



Inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas

A report for the cross-European programme *Working for Inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*





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Summary



The harbour at Bodø

Context

This report addresses the theme of inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas, in relation to the overarching theme of the *Working for Inclusion* project: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and social inclusion.

There is no single, EU-wide definition of what is meant by the term 'rural'. Individual countries have different definitions based on factors such as dispersed population, an agriculture-based economy, distance from major urban centres and lack of access to major services. In 2004, according to a definition accepted by EU Regional Policy (with regions classified into predominantly urban; intermediate regions close to a city; intermediate remote regions; rural regions close to a city; and rural remote regions) 90.5 million EU citizens lived in rural remote

regions or rural regions close to a city. Finland, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden have the largest extent of rural remote regions among member states, followed by Austria, Bulgaria, France, Hungary and Scotland: the largest share of rural population is in Bulgaria, Romania and Lithuania.

Rural regions differ from urban in a number of ways affecting access to and use of early childhood education and care services, including demographic, geographic and economic factors and social, cultural and service conditions. Provision and availability of services, and access to them, may be compromised in rural regions compared with urban settings. However rural areas may offer extensive access to outdoor environments and may make more use of parental and community support.

Summary

European funding has supported the exploration of new models for delivering educational services in rural areas when linked to rural development and economic diversification, and it is a specific goal under the new EU strategic framework, ET2020, that at least 95% of children between 4 years and compulsory school age – no matter where they live – should participate in early childhood education.

The aim of the visit was to explore models of good practice in a remote region of Norway and to feed responses, ideas and questions into the ongoing debate on how best to develop inclusive workforce models across Europe.

Study visit to Norway

Delegates from Italy, Poland, Portugal and Scotland visited five municipalities in Nordland, Norway: Bodø, Beiarn, Fauske, Saltdal and Steigen. The visits took place in January 2010 and responses from the delegates form the basis of the report. The delegate groups included officials and consultants from the public sector and national children's agencies; managers and staff responsible for a wide range of children's services; academics; representatives of local government; and developers of early years policy.

During the study visits delegates were asked to address the following questions:

- What are the most effective models for early years services in rural and remote areas and what implications are there for workforce education and development?
- What are the needs of the service users in rural areas, and how can access to services be ensured?
- What measures ensure that remote areas can attract, maintain and develop a professional early years workforce?

Each delegate received a background briefing paper, to introduce the topic of provision in rural and remote areas; to identify the factors that influence service delivery and access; and to provide a cross-European context on rural–urban differences in approaches and access to services.

At a concluding seminar to the study visit findings from the programme were published based on statistics from 28 European countries. These concluded fully integrated early years education and care services that are universally applied and coordinated by a single department across access, funding, regulation and workforce are more beneficial for children and go hand in hand with reduced child poverty and inequality.

Overall conclusions from the study visit included:

- Coordination, cooperation and integration in planning, developing and delivering early childhood and educational services is highly effective in meeting the needs of children and families.
- A high degree of integrated practice offers real support to the social, cultural and economic development of local communities, even where these are scattered or isolated.
- Universally available services with a single, coordinated point of access are highly effective in identifying and meeting needs at a local level, and reducing any stigma related to a need for additional support or intervention.

Summary

- Investing time and resources in developing and communicating a shared vision among service providers at every level of the workforce and also among service users, has a key role in establishing good practice.
- Flexibility and autonomy in delivering centrally agreed objectives contributes to maintaining core principles effectively across a range of settings.
- Developing and sustaining effective practice, particularly in rural areas, depends on willingness to work together; share knowledge and resources; respect the skills and knowledge of other workers; and openness to new ideas and ways of working.
- A prominent role for the outdoors in education has a multitude of benefits, for pupils, and in staff recruitment and development.
- Effective training and development for staff ensures the quality of provision in rural areas keeps pace with that in more urban-based populations.
- Building good relationships among service providers and service users, with respect for each others' skills and competences, contributes to effective service delivery that meets local and individual needs.



Skaug Upbringing Centre

Introduction

Drawing on individual and group feedback from delegates, within the context of local information provided by hosts and local practitioners, this report brings out a range of perspectives, responses and key learning points arising directly from the visit. These are considered in relation to the theme of the *Working for Inclusion* programme, looking at how they connect with the aim of working for inclusion and with the role early years services can play.

The objective is for this report to form part of the ongoing debate on these issues, with a view to forming recommendations based on sharing of experience and good practice.

Norway and Nordland County Region

Background

Nordland County is in the north of Norway. It extends for 800 km and has a population density of 7/km², bordering the Norwegian counties of Troms to the north and Nord Trøndelag to the south, with its eastern boundary the national border with Sweden and its western boundary the Norwegian Sea.

Nordland is divided into 44 municipalities. The rocky coastline features deep fjords and rocky islands, and the region's size and remoteness means service provision can face logistical challenges: in some areas the easiest way to travel is by boat or aeroplane.

Bodø, the regional capital of Nordland County and the biggest settlement with 46,000 inhabitants, is the southernmost town of the Arctic Circle. Founded in the 1860s on the fishing industry, and extensively reconstructed after the Second World War, its key employers today are in the tourist, health service and commercial industries. It is the base for Norway's main air force station and the armed

forces are a significant local employer. The region is governed by a coalition between Labour, Socialist, Christian Democrat and Liberal parties, and is highly regarded in Norway for its policy and practice in relation to children and families. Bodø is a centre for outdoor leisure, heritage and culture and with a train station, airport and ferry port it provides a transport hub for the whole region.

