower status of childcare workers, there has traditionally been very few men working in this sector. Table 8 below shows that less than a fifth of childcare workers in childcare institutions with shared management are male. For workers only working in leisure-time centres the proportion of male workers is 18.9% while the proportion for those working in leisure-time centres and other activities (e.g. pre-schools) is slightly lower at 14.9%. The proportion of male workers only working in leisure-time centres is slightly higher in childcare institutions with separate

management, at 20.7%, but the proportion of male workers involved in more than one activity is significantly lower, at 5.9%.

Table 8: *Childcare workers by sex, 2004*

	Number of workers	Females	Men
Childcare institutions with shared management			
Leisure-time centres only	12,700	81.1%	18.9%
Leisure-time centres and other activities	16,863	85.1%	14.9%
Childcare institutions with separate management			
Leisure-time centres only	556	79.3%	20.7%
Leisure-time centres and other activities	353	94.1%	5.9%

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.*

Table 9 below extends the above analysis and shows the number of childcare managers in all forms of childcare (children aged one to 12 years) and the proportion that are male and female. Notably, a slightly higher proportion of managers are male compared to the overall proportion of male workers.

Table 9: *Childcare managers by sex, 2004*

	Number of managers employed	Women	Men
Childcare (children aged one to 12 years)	8,29	80.0%	20.0%
Public	5,921	76.1%	23.9%
Private	2,369	89.6%	10.4%

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.*

Although there is not a centrally developed plan to get more men into the childcare profession, there are a number of small-scale projects that are running within municipalities.

Gaps in childcare provision

4

Access to childcare for school-age children has never been higher than it is today and almost all local authorities are now fulfilling their obligations under the Education Act to provide out-of-school childcare without undue delay. In 2004, some 75.5% of all children aged six to nine years and 10.2% of all children aged 10 to 12 years were enrolled in out-of-school childcare (both figures exclude children that attend open-leisure-time facilities where they do not have to enrol).

As a result of this near 'full coverage', it is relatively unusual for parents to mention lack of supply as a reason for not using childcare. However, a recent survey by the National Agency for Education (2001) revealed that there are a number of other reasons why parents do not have access to the childcare services that they would like.

Among parents with children aged six to nine years the most common reason for not getting the childcare they want is that parents consider it too expensive. Indeed, more than a third of the parents stated that they had given up a place in childcare due to financial reasons. This represents nearly 4,000 children and clearly raises questions about affordability. It should, however, be noted that this survey was undertaken before the new system of maximum fees was introduced and thus the affordability and accessibility of childcare may have improved since then.

For parents of older children from 10 to 12 years old, the rules of the municipality are more of a barrier to childcare than the cost involved. This is the case for 60% of the parents that do not have, but require, a place in a leisure-time centre. This is because many municipalities do not allow 10 to 12 year old children to stay in the leisure-time centre for financial reasons. For parents wishing to have their children in open leisure-time facilities, around 20% (representing 4,000 children) state that it is too expensive and nearly 25% (5,000 children) state that the rules of the municipality do not allow it.

The survey also revealed that the use of childcare is different among different groups of society. Single parents, for example, were found to use childcare for school-age children more often than parents that are married or living together. This is the case irrespective of the parents' occupational status. With regard to parents that are working/studying and that have children aged six to nine years, nearly three-quarters of them make use of childcare for school-age children. Among children with unemployed parents this proportion is much lower (44%). This probably reflects the fact that many municipalities do not offer childcare places for children to unemployed parents or parents on leave. Indeed, in 1998, children lost their place in out-of-school childcare in 60% of the municipalities when one of their parents became unemployed and only 30% of the municipalities accepted children of unemployed parents in out-of-school childcare (National Agency for Education, 2001). For children aged 10 to 12 years, the occupational status of parents does not affect the take up of out-of-school childcare.

The survey also revealed that children of highly educated parents attend childcare services more often than other children. Nearly 80% of children aged six to nine years whose parents have at least a three year higher education qualification have access to childcare, compared to just over 50% among children whose parents only have a compulsory school education. This pattern is not as apparent among children aged 10 to 12 years and the proportion of children in leisure-time centres and family day care is roughly the same regardless of parents' education. Nevertheless, it is more usual for 10 to 12 year olds to use open leisure-time centres if their parents have a higher education qualification. These findings raise some questions about the equality of childcare provision.

