



Working in an inclusive way with children and families, across agencies and age groups

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



Wood carvings in Długosiodło

Context

This report explores ways of working inclusively with children and families, across agencies and age groups, 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.

Across Europe exclusion is not only related to low income but also many other factors that deny access to services and participation. These include parents' employment situation; ethnic and immigrant status; national and regional government structure, provision and priorities; prevailing social and cultural assumptions; and the national and sometimes international economic situation.

Three approaches to promoting social inclusion predominate in Europe.

The first is a democratic egalitarian approach, which seeks to prevent poverty and targets inequality actively through national and local government intervention: this is found mainly in Nordic countries and is based on valuing universal second and third generation human rights (essentially, the rights to education, employment, housing and health care, and social security benefits including unemployment benefits).

The second is a targeted approach, addressing specific aspects of inequality, and often sponsored by national governments, the EU and/or voluntary bodies. Governments faced with social inclusion challenges propose specific solutions according to their welfare traditions, which means different approaches may be developed to tackle similar problems in, for example liberal economies, compared to social democratic regimes. Anti-poverty rhetoric and action features highly compared

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with systems employing the first approach, whose strong taxation and redistribution policies lead to far fewer social challenges downstream.

The third concentrates on technical factors by seeking to equip people with the tools that will help them participate effectively in society and the economy: frequently, this leads to a focus on education, with economic arguments used to justify starting education early and focusing on developing specific skills needed by the workforce.

A clear contrast exists between countries adopting the first approach and some of those adopting a mix of the second and third, according to figures from the *Social Protection Committee Child Poverty and Well-Being in the EU*, published in 2008. Sweden, Norway and Denmark all rank in the top six for child wellbeing, and have lower levels of social inequality and a much lower percentage of poor households than Italy, Portugal and the UK, which are ranked 19th, 21st and 24th respectively for child wellbeing.

Many agencies are involved in working in an inclusive way and the range and type of work is enormous, for example working with ethnicity; supporting majority language acquisition; working with gender issues; and developing additional learning supports. Frequently, distinctive knowledge and training is required in each field.

Study visit to Poland

Delegates from Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Scotland, Serbia and Slovenia visited services in Warsaw, Poland in May 2010 and their responses form the basis of the report. The delegate groups included early years policymakers and practitioners from a range of public sector and national children's agencies; representatives of local government; and

managers and staff responsible for a wide range of children's and family services.

The aim of the visit was to observe children's services in Poland, a country seeking to develop effective public services at a rapid rate and at every level, and to feed responses, ideas and questions into the ongoing debate on how best to develop inclusive workforce models across Europe.

Each delegate received a briefing paper in advance to provide background and contextual information. The programme included presentations on the education system in Poland and current approaches to workforce training and development; the role of non-governmental organisations, in particular the Comenius Foundation in initiating and supporting change, and the Nobody's Children Foundation in developing child protection strategies; and visits to services both in Warsaw and in rural municipalities.

Delegates also took part in *The youngest citizens of Poland: care – education – upbringing*, a national conference at the Parliament in Warsaw that brought together early years practitioners and service providers from throughout Poland to hear ministers and senior representatives from across the Polish government discuss the *Working for Inclusion* programme's emerging findings, and share their thoughts on the way ahead for early childhood education and care in Poland.

Overall conclusions from the study visit included:

- Observing and sharing early years practice among other political, economic and cultural contexts is immensely valuable in sharpening the focus on the values and philosophy on which service provision is based.
- Consistency in service delivery,

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regardless of geographical location, income, ethnic background, disability or parental education level is essential for inclusive working to take place.