The birth rate in Bodø has risen in recent years and the town is growing, leading to pressure on services and waiting lists for entry into kindergartens. At the time of the study visit around 300 families in the city were waiting for places for their children. However outside Bodø and in the more rural areas, depopulation is a factor.

Fauske is the centre of the Indre Salten region, and with 9600 residents forms a commercial and transport hub for the municipality. The Indre Salten region covers a large area and its total population of around 21,000 is sparsely dispersed. The countryside is varied and dramatic, offering a wide range of outdoor pursuits including skiing, mountaineering and caving. The region's economy depends on agriculture, fishing, mineral and energy resources.

The Nordland region caters for the indigenous Sami people, whose culture and traditions are required to be included within kindergarten and school provision: in some kindergartens this includes teaching in the three Sami languages, North Sami, South Sami and Lule Sami. Nordland also receives a quota of refugees who have been granted residency by central government, from a wide range of countries: within the last year these have included immigrants from Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Somalia and Ethiopia.

Early years and childhood services provision

Introduction

Both parents are entitled to parental leave from work with pay, amounting to 46 weeks at full pay or 56 weeks with 80% of pay. Leave may start up to 12 weeks before the child is born, but must begin a minimum of 3 weeks before birth. The mother is entitled to the first 6 weeks of leave after the child is born: the rest may be shared between the parents as they think best, but the father must take 10 weeks of leave or these are lost (unless the mother has permission to depart from the regulations). In addition the father has a right to 2 weeks leave at the time of the birth. Where there is more than one child, leave is extended by 5 weeks (or 7 weeks at 80% pay) per extra child. After the mother has returned to work she is entitled to 2 hours paid leave each day, without a time limit, to enable her to continue breastfeeding.

Kindergarten attendance is voluntary but since 2009, every child aged between 1 and 6 years old has the right to attend. It is estimated that 97–98% of children in this age group attend a kindergarten for at least part of every week. If kindergartens have capacity, they may accept children from the age of 8 months to allow parents to return to work.

In Bodø there are currently 67 kindergartens, 39 of which are privately owned and the remainder run by the municipality. Private owners may include groups of parents, religious bodies and work organisations: for example Bodø's Football Club owns part of one kindergarten with a number of places available to children of the players. All kindergartens are subject to legislation contained in the Kindergarten Act (2006) and an associated Framework Plan that provide guidelines to parents, staff, owners, supervisors and authorities. The result is a high degree of consistency and quality in provision irrespective of ownership and management.

Fees paid by parents are capped at 2300

Norwegian kroner per month – equivalent to around €285 at the time of reporting – across all kindergartens and central funding is earmarked to guarantee this subsidy for parents. Where parents cannot afford the fee and the authorities believe it is in the child's interests to attend a kindergarten, the fee may be paid by the social office.

Norwegian education

Norwegian education at every level, including early years, is informed by four basic core values:

- a common basis of knowledge, culture and values
- same education for all regardless of background or location
- identification with the local community
- tasks and challenges adjusted to pupils' abilities.

School is compulsory for all children from the age of 6 to 16 years old. Currently 95–98% of 16-year-olds in Norway continue in education to the age of 19.

Daycare facilities, for which parents pay, allow children to play or do homework. Most children attending these facilities are in the first and second years of primary school, after which they are usually considered old enough to manage at home alone: this is, however, a choice for the individual family and municipalities are obliged to offer services from first to fourth grade (to age 10). Children with special educational needs have a right to a place as long as they need it, and after the fourth grade this is free of charge.

A national curriculum applies at all levels of primary and secondary education based around five basic skills:

- ability to read

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- ability to express orally
- ability to express in writing
- ability to do arithmetic
- ability to make use of ICT.

Funding

Funding for compulsory education and most other services comes from central government as a block grant and municipalities have a high level of autonomy in allocation of funds. Municipalities currently receive earmarked funding for preschool provision: the national aim is that central government should bear one third of the cost of preschool provision, municipalities one third and parents one third or less, with clear legislative guidelines shaping local policy. From January 2011 the government-supported development of kindergartens and capping of fees through ring fenced funding will cease, giving municipalities more independence in interpreting and prioritising local needs within legislative guidelines. Where services are more expensive because of the cost of delivery in remote areas, the municipality may apply to central government for increased funding to reflect this.

Since 2003 private and non-private early childhood providers are required to receive equal treatment in terms of public financing, effectively preventing the development of a 'childcare market' and transforming private kindergartens into community providers.

Regulation, content and financing of primary and secondary education is the responsibility of the state, with county governors acting as links between the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate for Education and Training, and the education sector in the municipalities. Municipalities operate and administer primary and lower secondary schools, with county authorities responsible for upper secondary education and training.

Workforce training and development

"We have to constantly remind central government of the relative size of the area and the challenges. Sometimes they listen, sometimes not."

Henny Aune, Upbringing Coordinator, Bodø municipality

A combination of trained teachers, specialist teachers and pedagogues, along with other service providers (for example, occupational therapists) where necessary, make up the majority of the staff. Most staff are trained to tertiary level (age 19 upwards).

To teach or take on pedagogical responsibility staff must hold a Bachelor degree in early years pedagogy plus additional relevant specialist qualifications, which will vary depending on their choice of degree but may include, for example, music, pedagogy, special needs or outdoor education. Including an outdoor education specialisation has proved effective in bringing men into early years teaching and provision. To teach in a primary school requires 4 years study; to teach in a kindergarten, 3 years.