In summary, gaps exist in terms of:

- provision for children of unemployed and less educated parents;
- affordability of childcare provision;
- provision for children aged 10 to 12 years.

Satisfaction levels of childcare among parents

Despite these gaps, most parents are satisfied with the childcare provision in Sweden. The National Agency for Education survey revealed that nearly 90% of parents with children in childcare facilities were satisfied with provision (National Agency for Education, 2001). This proportion was slightly lower for parents that did not have their child in childcare facilities, 70%–85%. The lowest proportion of satisfied parents was found among those that leave their children on their own or with neighbours or relatives. Up to 25% of parents with children aged 10 to 12 years who take care of themselves are dissatisfied with the care of their children and are particularly asking for more places in open leisure-time centres. According to the National Agency for Education survey (2001), some 16,000 children would like to have access to open leisure-time centres. This can be compared with the 22,500 children that participated in open leisure-time activities in 2002 (National Agency for Education, 2001).

Tackling gaps in childcare provision

It is clear that a significant number of children have been denied childcare because their parents consider it too expensive. Although the introduction of the maximum fee system is likely to have made childcare more accessible and affordable for many parents, there is still a demand to make childcare free of charge.

As highlighted above, there is a need to expand facilities for children aged 10 to 12 years. This age group, it seems, is of low priority in the municipalities and is often the age group that is firstly affected by budgetary cuts. In the Education Act, open leisure-time centres are mentioned as an alternative to traditional leisure-time centres for this age group; however, to date less than 25% of all municipalities offer this alternative. With nearly 16,000 children aged 10 to 12 years wishing to attend open leisure-time centres, municipalities need to allocate more resources to provide satisfactory childcare facilities for this age group. Ostergardsskolan is a programme in Skurup that has responded to these demands and piloted a new 'house' for children aged 10 to 12 years in the spring of 2005. The initial experience of the initiative has been positive and it was permanently implemented in the autumn of 2005 (see case study 3).

The above sections have also shown that access to childcare differs among various groups of society. For example, children with unemployed parents do not have the same access to childcare as children whose parents are working/studying. This largely reflects the fact that municipalities are not obliged to provide out-of-school childcare to children of unemployed parents or parents on parental leave. The need for childcare should, however, not be determined by the employment status of a child's parents and thus childcare should be made available for all children. One way to solve this problem would be to offer out-of-school childcare to all children irrespective of how their parents are occupied. In July 2001, children with unemployed parents and those whose parents are on parental leave were given the right to pre-school for at least three hours a day or equivalent and it can be suggested that a similar system could be introduced regarding childcare for school-age children.

Gaps in employment

At present there seems to be a consensus among commentators that there is an apparent lack of qualified staff in leisure-time centres and other forms of childcare for school-age children. This is partly illustrated by the increasing number of staff without a teaching qualification. Towards the end of the 1990s, the proportion of staff without a teaching qualification was relatively stable; however, since the start of the 21st century this proportion has increased significantly (see Table 10) (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248).

The most probable reason for the gap in employment is that providers of childcare have found it difficult to recruit enough suitably educated staff to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding childcare market. This is not surprising

considering that the number of children registered in childcare has almost tripled since the 1990s (SALAR, 2005). As a consequence, providers of out-of-school childcare have had to recruit staff with lower qualifications.

It is unlikely that this situation will improve much in the near future as the number of children aged six to 12 years is expected to increase further¹⁰. Moreover, the National Agency for Education expects that a greater proportion of these children will be registered in out-of-school childcare. It is expected that nearly 79% of children aged six to nine years and around 13% of children aged 10 to 12 years will be registered in out-of-school childcare by 2010.

According to an assessment made by the National Agency for Education, providers of childcare should be able to sustain the current proportion of qualified staff and meet the future need for staff through graduates. However, the National Agency for Education (2004) has shown that an increase in the proportion of qualified staff to 75% will make it impossible for municipalities to sufficiently meet the future needs for staff solely through an increase in graduates. This means that other measures need to be taken in order to meet future needs, such as offering teacher training to other people with a higher education qualification and providing further training for the 40% of staff that currently do not have a teaching qualification. Another measure suggested by Bjorn Flising, lecturer at the University of Gothenburg, is to increase the number of available places on university courses and to improve the working conditions for childcare workers so that a greater proportion of students choose to specialise in leisure-time activities. To date, only a very small number of students choose to specialise in leisure-time activities.