- Establishing shared values across the children's services sector is important in developing and implementing services that are consistent and effective on a wide scale.
- Public services, private service providers, service users and all other stakeholders need to be fully engaged and involved in developing services if they are to be consistent, effective and sustainable. This needs to be part of the process of developing and establishing shared values.
- Clear communication across the sector and at every level is essential in engaging all stakeholders in consistently implementing shared values and good practice.
- High quality trained staff are the key to raising levels of provision and good practice in every setting. Training can play a major part in communicating shared values and principles, and in strengthening and deepening understanding among service providers. This in turn raises awareness and expectations among parents and other stakeholders, and raises the professional standing of early years practitioners.
- For experienced staff already in place, developing lifelong learning and making some aspects of this compulsory – for example, child protection training and inclusive practice – is significant in upskilling the existing workforce.
- Promoting evaluation and reflection is important in developing services.
- Preschool teachers have an important role to play in the social inclusion of children, and also of their families.
- Establishing a clear qualification pathway to equip those seeking a career with young children, that reflects the complexity of the task, is important. Where there are many different routes into early years services it is difficult to monitor and evaluate skill levels, and the tendency to rely on unqualified staff is high.
- A single qualification enabling work with different groups and ages was felt to be helpful in promoting good practice at preschool level.
- Good support systems should be developed to ensure the right competence is available when it is needed, for example in additional support for learning or experience of particular ethnic groups, especially in rural areas.
- Bringing responsibility for all early years services from birth upwards under one government department is seen as important in ensuring all the education and care needs of young children and their families can be met efficiently through an holistic approach. This also contributes to inclusive working.
- In particular, more attention should be paid to the 0–3 age group.
- Promoting democratisation of systems and curricula is important to make sure no 'hidden' assumptions are made regarding individuals or groups.
- Targeted approaches should be considered for particular groups as universal services may not fully meet the objectives of inclusive working for some groups.
- Education is part of a package of measures to support greater inclusion, including bringing businesses to rural areas, supporting small local enterprises, and ensuring peoples' wellbeing to reduce income and skills gaps, particularly between urban and rural areas.
- It is important to retain unique national and cultural identities within education and social systems.

Introduction

This report draws on individual and group feedback from delegates, within the context of local information provided by hosts and local practitioners, to bring 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 report forms part of the ongoing debate on these issues, with a view to forming recommendations based on sharing of experience and good practice.

Poland Background

The Republic of Poland is in central Europe and borders with Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Germany, with the Baltic Sea its northern boundary.

It has an area of 312,685 square kilometres and a population of 38.1 million, the sixth largest in the European Union. The country is divided into 16 provinces (*województwo*), each administered by a government-appointed governor (*wojewoda*) and an elected regional assembly (*sejmik*). The provinces are divided into counties (*powiaty*) and each county is divided into municipalities (*gminy*).

Warsaw is the biggest city and the national capital, followed by Kraków, Łódź, Poznań and Wrocław.

Under Soviet control after World War II, Poland was instrumental in bringing about changes that led to the collapse of the communist Soviet bloc. In 1989 Poland elected eastern Europe's first post-communist government, and in 2004 the country joined

the European Union. There has been a gradual progression in the post-socialist era towards a market economy, and Poland has weathered the global recession better than some countries. However structural reforms in health care, education, the pension system and state administration have been costly, and the population has decreased due to an increase in emigration and a sharp drop in the birth rate.

Poland has a per capita income about half the EU average, and income inequality well above the EU average. The risk of living in poverty is significantly higher for children, with one in four children living in poverty (rising to nearly half in lone parent households). Poland ranks 20th among EU member states for child wellbeing and 49th in the world on the Gender Gap Index. Taxation levels are below, and expenditure on education above, the EU average, but expenditure on social protection overall and on children and families in particular is substantially below average.

There are disparities in development, particularly between Warsaw and the rest of the country; between urban and rural areas; and between eastern and western Poland. In many areas the transport infrastructure is underdeveloped and in urgent need of repair, upgrading and extension.

More than 96% of people in Poland claim Polish nationality. The remainder is made up of smaller racial groups with Silesian and German populations the largest subgroups followed by Belarusian, Ukrainian and Roma populations.

Under Poland's constitution freedom of religion and religious expression is ensured for everyone but the overwhelming number of Polish residents belong to the Roman Catholic church, which retains a strong cultural influence.

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Early years and childhood services provision

Parental leave

Poland has maternity and parental leave, but no paternity leave. Each family is entitled to 20 weeks maternity leave at 100% of previous earnings: 14 weeks of this is obligatory. Parental leave can be taken up to a child's fourth birthday, in one single block or in several blocks of time. Parental leave is not paid, but parents whose monthly income is less than €145 and whose children do not attend nursery or kindergarten can receive a flat-rate 'parental allowance' of €115 per month until 2 years after birth (for a first child) or 3 years (if there is more than one child).