Vocational qualifications offer specialisation as a child and youth worker plus an apprenticeship, which leads to certification enabling staff to work in a kindergarten, school or youth club, but not to teach or take pedagogical responsibility. Staff with extensive practical experience may use this to provide a theoretical dimension to their knowledge and allow them to become qualified.

In rural areas distance learning allows training and development to continue to tertiary level

Introduction

and beyond through 'Open School', with extensive use of the internet and remote classrooms.

No fees apply to higher education in Norway: there is a flat charge of €80 per semester.

Ongoing personal and professional development following qualification in Nordland is the task of the RKK, a regional agency established to promote collaboration between local authorities in training and development work, which aims to overcome the challenges of a decentralised municipal and school structure, distances, high travel expenses and inequalities between regions by building up a regional network and resource body to connect training to all parts of the children's sector horizontally and vertically.

The role of the pedagogue

Professionally trained pedagogues have a range of skills that are particularly valuable in delivering services in rural areas, where flexibility within an integrated service network is an asset. Pedagogical training is one of the specialisms available to student teachers, and the government has strengthened the recruiting of pedagogues in the last year. Many preschool teachers are in fact qualified pedagogical leaders and pedagogues lead open kindergartens or drop-in centres for parents and children: legislation dictates that there must be one pedagogical leader for every seven to nine children under the age of 3 years and every 14 to 18 children over this age. Pedagogues also play a key role in implementing the inclusive approach to children with disabilities and additional support needs.

The Bodø Upbringing Plan

Begun in 2004 to give a higher priority to a child-focused approach, the Bodø Upbringing

Plan has attracted favourable attention from other municipalities.

A comprehensive plan covering all sectors involved in the upbringing of a child, from birth to adulthood, it is based around the principles of:

- early intervention
- interaction between services across the sector
- ease of access and reduction in bureaucracy
- parental empowerment.

Because almost all children are in the public system the plan provides an effective foundation for joined-up thinking. When the government-funded pilot of the plan ended, evaluation was so positive that there was willingness to revise thinking and practice across sectors in order to facilitate working together.

Delegate feedback



Parents and babies at Mørkved Family Centre

Group responses

Delegate groups reconvened following 2 days visiting different service providers across the five municipalities. These responses are based on the impressions shared by each of the participating groups.

Group 1 – Bodø Teresa Ogrodzinska, Franco Doni, Ewa Speranza and Tracey Francis (Local host: Henny Aune, Upbringing Coordinator for Bodø municipality)

The group remarked on good examples of cooperation among different services and professionals, parents and municipality

leaders, for example in Mørkved Family Centre. Staff engaged with each other and with the children, and there was a positive atmosphere among the workforce promoting effective problem-solving, rather than complaints, when challenges arose. The system was seen to lend itself to piloting new ideas and solutions, and to real interaction and sharing of knowledge among different services.

Centres were seen to focus on the importance of creating a happy childhood for very young children, with formal learning left to school: the group felt this approach favoured learning of a wide range of life skills. Strong local leadership was seen to contribute to an encouraging ethos, participatory models and

Delegate feedback

openness to discussion, plus flexibility that enables effective implementation of decisions at a local level.

The group questioned whether delaying the start of formal learning so markedly meant that children may not learn enough in the earliest years of their education, and questioned how children's development is documented in the kindergartens: compared with other countries, this seemed to have a lesser focus. The inclusive approach to children with special needs and children of refugees was praised, but it was felt that a higher volume of children requiring additional support of some kind might represent a strain on the current model of provision. How far children's opinions and personal choices were really taken into account was questioned, given that all children seemed to take part in the same activities, and the group wondered what plans were in place to absorb the 15% of families that currently remain outside the family centre system.

Group 2 – Fauske
Gloria Tognotti, Chiara Rossi, Carrie Lindsay and Inga Lill Sundseth (interpreter)
(Local host: Frid Sund, Advisor in Nordland County Municipality)

The group was impressed by the approach to staff training, with joint training for health and social services, and education workers, and consultation over training needs with people on the ground. This was felt to be a factor in developing the shared understanding and values that contributed to integrated practice.

A good support network among offices was identified as contributing to services working effectively in rural areas, along with a holistic view of the family and the range of needs they may have, reducing fragmentation in service provision: NAV – the local office of the

Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration – played a positive role in this by bringing together a range of services, including benefits, to support the family. Having a universal approach to family services helped break down any stigma attached to families requiring ongoing support.

In terms of provision, the group saw farm kindergartens as an effective means of promoting health and wellbeing for children, supporting local culture and encouraging men into the children's workforce. The relationship between private and public kindergartens was highlighted as a good example of effective service provision.

Group 3 – Steigen
Monika Rosciszewska Wozniak, Douglas Chapman and Maria Luisa de Almeida Tavares
(Local host: Anne Sofie Skogvold, Researcher at Nordland Research Institute)

Impressive organisation, a clear and shared vision, strong leadership, positive staff relations, flexibility and good integration were all seen as contributing to effective education and family services in a very rural, harsh environment.

Pride in the area was evident throughout the community and became a driving force, with culture school activities, farm schools and the natural environment a big focus for everyday life and learning. A passion for the education system and welfare of the children among staff and parents means learning can take a personalised dimension, for example in music lessons.

However the group questioned how far pupil choice might extend, for example in relation to motivation of pupils, especially higher up the school system. The current models are

Delegate feedback

expensive to run and the group felt some resources were under pressure: and challenges within a small community where professional and personal relationships can overlap were highlighted. It was not universally agreed that being out of doors all day represented the best model for early education.