¹⁰ The number of children aged one to five years is currently greater than the number of children aged six to 12 years and thus the number of children aged six to 12 years will increase in the next few years (National Agency for Education, 2004).

5

Creating sustainable childcare

There is no specific definition of quality in out-of-school childcare; however, most interviewees mentioned staff training, the staff to child ratio, the size of groups and the quality of facilities as important determinants of quality in care. The following sections will examine each of these and present an overview of recent changes in quality.

Qualification of staff

As stated by the Education Act, out-of-school childcare should be provided by staff who are so well trained or experienced that they can satisfy the children's needs with regard to the provision of both care and stimulating educational activities. This is further specified in the general recommendations for leisure-time centres which states that municipalities should aim to have staff that have a higher education qualification in teaching (specialised for the age group for which they work). Despite this specification, a large proportion of staff do not have this qualification. The proportion of staff with a teaching qualification has particularly decreased in leisure-time centres. During most of the 1990s, nearly 70% of all staff in leisure-time centres had a teaching qualification. However, since the start of the 21st century this proportion has decreased steadily. In 2004, just over 60% of all staff had a teaching qualification (see Table 10 below) (SALAR, 2005). Statistical evidence also shows that the quality of staff is significantly lower in private leisure-time centres as less than half of the staff have a teaching qualification.

Table 10: *Number and qualification of workers in leisure-time centres*

	Total number of workers	Teaching qualification	Childminding education or no education
		%	%
2004 Total	17,937	62.0	38.0
Public	16,576	63.5	36.5
Private	1,361	43.5	56.5

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.*

The qualifications of staff in family day care has traditionally been lower than that in leisure-time centres and only 3.3% of staff in family day care had a teaching qualification in 2004. The majority, more than two thirds, of staff in 2004 had a relevant secondary school education or other relevant education, while less than 30% had no childcare education (see Table 11 below) (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260).

Table 11: *Number and qualification of workers in family day care*

	Total number of workers	Teaching qualification	Educated childminders	Other childminding education	No childminding education
		%	%	%	%
2004 Total	6,938	3.3	32.2	35.2	29.3
Public	6,306	2.3	30.7	36.9	30.0
Private	632	13.0	47.5	17.6	22.0

Source: *National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.*

Staff to child ratio

Another important determinant of quality in childcare is the staff to child ratio. There is no single ‘right’ staff to child ratio as it will depend on various factors such as the age of children, the need for special support, the competence of staff and the design of facilities (National Agency for Education, *General recommendations with comments for leisure-time centres*, 2000). Some studies have also shown that a higher staff to child ratio is needed in deprived areas in order to achieve a good quality standard of care.

The very rapid expansion of the childcare system, combined with severe cutbacks in municipal budgets during the 1990s, has led to a reduction in the number of staff to children in both family day care and leisure-time centres. Leisure-time activities were particularly affected by the savings in the 1990s and the staff to child ratio in leisure-time centres decreased from 1:10.6 in 1994 to 1:18.4 in 2002. Since then further reductions in the staff to child ratio has been averted and for the past two years it has been fixed at 1:18.2 (National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260; SALAR, 2005). A comparison between public and private leisure-time centres, shows that the staff to child ratio in public leisure-time centres was relatively lower than in private leisure-time centres in 2004, 1:18 compared to 1:20.9 (see Table 12 below).

Table 12: *Staff to child ratio in family day care and leisure-time centres, 2004*

	Number of children per family childminder (family day care)	Number of children per worker (leisure-time centre)	Number of children per qualified worker* (leisure-time centre)
2004 Total	5.2	18.2	29.4
Public	5.1	18.0	29.1
Private	6.2	20.9	51.7

Source: National Agency for Education, 2004, report 260.

* A qualified worker in this context is defined as a worker that has a teaching qualification.

Group size

Similar to the staff to child ratio there is no single group size that is considered to be ‘the best’. On deciding the appropriate size of a group, factors such as the staff to child ratio and the age of children need to be considered.