Fathers have been entitled to take parental leave since 1996 but no data are collected on the take-up of this provision. Parental leave is used most by low paid mothers with low levels of education.

Demand for nursery and kindergarten provision tends to be low, reflecting a prevailing cultural belief in favour of full-time care for young children within the family, and against maternal employment.

Services for 0–3-year-olds

Services for 0–3s are currently the responsibility of the Ministry of Health.

Centres for children under 3 years are nurseries, either *zlobki* or *oddziały zlobkowy* (which are smaller), and are not considered to have an educational element: they provide childcare only, with a specific emphasis on health care.

Individual municipalities determine operational standards and rules for nurseries based on

Ministry of Health regulations, which cover for example the ratio of children to staff, the provision of sleeping and play space, and the availability of outdoor play. There are no curricular guidelines for *zlobki*: each nursery works out its own programme.

Zlobki usually admit children aged from 4 or 5 months to 3 years, and are open 10 hours a day and 11 months of the year. Current legislation allows for child carers to care for children in their own homes as family day carers: no formal registration is currently required, no qualifications are needed and many work unofficially.

Most nurseries are provided by the public sector through the municipality, but some are run privately and municipalities can buy places. Nurseries gained a bad reputation under the communist system and may still be shunned as a result. Attendance rates for 0–3s are the lowest in the EU, with only 2% attending some form of provision for 30 hours a week or more.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is currently working on proposals for a bill on forms of childcare for children under 3 years, to offer a range of registered provision options for children aged from 20 weeks upwards in which care, upbringing and educational elements are combined according to age. The system will be accessible to all and may include advice centres for parents.

Services for 3–6-year-olds

Services for 3–6-year-olds are the responsibility of the Ministry of National Education.

Currently children begin elementary school at 7 years old. However since 2004 it has been compulsory for 6-year-olds to attend kindergarten or preschool classes: and by

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2012 compulsory education will begin at age 6 years, with a 1-year preschool preparatory programme compulsory for 5-year-olds from 2011.

The main type of preschool provision in Poland is the kindergarten (*przedszkole*), for children from 3 years old, and the preschool classes in primary schools (*oddziały przedszkolne*), for 6-year-olds.

Kindergartens must offer at least 5 hours provision each day: most are open 9 hours every day throughout the school year. Since 2008 'other forms of kindergarten provision' (*inne formy wychowania przedszkolnego*) have been permitted, which must be open at least 3 hours every day and for at least 12 hours each week.

Services are unequally distributed and attendance rates vary between urban and rural areas. In 2008, 70% of 3–5-year-olds in urban areas attended kindergarten compared to 30% in rural areas, and 20% of all Polish municipalities have no kindergarten or preschool provision at all. Eastern and north eastern Poland has particularly low levels of attendance.

'Other forms of kindergarten provision' were initiated by non-governmental organisations to supplement existing services and increase participation, often operating in rural areas where no other provision exists. They may be managed by public or private bodies and can receive up to 40% public funding. Private sector kindergartens and preschools are mostly provided by religious organisations, non-governmental organisations or individuals.

A new core curriculum for older children in kindergartens was established in 2008 combining learning and play through 15 curricular areas, each with identified indicators

that allow teachers to evaluate pupils and monitor their readiness for school. There are no official recommendations or guidelines on methods of teaching.

Organisational and safety requirements for kindergartens are set by the Ministry of National Education. Class sizes are set at 25, less if children with disabilities are integrated. Administration for the kindergarten is carried out by the managing body and pedagogical supervision by the regional education superintendent (*kurator oswiaty*).

Funding

Funding for nurseries and kindergartens is from two sources: government (through the municipalities) and parents. Municipalities decide parental fees and can provide financial support to lower income families.

In nurseries, parents pay for meals, averaging €436 each year. In kindergartens, parents of 3–5-year-olds pay an annual fee of €726 euros plus a monthly average of €60 for meals. Some kindergartens offer extracurricular activities at an additional cost.

Kindergartens or preschool classes in primary schools are free for 6-year-olds if they only stay for 5 hours each day, but additional hours and extra activities are paid for at the same rate as for 3–5-year-olds.