Group 4 – Beiarn and Saltdal Malgorzata Zytko, Barbara Pagni, John Butcher, Wiveca Wilhelmsen- Holm

**(Local host: Wiveca Wilhelmsen-Holm,
Office of the County Governor in
Nordland)**

Cooperation, particularly between municipalities in relation to staffing, was seen to be the key to successful service delivery in rural areas. The group felt the workforce benefited from formal recognition of professional development needs, and initiatives such as the “call centre” approach, which allows workers in remote areas to access advice and assistance by telephone.

Municipalities were seen to work well with parents, and the group gained the clear impression staff valued children and had an investment in them, which was less apparent in some delegates’ home countries. Examples of learning through play, nature- and place-based learning and experiential learning were felt to be particularly impressive.

However there was a sense that the need to retain staff, coupled with lack of direct supervision owing to geography, may contribute in some cases to complacency of staff. The group queried the balance between the role of the teacher as educator, and as promoter of the child’s experience, which it was felt in some cases might inhibit learning and the transition to more formal school settings.

Responses to thematic questions

Delegates on the study visit were given three questions about inclusive workforce models, and asked to respond.

NB The following responses are summaries of or edited extracts from reports provided by the delegates. Direct quotes or personal observations are indicated by quotation marks.

1. What are the most effective models for early years services in rural and remote areas and what implications are there for workforce education and development?

Italian delegation

Developing services that are diversified, and flexible enough to accommodate different models of organisation and planning, seems to be a highly effective strategy. This requires a workforce that is able to deal with flexibility and complexity in its role, without a standardised and rigid model. Giving high value to the use of natural resources is also effective in developing services.

Polish delegation

Adjusting institutions and the way they function to meet peoples’ needs, rather than people having to fit into a rigid framework, is effective. In particular, financing education by giving local authorities latitude to manage the budget and plan education strategies depending on local needs (taking into account, for example, local demographics; children with additional support or other special needs; refugees) is very effective.

The use of nature and the local environment is very effective in accessing a rich source of knowledge that builds the courage needed in personal and professional life, and gives the opportunity to develop a variety of skills and abilities that are not available in standard school conditions.

Delegate feedback



Special teacher Siv Rødland working with Amalie, 4, at Skaug

For the workforce, the success of these models depends on developing the ability to cooperate within the system and to share competence and responsibility. The decentralisation of management is important in helping the models work effectively. The system of training social workers, which includes lots of practical experience so that even new graduates are effectively prepared to work with service users, is a good model.

Scottish delegation

Having an integrated approach benefits children and families, with the joint delivery of services starting prebirth. Shared values and focus among providers appears to be key to the success of the model of universal access to services for all parents, with effective leadership a significant factor. A freedom from bureaucracy allows time to focus directly on work with children and families.

The joined up approach to training is an effective way in a small community to build relationships, use scarce resources and deliver services to meet local needs.

The Norwegian model is very inclusive of men, with men an integral part of the early years workforce and teacher training and teaching practice encouraging men into the sector. This provides good male role models and values the role of the man in shaping the whole child.

Delegate feedback

Significant investment in early years is a factor in implementing the Norwegian model.

Portuguese delegate

The emphasis is on the importance of sharing resources, both human and material, to develop strategies that improve services, develop competency in staff and integrate resources. Investment has played a great part in building the ability to do this, as well as the willingness to cooperate between disciplines.

2. What are the needs of the service users in rural areas, and how can access to services be ensured?

Italian delegation

The presence of private services that have special agreements with municipalities, working alongside public service providers, make the diffusion of services possible even for the remotest communities.

Polish delegation

Service users need access to up-to-date education to ensure a stimulating and rich educational environment. Access to culture is important, so children can develop their potential and prove artistic and creative development is possible even in a small village.

To meet service users' needs effectively, integration of different services is important, especially where needs overlap (for example in education, social services, culture, finance, health).

Understanding and communication are essential for close cooperation and effective planning among service providers, meaning a lot of attention needs to be paid to agreeing common policies. Flexibility over delivery to fit local needs or changing situations (for

example the impact of the weather on the delivery of education) is also important.

Focusing on the needs of the individual child or family is a very good way of ensuring effective access to services.

Scottish delegation

Service users in Norway expect access to quality inclusive services operated by qualified staff committed to the development of the whole child, supported by high quality teacher training, continuing personal development initiatives and an effective local government system free from legislative and bureaucratic constraints. Service users in rural areas have the same requirements as urban families in the need for effective care and support services that allow parents to work, benefiting both the society and the local economy.

Physical, social and cultural isolation are key challenges to be addressed.

In small communities staff know families well and discussions and joint working with parents is embedded, supporting access to services. The Family Centre system, providing universal access to all services at a central point and therefore reducing any stigma attached to attending, creates a very effective service for all parents as well as enabling staff to identify children and families for whom additional support would be beneficial. This also helps services that are small in scale to work together effectively.

The joint delivery of state benefits helps ensure the whole family's needs are taken into account.

For service providers, the sharing of expertise (for example through the provision of telephone helplines, or links with other municipalities) helps support consistency in delivery by ensuring learning and

Delegate feedback



Children and staff at the Regnbuen Kindergarten in Bodø

development is a feature regardless of the setting.

Supporting local community initiatives, for example in setting up their own provision such as farm kindergartens, is effective in enhancing services.