The general impression that the research found from leisure-time teachers is that the average group size is much too big at present. In 2004, the average size of groups in leisure-time centres was 30.1 children which is nearly twice as many children as in 1990 (see Table 13 below).

Table 13: *Average group size in leisure-time centres, 1990–2003*

	Average size of groups
1990	17.8
1995	23.7
1996	24.1
1997	26.2
1998	29.4
2002	34.1
2003	30.1

Source: National Agency for Education, 2004, report 248.

Many leisure-time teachers also consider group size to be the main problem when discussing the quality of out-of-school childcare. As a consequence of the larger groups, leisure-time teachers have less time for each individual child and are increasingly unable to organise educational activities. Nya Varvets skola has responded to the problems of larger groups of children by introducing separate groups for children of different ages (six to seven year olds and eight to nine year olds). As a result of this age segregation, Nya Varvets skola has managed to reduce group sizes for the younger children, which means that the staff can dedicate more time for each individual child. Although the average size of groups for the older children has remained largely the same, it is less of a problem for this age group as the attendance of older children is less frequent and the independence of these children is greater (see case study 2).

Quality of childcare facilities

The final determinant of quality in childcare are the available facilities. This quality factor has attracted increased attention because of the integration of schools and leisure-time centres. According to the general recommendation, leisure-time centres should be adapted for varied activities and should also have some space where children can retreat to when they need to rest. Moreover, when leisure-time centres and schools share the same facilities, they should be adapted so that they match the needs of both activities. Many of the leisure-time teachers interviewed describe a situation in which the leisure-time activities have moved into the classroom. In some cases, the integration has led to a situation where the leisure-time centres no longer have satisfactory facilities to undertake leisure-time activities. As a consequence, most activities have to be undertaken outdoors. Bjorn Flising again stated that the most positive experiences from the integration of schools and leisure-time centres have been reported from those centres where the facilities are either new or renovated to suit the needs of both schools and leisure-time centres.

In summary, there has been a significant deterioration in the quality of childcare for school-age children in recent years as a result of both budgetary cuts and difficulties in attracting qualified staff to meet the increasing demand for out-of-school childcare. A recent evaluation by the National Agency for Education stated that 'the budgetary cuts have won over the pedagogical ideals and resources have been cut to such an extent that good quality no longer can be guaranteed'. Another evaluation by the National Agency for Education described the leisure-time centre as 'more of a repository than the pedagogical activity that it is supposed to be'.

The central government has responded to this criticism by taking a number of steps to assure the quality of childcare provision. One such step was the introduction of state grants allocated for the recruitment of staff in leisure-time centres and schools. The first state grant was given in the 2001/2002 school year and the National Agency for Education recently published an evaluation of the effects of the state grant. The main findings are summarised as follows:

- 288 out of 290 municipalities were awarded the grant;
- 9,000 more teachers and other staff were employed in schools and leisure-time centres compared to the 2000/2001 school year;
- the state grant enabled municipalities to avoid further spending cuts which may have reduced staff numbers further.

With the latter in mind, the total number of new jobs created was estimated at 12,000 jobs. Of these posts, 74% were given to teachers, and 26% to other staff, such as classroom assistants.

The total cost for the municipalities in creating these jobs is estimated to have been SEK 4.7 billion (€490 million) and thus the state grant of SEK 3 billion (€312.8 million) is estimated to have helped finance 7,740 of the 12,000 new full-time jobs that had been created since the 2000/2001 school year.

As the state subsidy was not allocated to any particular form of childcare or school, there have been considerable differences in the number of jobs that have been created in the different services available. Primary schools benefited the most and increased their staff numbers by 6,669 teachers. As a result, the staff to child ratio increased from 7.99 staff per 100 children in 2000/2001 to 8.67 in 2003/2004. Leisure-time centres, on the other hand, benefited little from the state grant. In fact, the staff to child ratio in leisure-time centres decreased by 0.11 staff per 100 children to 5.54 in 2003/2004. This is partly explained by an increase in the number of children attending out-of-school childcare, but also by a reduction in the number of staff (National Agency for Education, 2004).

Christer Toftenius, second parliamentary undersecretary for the Ministry of Education and Science, stated in an interview that the central government is disappointed with this outcome, but that they are reluctant to allocate the state grant in such a way that it would reduce the flexibility of municipalities to match the grant to local needs and political objectives.