Schools can be public (state) schools, offering free education in line with the core curriculum, and non-public schools, financed by a combination of fees from parents and/or money from private foundations and enterprises. Non-public schools may have their own curricula but these must be approved by the Minister of National Education. Around 2% of pupils in primary schools attend non-public schools.

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Workforce and qualifications

Lack of qualified staff is a major obstacle to development of preschool and early years services, particularly in rural areas. Those who qualify easily find work in the cities where demand is high, and there is an estimated need for an additional 25,000 teachers if preschool education is to be extended to all 3–5-year-olds.

The preschool workforce is overwhelmingly female, with only 2.3% under the age of 25. The average age of kindergarten teachers is 40, with over a third having more than 20 years professional experience.

There is no single qualification providing access into a career with the youngest children. Current preschool staff may have been trained through a variety of routes including universities, teacher training colleges and colleges of higher education, and many different qualifications – or none – can be found among the existing workforce.

Nursery staff are child carers (*opiekunke dziecięce*), nursery nurses (*pielegniarki*) and assistants (*salowe*). The head of a nursery (*starsza pielegniarka*) should be educated to degree level in a health care related discipline but there is no quality monitoring system for staff. The basic salary for nursery workers is determined by the Ministry of Health and depends on qualification levels: it is currently €623 for a carer and €648 for a nurse.

Kindergarten staff are educated to degree level: the kindergarten upbringing teacher (*nauczyciel wychowania przedszkolnego*), the early school education teacher (*nauczyciel edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*) and the teacher's assistant (*pomoc nauczyciela*). Since 2004 kindergarten teachers must train in two specialisations, one of which must be early education. Kindergarten heads require a

5-year Masters degree and courses in management and marketing. Staff are supported by other professionals such as psychologists and pedagogues. Teachers qualified in kindergarten or early education may work in preschool classes in primary school and have the same rights, duties and pay as teachers in school, but longer teaching hours. The Ministry of National Education decides basic salary, depending on qualification levels, but municipalities can offer bonuses related to responsibility and incentives. Rural teachers receive a housing allowance and a rural allowance, equivalent to 15% and 10% of salary respectively. Basic salaries for kindergarten teachers are between €448 and €598.

In practice, parents currently form a key component of the preschool workforce in many areas, providing support services and assistance. However this is variable: in other areas parental involvement is negligible.

There is an established system of career advancement that enables teachers to progress and monitors them as they do so. Career development is through the National In-Service Teacher Training Center, a state-funded agency of the Ministry of National Education.

Trade unions have an important role in shaping educational policy, and must be consulted on important decisions. In some cases, for example amendments to education law, the Minister of National Education must have union approval before making changes.

Children with additional support needs

Kindergarten education is not compulsory for children with learning difficulties, but they can attend special kindergartens before starting school. These special kindergartens use regular Ministry of Education programmes.

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There is a trend to integrate children with disabilities into mainstream nurseries and preschool classes, where it is the teacher's task to assess readiness for school along with the rest of the preschool children.

Role of non-governmental organisations

Non-governmental organisations have been key to developing services within Poland, particularly in areas where provision is patchy or non-existent. Organisations such as the Comenius Foundation for Child Development

have been instrumental in introducing programmes such as *Where There Are No Preschools* (WTANP) to help communities create preschool centres that meet local needs and budgets, at the same time as expanding kindergarten provision and introducing an educational, rather than only a care, focus. Another example is the Nobody's Children Foundation, a nonprofit organisation offering a broad scope of assistance for abused children, their families and caregivers.



Preschool children at Dalekie Centre

Delegate feedback

Delegates were asked to provide feedback in group discussions at the end of the study visit programme and in written reports reflecting on relevant questions and issues raised. As there was considerable common ground, the following responses are based on joint feedback from all delegates and participating countries unless otherwise specified.

Group responses

Groups were asked to share impressions of their visit and offer observations for their hosts to pass to relevant bodies in the Polish children's sector.

Impressions of early years provision in Poland

All the groups were impressed by the enthusiasm among both staff and parents working with early years, and the real commitment to improve the quality of provision. Parents and other members of the local community were very willing to become involved in developing and delivering services. In the services visited, delegates saw considerable mutual respect between parents and teachers, with parents learning from trained teaching staff and staff benefiting from the close involvement and support of parents.