Portuguese delegate

There is common ground worth highlighting in the success of teamwork and cooperation among schools, municipalities, teachers and services to parents. Collaboration can transform the quality of life in rural and remote areas and promote social inclusion.

3. What measures ensure that remote areas can attract, maintain and develop a professional early years workforce?

Italian delegation

A high level of professionalism, as for example that required to work in farm kindergartens, is effective in attracting male educators and people with a preference for educational work in outdoor spaces.

Ongoing training and the presence of networks of services help prevent isolation of staff or disagreements, and help support the renewing of work methodologies.

Polish delegation

Service providers are high quality people taking care of children, and there is a large supply of teachers.

Delegate feedback

A number of people leave the area for their further education and return later, perhaps because they see more possibility of personal fulfilment in the countryside. Where this is the case, passion for the countryside can be linked with a career in teaching children.

An important factor in making work in rural areas attractive to a professional workforce is friendliness and the readiness of local people to share and accept "strangers", along with a rich cultural and social life.

Scottish delegation

The biggest challenges for Norwegian service providers in rural areas are ongoing staff development and retaining imagination, creativity and enthusiasm.

Focus on the outdoor environment attracts men to work in the sector even where salaries may not be so competitive as in other occupations.

The role of the RKK in identifying training needs ensures local needs are met based on national priorities and guidance, and combats inward thinking: there is a real desire to learn from other parts of Norway and further afield.

Portuguese delegate

The implementation of the RKK system as a tool for skills development in rural areas, cooperation among higher education institutions and local authorities, and decentralisation are key in supporting service providers and developing the competences of individual staff members. Investment in cultural and place-based projects is a way to promote to students and teachers a taste for where they live so they stay in, or later return to, the rural area. In Norwegian society teachers are highly regarded and in rural areas are better paid than other occupations.

Individual responses

Italy

"We have been particularly touched by four main aspects:

- the complexity of an integrated system of services that lies inside a national law framework that guarantees the access to services [to] most of the population
- the flexibility ... towards families with different needs
- the plan of services oriented [towards] the limits and the possibilities of the environment
- the attention [given to] preschool teachers' training and towards the search for possible tools and ways [to access] professional training even in particular areas like the rural and remote ones."

Gloria Tognetti

Manager of Educational and School Services, San Miniato, and director of the Research and Documentation Centre on Childhood, La Bottega di Geppetto. Consultant for many public and private organisations

"I found very interesting the organisation of preschool services, especially in such a 'domestic' context as the one of farm kindergartens and also the use of both the outdoor space and the domestic animals as an important resource to make children's experiences and learning richer ... In primary and secondary schools I appreciated the presence of organised and quality spaces for small group activities, as well as the presence of laboratories, spaces for informal meetings ... I really liked the big care on welcoming ... warmer and more respectful of the differences and the evolutionary needs of children and of young people."

"The idea of community services as Culture

Delegate feedback



Toddlers at the Sentrum Family Centre, Bodø

Schools and the great presence of [the] voluntary sector gave me the idea of cohesive communities that are based on the promotion of individual potential as well as on care and protection."

Franco Doni

Manager of Services to the Person and Solidarity Policies Sector, San Miniato

"The general impression is of a system of educational and social services strongly integrated, services that are based on a strong political vision both at national and at local level and supported by significant public funding."

"I had the chance to appreciate ... an effective organisation oriented towards the use of outdoor spaces and toward the diversification of opportunities with flexible answers dedicated to different kind of users, children with special needs included. Children with special needs seem to have a great integration in the public service."

"I also found interesting and effective the public answer to migrant people needs but I have to say this kind of answer is possible mostly because of the limited number of migrants. The limited presence of migrants is guaranteed by a careful – but restrictive – national policy about the admittance in the country."

Chiara Rossi

Vice mayor of the Municipal Administration of San Miniato and president of the educative conference of the Valdarno

Delegate feedback

Inferiore area. Lawyer by profession

"I have been very interested in [the] NAV reform: it tends to give value to the partnership between national government and local authorities with the aim of simplification of the practices to make unemployed [people] active again. I also would like to underline the particular sensibility of policies towards people with special needs or with temporary difficulties: it seems to me that governments try to connect them with the labour market as soon as possible."

"I was very interested in the Norwegian Centre for Arts and Culture in Education: it is a cultural centre that promotes and support children's artistic experiences ... My impression is that the Centre, as well as giving the possibility of experiencing different kind of cultural activities, can also be a link with the labour market. I found interesting the fact that every year they organise the Grundrecamp with many workshops that involve every artistic discipline."

Barbara Pagni

Educator in educational services for early childhood, San Miniato, and on the staff of the Research and Documentation Centre on Childhood, La Bottega di Geppetto. Involved in research and international projects

"In general I have been very interested in the use of outdoor spaces in every kindergarten we visited ... I was fascinated by the concept of learning through the contact with nature."

"On the other side I found the inner spaces not very stimulating for children: few toys were reachable for children and most of the furniture was empty. The access to tables, chairs seemed to be necessarily helped by adults."

"The idea of farm kindergartens is really striking for me, and I was very interested in the fact that many families choose this kind of

service for their children accepting also to drive a longer way to make [sure] their child has this kind of experience."

"In general I found a lot of enthusiasm in people working in kindergartens and centres: all the people we met really seemed to enjoy their work and be satisfied with their role."

Poland

Monika Rosciszewska Wozniak

Vice president of the Comenius Foundation for Child Development Board and director of Comenius Academy Training Center. Psychologist and trainer

"I had a very interesting time. I have the impression that this is a place ... I understand and feel good in. A country whose values, citizen support system, educational system for children – even the youngest ones – fills me with admiration."