Future needs

It is clear that more needs to be done in order to improve the deteriorating trends in the quality of childcare services. The most pressing need, as expressed by leisure-time teachers and experts, is to reduce the average size of groups and to improve the staff to child ratio. To achieve this, more funds need to be allocated to out-of-school childcare.

Another area that needs to be improved is the cooperation between school and leisure-time centres. To date, most cooperation takes place during school hours and the objectives and needs of the school have dominated the rewards. To some extent the leisure-time teacher has become an extra resource in the school rather than an actor to promote cooperation between the two activities. The integration of school and leisure-time centres has also highlighted the need for school directors to develop competencies for both leisure-time activities and school activities. During the interview process, Marie Pettersson, a leisure-time teacher in Gothenburg, stated that in many cases the school directors have only got experience of managing schools and thus the needs of the school are dominant.

Case study 1: Milstensskolan – An integrated school day

Organisational background

Milstensskolan is situated in Täby, near Stockholm, and is a private school with integrated leisure-time centres and pre-schools. The school was previously owned by the municipality but taken over by Pysslingen AB, a private limited company, in 2000. Pysslingen AB is a national organisation with 66 integrated schools/pre-schools/leisure-time centres all over the country though most of them are situated in or around Stockholm.

Although owned by Pysslingen AB, Milstensskolan has got autonomy over the activities provided. Milstensskolan provides services for children up to 12 years of age and at present 284 pupils attend the school. Almost all of the six to nine year old children attend the leisure-time centre in the afternoons (191 pupils in total). Among the 10 to 12 year old children, the proportion of pupils that attend is much lower, with just under 50%, or 49 pupils, attending the afternoon activities. This proportion is, however, significantly higher than the national average for this age group. Leisure-time activities for 10 to 12 year olds are slightly different to those for children aged six to nine years and the school is run more like a leisure club than a leisure-time centre.

The school is partly funded through public subsidies and the rest comes from parental fees. Parental fees are capped by the maximum fee system and thus the maximum charge per child is SEK 840 (€88) for the first child and SEK 420 (€44) for the second and third child.

There are currently eight staff responsible for leisure-time activities, only one of whom is a man. Most of the staff have either a leisure-time teacher qualification or a pre-school teacher qualification. Some childminders are employed to assist the leisure-time teachers in looking after the younger schoolchildren.

The school opens from 08.30 to 14.00. During leisure time, organised activities are mixed with free activities in order to stimulate and develop the children's creativity. Activities are undertaken both indoors and outdoors and the school's gymnasium is available for use during leisure-time activities. The children also have access to the school computers during the afternoons. All days end with a common calm activity, e.g. reading aloud, or listening to music.

Apart from the more general leisure-time activities, Milstensskolan also provides leisure clubs twice a week. These leisure clubs have different themes such as sports, music, drama, painting and drawing, ceramics, etc, and run for four weeks at a time. The school also has a 'nature class' for either a half day or one day a week. The aim of this activity is to study nature, the environment and ecology through play and to allow children to get some fresh air.

An example of weekly activity at the leisure-time centre

A typical week at the leisure -time centre	
Monday	'General meeting', everyone is sitting together and the children get the opportunity to give their views on the activities provided. On Mondays, there is also time for 'floorball' and baking to celebrate the birthday kids of the week.
Tuesday	Leisure clubs. Children choose an activity that they undertake on Tuesdays and Thursdays during a four week period.
Wednesday	Birthday party or outdoor activities.
Thursday	Leisure club.
Friday	Performances. Time for free play.

Source: <http://www.milstensskolan.se>

Description of the initiative

A distinguishing feature of Milstensskolan is that it has gone one step further in the integration of schools and leisure-time centres. Not only are the two activities provided in the same facilities, but the leisure-time activities are also provided during school hours. Since the start of the school in 2000, it has dedicated between one and two hours of the school day to leisure-time activities with one of the teachers. The initiative was largely inspired by studies in the US that showed that play, sports and being in motion improves the coordination of children's movements and helps them to develop good physical and psychological stamina. Being in motion also helps to stimulate the development of the brain and its capacity to learn new things. Another reason for adopting an 'integrated school day' was to break the day up and combine the two activities rather than having them separate.