"We saw children in preschool who spend time outside. What can they do there? At first glance, there seems to be little to do, especially in winter time ... meanwhile, the children have their hands full. They can experiment with melting snow, check what happens to ice when it's covered with a thin layer of water, they can agree on how to use a puddle and organise trips to the seashore. But above all they learn that nature is a part of their life. Philosophy of relation with the environment, inclusion of the natural environment is not only the source of knowledge ... it shows us that wherever we live, we are ok. In my opinion ... it prepares children for different obstacles in life."

"Abandoning the schools-like system of education for small children seems justified in my opinion, but on the other hand I understand the discussion over balancing the proportion of activities planned by the teachers and free play of children. I didn't

Delegate feedback

have time to see how the kids in Norway are learning, acquiring new skills and knowledge. ... children who develop individually [and] have different interests and abilities need to be prepared for school in the same time. How is 'being prepared' for school defined?"

"In Steigen we had a chance to meet the people who created [the] Family Centre. Their work starts ... among the people responsible for helping – creating a concept, agreeing on values, communication, ethics, information exchange and division of competencies and at the same time supporting one another in working"

"the care the state provides ... may cause a decrease in natural readiness to help others and to act in benefit of common problem solving. NGO's – which in Poland are set up mainly for this reason – are in Norway a lot less common."

Ewa Speranza

Lawyer in the Department of Family Benefits, Legislation and Law Implementation in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy

"Participants had the opportunity to learn how the Family Centre in Mørkved works ... a solution for child care, from the first days of [a] child's life. It is aimed not only at the child, but also its ... surrounding environment. It is an excellent therapeutic method."

"Organisation [of child care] gave the children with [different levels of] disabilities the opportunity to participate in activities with non-disabled children at kindergarten and at school. This is very humanitarian and non-disabled children learn empathy and solidarity for the weaker children."

"One has the impression that all the services, acting on behalf of children, do everything to ensure all children's rights. It would not be possible if all the services did not cooperate together."

Malgorzata Zytka

Assistant Professor in the Department of Early and Elementary Education at the University of Warsaw. Member of the Polish Scientific Academy and Association for Teacher Education in Europe

"Particular institutions have clearly defined [the] scope of their activity and responsibility. They are equipped with competence and financial tools to achieve these goals. One interesting experience was my visit to Rognan kindergarten where I saw a group of immigrant children from different countries. It was the occasion to have a first hand experience how the support for [a] target group with special educational needs is organised. It was a very positive example of cooperation with parents as well."

"My only doubt concerns the extent to which the teacher engages in [the] educational process. Should he/she allow the children to play freely or try to direct their activity? The research shows that the more effective method of young children's education, particularly from disadvantaged areas, is offering more ordered and structured ... education instead of giving them no direction."

"The idea I liked very much is to arrange kindergarten like a home with some space allocated to educational activities. Nevertheless, there is another doubt here ... What is the proportion between education-orientated games and any other games? These questions were not fully answered during my visit."

"One more reflection – the difference between Polish and Norwegian meaning of child care or bringing up young children. In Norway it means to give the child a chance to explore the outside world, to be free in this activity. In Poland it means to protect [the] child from danger, to facilitate every activity as much as possible. Making mistakes is not welcomed ... From my view the Norwegian model integrates

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the child more with the environment while the Polish one isolates him/her from it. I believe it is [a] cultural issue."

Scotland

John Butcher

Area Education Manager (East), Glasgow City Council

"It's not just a desire to educate its population that's important to the Norwegians, it's the experience that is vital in helping to develop and equip young people not only with a sound knowledge base but the social skills to be able to contribute to society."

"What I found in rural Norway was a freedom that was obvious when you visited the kindergartens. They don't have the regulatory visits, they don't spend hours and hours on paperwork, what they do instead is work with children and families. It's clear that people can live without the bureaucracy that Scotland has created, but not only that, children in the Norwegian kindergartens are flourishing in establishments that are truly vibrant, imaginative and contributing to the development of the whole child."

"Children were involved in construction, science exploration and learning about their environment ... all outside in temperatures and conditions that would have us all engaged in a debate about whether or not to shut our schools. These Norwegian children are healthy, happy and learning climbing trees, catching fish, feeding and looking after farm animals and in one kindergarten sitting around an open fire reading their books while the two very young children slept in the corner wrapped in reindeer skins. I couldn't help but think how many regulations were being broken and how if I allowed this to happen in the nurseries for which I have responsibility, after the parental outcry I would be most likely dismissed. Yet at no time did I see

anything other than happy, engaged children soaking up real education from very committed and capable staff."

"Local politics in Norway however is not the same as Scotland and I am assured that they would 'just share'. How refreshing and simple is that?"

"Parent power is the main contributor to the maintenance of standards and quality. They are involved in all aspects of their child's education right through their school career and have the right to challenge practice."

Carrie Lindsay

Area Education Officer, Fife Council

"The leadership and values from national government through to local delivery appear to emphasise the need for close working across children's services and indeed often beyond that to look at the needs of families and not just the children."

"A very innovative appointment ... of a social worker as headteacher had the potential to develop attitudes of teachers to look beyond their responsibilities purely in the classroom. Although this appointment had been controversial and the teaching unions had concerns the municipality felt it worth the risk. ... The vision of the headteacher was to let the teachers do what they do best which is to teach whilst developing skills in dealing with parents and seeing the children as part of a family rather than just as a pupil. ... it will be interesting to see how his philosophy develops and supports other schools in the municipality to extend the professional role of teachers beyond the four walls of the classroom."