Activities are undertaken in groups consisting of half a class and include theme-based learning, play, practical workshops (e.g. math workshops) etc. Working in smaller groups has allowed leisure-time teachers to focus on the children on a more individual basis.

Development of the initiative

So far the initiative has been highly successful. Children find it easier to concentrate and all pupils are reaching the national educational targets of achievement. The initiative has also been praised by the leisure-time teachers. First, it has allowed them to work with children for a greater proportion of the day and in different settings, which in turn has created greater security and continuity. Secondly, the initiative has allowed leisure-time teachers to work with all children and not only the ones that attend the leisure-time centre. Thirdly, it has allowed more of the leisure-time teachers to gain full-time employment.

To help staff implement these new tasks the school has encouraged further training. For example, Britt-Marie Sundstrom, one of the leisure-time teachers, recently attended university courses such as 'Basic Chemistry' and 'From Bamse (a Swedish cartoon character) to Kafka'. Both courses were worth five points at university which is the equivalent of a quarter of a semester.

There are currently no plans for developing the initiative further, but many other schools have become interested in what Milstensskolan does and similar initiatives have been adopted by other schools owned by Pysslingen AB.

Good practice

Milstensskolan demonstrates good practice in the type of childcare provision. Through their innovative approach they have managed to combine school and leisure-time in a more effective way and this has benefited both children and staff. Moreover, Milstensskolans owner, Pysslingen AB, was recently ranked 6th best employer by the respected magazine 'Veckans Affärer' (Weekly Business). With the increased integration between schools and leisure-time centres there is increased scope to implement similar initiatives in other leisure-time centres/schools.

Further information

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Case study 2: Nya Varvets skola – Age-segregated groups

Organisational background

Nya Varvets skola in Gothenburg is a non-private school inspired by the Montessori method¹¹. In the school there are four 'houses' for pupils aged six to 13 years, six leisure-time centres and one pre-school with two groups of children aged one to five years. Every 'house' has their own leisure-time centre, which is open for children aged six to seven years. The other two leisure-time centres are open for children aged eight to nine/10 years. Parents are charged through the maximum fee system for registration in leisure-time centres.

The school was built 10 years ago and was purpose-built to suit both school and leisure-time activities. There are a total of 14 staff in the leisure-time centres, of whom three are men. In all, 11 staff members have a relevant higher education qualification and the remaining three are qualified childminders. One of the childminders is specifically employed to assist children with special needs.

Description of the initiative

As a result of the rapid expansion of the childcare system, and severe cutbacks in municipal budgets during the 1990s, many leisure-time centres in Sweden have been faced with larger groups and a lower staff to child ratio in recent years. As a result, many leisure-time centres have had to reconsider the way they provide their services for school-age children. At Nya Varvets skola, the management responded to this problem by introducing separate groups for children aged six to seven years and children aged eight to nine/10 years in the autumn of 2004. As a result of this new system, children aged six to seven years now play in smaller groups while the older schoolchildren play in slightly bigger groups. Although the bigger groups for older children are not ideal, it is less of a problem as the attendance of these children is less frequent. They sometimes have the right to go home with friends or return home as long as they have parental consent. Furthermore, the older schoolchildren are better able to play independently than younger children and need less supervision.

Since the introduction of separate groups, two members of staff work with each group of children aged six to seven years while three members of staff work with the older children. In the groups for the younger schoolchildren there are currently 20 to 22 children in each group while for the older schoolchildren there are around 45 children in each group. As a result, the staff to child ratio is slightly lower among the younger schoolchildren.

Apart from the provision of smaller groups, the initiative has also enabled activities to be better suited to the different age groups. Teachers are able to work with the older schoolchildren in a different manner and let them learn to take greater responsibility for their actions and thus aid them in their development. Having smaller groups for the younger schoolchildren also makes the transition from pre-school less traumatic for six year olds.

Although the new system has only been running for a year, the staff have already noticed improvements in terms of better integration with the children.

Development of the initiative

For the leisure-time staff at Nya Varvets skola it is important that children aged 10 to 12 years also get access to the leisure-time facilities at the school. The school is, therefore, working hard to obtain additional funding from the

¹¹ The Montessori method is an educational model developed for children by the Italian physician and teacher Maria Montessori. Maria Montessori believed that children learned better if they were in an environment of self-education and self-realisation.

municipality in order to be able to set this up. However, as there already is an open leisure-time centre in this part of the city, the municipality is unlikely to fund any such activity at Nya Varvets skola. However, Magdalena Ekbrand-Schagerström, one of the leisure teachers at the school, stated that the other existing leisure-time centre is not used by the pupils, as it too far away from the school. As a consequence, many of the children in this age group are left on their own for most of the afternoon (normally between 13.30 and 17.30). For some children this may be acceptable, but Magdalena Ekbrand-Schagerström feels that many children have too little choice of activities if they are at home all afternoon.

Good practice

Nya Varvets skola demonstrates good practice as it has responded to the problems of larger groups of children and tried to address the problem by introducing separate groups for children aged six to seven years. Although the initiative has been highly successful in the short term, it is felt that the long-term problems with larger groups can only be solved through increased funding from the municipalities.

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Case study 3: Ostergardsskolan – Activities for children aged 10 to 12 years

Organisational background

Ostergardsskolan in the municipality of Skurup was founded in 1983. At the beginning it was a normal school, but since the 1990s, leisure-time centres and pre-schools have been integrated into the organisation.

Ostergardsskolan provides services for children aged five to 13 years and it currently has 285 pupils. Pupils belong to one of three 'houses'. There is also a 'house' for children who have special needs. Each 'house' is divided into younger and older children and has a leisure-time centre attached to it. However, there is no separate leisure-time centre for children with special needs as the school believes that it is better for these children to mix with other children during leisure time.

Nearly 41% of all pupils are registered in the leisure-time centres. The proportion of six to nine year olds registered in leisure-time centres is, however, significantly higher, with 75% of all children registered. About 20 pupils attend activities for 10 to 12 year olds.

The leisure-time centres at Ostergardsskolan employ 11 people, of whom three are men. This is slightly higher than the national average. Just like the children, the staff belong to a specific 'house'. The staff in each 'house' comprise a leisure-time teacher, a primary school teacher, a pre-school teacher, and childminders. Schoolteachers work almost exclusively during the school hours while childminders only work during the part of the day when the children are not in school. Leisure-time teachers and pre-school teachers work mainly with the leisure-time activities but they also often assist teachers during school hours. Sometimes the teachers even teach in a number of subjects e.g. drama, music, drawing. It is, however, rare that they teach in purely theoretical subjects. This is widely appreciated by teachers.

The qualification level of staff is generally high and seven staff have a relevant higher education qualification. The remaining four are childminders with an upper secondary school education. To some degree this relatively lower level

of education among the childminders is complemented by several years of experience of working with children. Two of the childminders are dedicated to working with special needs children.

Description of the initiative

In Sweden, there is generally a significant gap in the provision of suitable activities for children aged 10 to 12 years. Children in this age group are often included in the same groups as six to nine year olds which may not always be suitable and stimulating for the older children. Moreover, when 10 to 12 year olds are integrated with six to nine year olds they often receive little attention from the staff as six to nine year olds take up much of their time. A further complication is that activities in leisure-time centres are often geared towards the needs of six to nine year olds. This together with the financial burden of childcare has led to a general trend that parents choose to leave their older children on their own during the afternoons.

Ostergardsskolan responded to this problem by piloting a separate activity for 10 to 12 year olds in the spring of 2005. A whole new 'house' was created for this age group and it accepts children from all the other 'houses'. The initial experience of the pilot scheme has been positive and as a result it was implemented on a permanent basis in autumn 2005.

With a separate group for children aged 10 to 12 years, staff are able to provide activities that are better suited for this age group. Moreover, in order to take into account the greater independence developed by this age group, attendance is less strict and a child can choose to go home with a friend after school if they have parental consent.

The school has dedicated two members of staff to work with the 20 pupils in the leisure-time centre for 10 to 12 year olds. One of these is employed as a leisure-time teacher and has got a higher education degree while the other is an educated social worker/childminder who has been employed largely to take care of the special needs children who attend the leisure-time centre.