"The provision of children's services was valued by the municipality and there was a real sense of a shared vision about what workers wanted to deliver for children. Some of that vision may well come from the vision in

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society as a whole and [be] shaped by the political system in Norway.”

“I was most impressed with the way Fauske in particular had shaped services to meet their local needs and not used the rurality of their location as an excuse for poor service delivery. However, the national philosophy in early years and the significant investment in the early years makes it difficult to see how much of this could be replicated in Scotland. There were some areas that will help inform our thinking in developing our early years workplace development and working with our private partners.”

Douglas Chapman

Convener of the Education and Children's Services committee, Fife Council

“I thought [Steigen] was a very harsh environment, very similar to the west coast of Scotland – small communities depending on things like fishing, fish farming, agriculture...what struck me immediately was the organisation in the area to provide education and services for families.”

“People worked together a lot more than we experience in Scotland where health is separate from education, education from social work. That was a bonus overall.”

“I think [the director of education's leadership] was key to making education there a success. He had a clear vision of what he wanted and of what was expected of his staff. The relationships were very positive and very friendly, with the emphasis 'what can we achieve together for the children?’”

“Speaking to the director of education I got the impression this was a very expensive system to operate ... one school had a gymnasium and a swimming pool, but they had closed the pool because it's too costly to

run. They were also talking about the possibility of merging schools together because maybe there isn't enough money in the budget to provide the things they want to do ... we are all looking at similar issues, but in Norway I think the underlying vision, the passion, the mission and the leadership they have will reduce the impact on education.”

“The big focus in Steigen was the natural environment – it's part of the life, part of the learning and part of the culture ... There are a lot of links between the environment, the school, the community and the family, which are all very positive things.”

Portugal

Maria Luisa de Almeida Tavares

Childhood Educator, Agrupamento de Escolas di Pedro de Santarem, Boavista

“there has been a great investment in the promotion of early education ... It is intended that all schools have the same opportunities. It should be pointed out, as extremely important, that 50% of local government finance support must be applied in education.”

“Very interesting work in an interdisciplinary team, that reports to the municipality's chief in work with children, youth and their families. It is situated [in] the office of the public health nurse, midwife services, mental health services and childcare services: in the same building are situated local healthcare services, medical and physiotherapist services. There is cooperation with educational services and the psychological/pedagogical team.”

“Food, arts, ecology, fishing, carpentry, dealing with animals, cultivation of potatoes and others are ... a part of life, a part of learning and a part of culture. Everyone has talents, and can be valuable in the community. Investment in these projects is a way to promote [among] students and teachers a

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taste for where they live so that later they come back to this rural area.”

“Low levels of education contribute to unemployment and an increase in poverty rates, and investment in education is essential and a priority in rural and isolated areas. In addition to the importance of investment in education is of almost importance, qualification, developing local resources and the importance of interdisciplinary teams. In these areas, local authorities have a major role to channel this power along with education professionals and families to raise levels of education as a collective responsibility.”

“My concluding observations are these:

- Identify and exploit the potential of rural areas: they can enjoy better health and wellbeing, may have less mental health problems, may have a better culture of participation, have the same kind of cultural resource and lifestyles
- Develop strategies to improve services and local development, such as entrepreneurial schools with qualified personnel, transportation for children and young people, suitable buildings, staff recruitment among residents, itinerant teachers, involving professionals from the social, cultural, health and local industries: i.e. coordination between departments and professionals
- Important principles of place-based learning: love it, learn about it, use it; care for it; return to it.”

Concluding seminar: Developing good and holistic welfare models for working with children in a rural county



Special needs provision at Vågønes Kindergarten

Research undertaken for the *Working for inclusion* project was presented at a national seminar in Bodø, attended by 70 delegates from all over Norway and with input from researchers, practitioners, bureaucrats and politicians.

Statistics from 28 European countries were analysed to produce the report *Working for inclusion: an overview of European Union early years services and their workforce* by John Bennett, former co-director of the OECD's Starting Strong reports, and Peter Moss, Professor of Early Childhood Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. A full version of these findings are on the Working For Inclusion webspace at www.childreninscotland.org/wfi/

Working for inclusion programme director Bronwen Cohen presented the research findings, which were that fully integrated early years education and care services that are universally applied and coordinated by a single government department across access, funding, regulation and workforce, are more beneficial for children and go hand in hand with reduced child poverty and inequality. Reidar Hjermann, the children's ombudsman in Norway, gave comments on the report.

John Bryden and Karen Refsgaard gave a lecture on territorial equivalence and its significance for holistic rural development, inclusion and education, while

Concluding seminar: Developing good and holistic welfare models for working with children in a rural county



Specialist music teacher at Vågønes Kindergarten

parallel seminars offered delegates the chance to share good practice in four key areas: upbringing policy, family centres as models for interdisciplinary cooperation, development of holistic models through intermunicipal cooperation, and models for decentralised education. Åsa Steinsvik from the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion shared national priorities.

Representatives from partner countries in *Working for inclusion* had the opportunity to share their challenges and opportunities with the Norwegian delegates.

Conclusions

Delegates found the level of coordination, cooperation and integration that Norway has achieved in planning, developing and delivering early childhood and educational services to be exemplary. It is highly effective in meeting the needs not just of children, but of families as well, thereby offering real support to the social, cultural and economic development of local communities, even where these are scattered or isolated.