Development of the initiative

One interviewee, Leif Andersson, a leisure-time teacher who has worked at the leisure-time centre for 22 years, is extremely pleased with the way the initiative has worked out and hopes that more children will discover the benefits of attending the leisure-time centre. Specifically, he expressed satisfaction with the increased enjoyment of children aged 10 to 12 years. One of the girls attending the activities for 10 to 12 year olds stated: 'It is much better now. In [the new 'house'] we are able to spend more time with the older children and we do not have smaller children who disturb us.'

Good practice

Ostergardsskolan can be seen as a good practice initiative as it has given high priority to children aged 10 to 12 years – an age group that is often rejected in other leisure-time centres. Furthermore, the school has dedicated qualified staff for this age group and as such is an example of good practice. The extent to which this initiative can be transferred to other leisure-time centres is largely determined by whether there is a demand from this age group for the service and if the municipality is prepared to fund such an activity.

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Conclusions

In conclusion, this report has revealed that the Swedish out-of-school childcare system is well-developed and accessed by a large proportion of children aged six to 12 years.

The organisation of out-of-school childcare has changed in recent years and is now to a great extent integrated with schools and pre-schools. This integration generally applies to staffing and premises. Another recent change in policy is the introduction of maximum fees. The aim of this policy was to increase accessibility to childcare for school-age children and to improve the economic circumstances of families with children: effectively, reducing the marginal effects and facilitating participation of parents in the labour force.

Access to childcare for school-age children has never been higher than it is today and almost all local authorities are now fulfilling their obligations under the Education Act to provide out-of-school childcare without undue delay. Despite this, there are still a number of reasons why parents do not get the type of childcare that they want. These include the cost of childcare and the rules of the municipality. A possible reason for why such a large proportion of parents refer to the cost of childcare as a barrier for getting it may be the fact that out-of-school childcare is more price sensitive than pre-school care. School-age children, particularly children aged 10 to 12 years, are often capable of taking care of themselves for a few hours in the afternoon and the savings that a family can make by giving up a place in a leisure-time centre is relatively large. It should, however, be noted that despite the fact that a significant number of parents have had to turn down a place in a leisure-time centre due to financial reasons, the Swedish out-of-school childcare system should be viewed as highly affordable. With the introduction of the maximum fees system, parental fees are restricted to 1%–2% of the family income up to a ceiling of €88 per child per month (€44 per child for the second and third child etc).

In terms of employment, there is an apparent lack of qualified staff. This has resulted in a reduction in the proportion of staff with a teaching qualification. Although it is likely that the current proportion of qualified staff will be able to be sustained through the recruitment of graduates, it is not likely that the out-of-school system will be able to improve the proportion of qualified staff unless measures are taken to achieve this. Examples of such measures include offering courses in teacher training to other people with a higher education qualification and providing further education for those with no teaching qualification.

The very rapid expansion of the childcare system, combined with severe cutbacks in municipal budgets during the 1990s, has led to a deterioration in the quality of childcare services in recent years. The average size of child groups and the staff to child ratio have been particularly affected. Various methods have been adopted to respond to these changes and one of these involves introducing age-integrated groups (see case study 2 above).

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List of interviewees

Name	Position	Organisation/Type of service	Location
Ulla Nordenstam	Counsellor for educational affairs	National Agency for Education	Stockholm
Bjorn Flising	Lecturer and ENSAC coordinator	University of Gothenburg and ENSAC Sweden	Gothenburg
Anna Tornberg	Counsellor for out-of-school care affairs	Swedish Teachers' Union	Stockholm
Marie Eklund	Headmistress	Ostergardsskolan (leisure-time centre)	Skurup
Karin Thulin	Leisure-time teacher	Leisure-time centre	Gothenburg
Christer Toftenius	Second parliamentary undersecretary	Ministry of Education and Science	Stockholm
Britt-Marie Sundstrom	Leisure-time teacher	Milstensskolan (leisure-time centre)	Täby
Leif Andersson	Leisure-time teacher	Ostergardsskolan (leisure-time centre)	Skurup
Rigmor Bewo-Lundblad	Headmistress	Milstensskolan (leisure-time centre)	Täby
Marie Pettersson	Leisure-time teacher	Leisure-time centre	Gothenburg
Magdalena Ekbrand-Schagerstrom	Leisure-time teacher	Nya Varvets skola (leisure-time centre)	Gothenburg