Delegates commented on the strength and stability of the society and government, both local and national, required to underpin this level of provision. They also recognised the level of investment, historic and current, that has been necessary to put structures in place and support them in developing effective models of provision.

Services that are universally available with a single, coordinated point of access were felt to be highly effective in ensuring particular needs were identified and met at a local level. It was also seen to be a very effective way of reducing or eliminating any stigma that may attach to families requiring additional support or intervention of whatever kind.

Willingness to work together; share knowledge and resources; respect the skills and knowledge of other workers; and to be open to new ideas and ways of working were identified as essential in developing and sustaining effective practice, particularly in rural areas. It was acknowledged that this willingness is based to a large extent on the effort and investment in developing and communicating a shared vision among service providers at every level of the workforce and also among service users, so expectations and delivery go hand in hand. The degree of flexibility and autonomy available to local practitioners in delivering centrally agreed objectives was commented on favourably, for the way it acknowledged and valued the capability and professional

competence of the workforce, and the way it allowed different services to respond to individual and local needs. It ensured that commonly agreed core principles could be upheld without the bureaucracy and restrictions of prescriptive practice.

The role of the outdoors in education in Norway was seen to have a multitude of benefits, among which were:

- building children's physical, social and environmental confidence
- laying the foundation for lifelong good practice in terms of a healthy lifestyle
- building important links with the local environment, culture, history and community
- providing excellent opportunities for place-based learning
- contributing to the diversification of the workforce by encouraging men into careers with children.

The professional standing of staff was considered a factor in effective service delivery, especially in rural areas, contributing to good relationships with service users and effective cooperation among providers. Structures that allow training to tertiary level and beyond through 'Open School' in local upper secondary schools is particularly beneficial in rural areas, along with the Norwegian entitlement to ongoing education to the age of 25. While most staff are trained to tertiary level, many with additional specialist qualifications enabling them to take on pedagogical responsibility, flexible vocational qualifications are also important in allowing staff to become qualified by adding a theoretical dimension to existing practical knowledge.

Conclusions

The RKK system that supports effective training and development for staff was seen as significant in ensuring the quality of provision in rural areas keeps pace with that in more urban-based populations. This contributes not only to a workforce that is appropriately trained and equipped to deliver services effectively, but also to the retention of good qualified staff. It also contributes to a sense of being valued and supported that significantly affects staff morale, labour relations, relationships among professional providers, openness to new ideas, and the willingness to cooperate and problem solve.

Overall, delegates felt the Norwegian model manages to meet to a significant degree its aim to focus on the child and family so that services fit around individual need, rather than service users being required to shape their situations to the provision that happens to be available. In this way real progress has been made towards provision that is flexible enough to cope with a variety of settings, locations and situations while maintaining a high level of professionalism and support.

Acknowledgements

The *Working for Inclusion* programme team would like to thank all the staff and services that participated in the study visit.

Services visited

Bodø Municipality

Bodø University College and Nordland Research Institute
Mørkved Family Centre
Mørkvedmarka School
Regnbuen Kindergarten
Skaug Upbringing Centre
Vagønes Kindergarten

Fauske Municipality

Fauske Culture School
Fauske Family Centre
Fauske Upper Secondary School
Finneid Naermiljøsenters and Tinkeliheia Kindergarten
NAV – the local office of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration
RKK Indre Salten – the Regional Office for Competence Development
Stemland Farm Kindergarten
Vestmyra School

Saltdal and Beiarn Municipalities

Beiarn Culture School
Engan Farm Kindergarten
Hero Reception Centre for Refugees
Moldjord School
Moldjord Kindergarten
Rognan Kindergarten
Rognan Primary School

Steigen Municipality

Gallery Solhaug
KUN Centre for Gender Equality
Laskestad School
Leinesfjord Kindergarten
Skagstad Farm
Steigen Culture School
Steigentunet Health Centre

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Appendices

This report forms part of *Working for inclusion: the role of the early years workforce in addressing poverty and promoting social inclusion*, a Europe-wide programme funded by the European Commission and supported by the Scottish government.

The programme

Working for Inclusion is examining how improving the qualifications and skills of those working with our youngest children is helping to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion.

Taking place from February 2009 to January 2011, the programme will encourage and facilitate discussion and debate over the role of the early years workforce. It will enable greater, more extensive and effective dialogue between local and national governments, education and qualification providers, employers, practitioners and policymakers.

The programme encompasses research taking place simultaneously in Scotland and the UK, Poland, Norway, Italy, Slovenia, France, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden and Hungary to produce a clear picture of qualification and skill levels in early years services and how these relate to levels of poverty and social inclusion.

Programme partnership

The programme is led by Children in Scotland in partnership with:

- La Bottega Di Geppetto, Italy
- Nordland Research Institute, Norway
- Comenius Foundation for Child Development, Poland

Each country will provide the context for exploring particular key challenges within the early years workforce:

- working with the child as an active agent in their own learning (Italy)
- working with diversity, in particular ethnicity, language, disability and gender (Scotland)
- inclusive workforce models for rural and remote areas (Norway)
- working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups (Poland)

A discussion paper and report will be produced on each of these themes. All papers, reports and publications can be accessed at the community webspace and discussion forum through www.childreninscotland.org.uk/wfi.

Study visit delegates

Italy

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Barbara Pagni, staff of *La Bottega Di Geppetto*

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Gloria Tognetti, director of *La Bottega Di Geppetto*

Poland

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