However this raised the question of whether it was appropriate for parents to become seen, in many services, as core members of the workforce. All the groups felt heavy reliance on parental and family involvement could have a negative aspect if this was at the expense of investing in trained and qualified staff. Depending on parents for core tasks such as cleaning and maintenance of the facilities was felt to be inappropriate.



Sieczychy Preschool Centre

Delegate feedback

Childhood was clearly valued by local communities and individual municipalities. A sense of belonging and connection with the community was very evident, with an awareness of local history, the shared use of community facilities and many personal connections and contacts with other community members.

However once again, the groups felt over-dependence on local communities for staffing and for provision of teaching and play materials could have a negative aspect, with the potential for wide variation in the quality of provision. This could be a particular feature in rural areas, with schools and preschools having to 'make do' with what is available locally. It was also recognised that, against a background of rapid development at all levels and across all sectors in Poland, some municipalities might have different priorities for spending and development – again, resulting in patchwork provision.

There is a high level of involvement by non-governmental organisations in basic services provision, which has many positives, and it was felt this is to be commended, provided it does not become a substitute for longer term core funding and workforce development.

It is clear there is a real desire to build good practice in Poland, and great steps forward are being taken. But the groups recognised many people are starting from a point of very little knowledge, both of children's development and how they learn, and of practice in other countries. Practitioners the groups met were justifiably proud of what was being achieved for the children in their care, but without always being aware of how this might develop or what more could be taking place. There appeared to be inconsistency and incoherence in service planning and delivery, with a lack of learning and development strategies for young children and no clear pathway for planning

and monitoring progress towards identified outcomes.

The groups felt that in general, buildings and rooms used by the children tended to be small and provide little flexibility for free movement, choice of activities, or free play. Many tended to be designed from an adult perspective in terms of furnishings, colour schemes, and the toys and other materials provided: it was felt that a more child-centred and child-focused approach would be helpful.

All the delegates were impressed by the level of openness and sharing they encountered and praised the hospitality and good organisation of the hosts. All felt they had gained a good knowledge of the Comenius Foundation and expressed gratitude for the warmth of their welcome.

Observations

A legislative framework is needed that will provide structure for the good practice already taking place and support the extension of this across Poland. However this needs to be flexible to enable effective delivery where municipalities vary widely in terms of resources, experience, and availability of qualified and motivated staff. Present legislation was felt to be too rigid and contributing to reduced effectiveness in the use of available resources.

National standards for children aged 0–6 years should be developed, and communicated effectively among all those who work with this age group. Curriculum information is currently incoherent and quality standards in delivery and assessment very patchy. The groups felt they would have liked more information on services for under-3s: provision for this group is generally regarded as the responsibility of families, and 0–3s can be invisible in the system. It was felt services for this age group

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need to receive more attention and to be developed further.

More attention should be paid to diversity, in age, race and religion: in particular, a lack of age integration was identified. Issues relating to universal provision should be discussed as a means of raising the standard of services and working more inclusively.

Longer term core funding is needed to raise standards of provision within individual settings and also across different municipalities. In some settings restricted funding has allowed specific improvements – for example, enabling the purchase of computer equipment – but the same preschool may have chairs and tables that are inadequate for the needs of the children.

Facilities could be used more effectively. In general the services the groups visited had small spaces inside, but large spaces outside were not in use despite fine weather. It was suggested this could be linked to the perception of how children learn and develop, with a prevailing assumption that 'learning' takes place inside and in a relatively formal and structured way. Service providers need to recognise the significance of play and of child-centred learning in children's development. A more flexible approach to the use of space, both inside and outside, and a wider choice of play materials (including materials such as water and sand) would be beneficial.

Parents' involvement should be valued, but they should not be regarded as core members of the service team.

Delegates felt it could have been beneficial to have the opportunity to share experiences from their own countries and settings, to enhance the value of their contact with the services they visited.

Responses to thematic questions

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

1. What does it mean to work 'in an inclusive way'? Who are at risk of being excluded, why and how?

Working inclusively means to recognise the individual as a person with their own identity, values and potential; to be aware of diversity as a natural facet of life that characterises each individual; and to recognise contexts that discriminate between individuals.

Those groups that are numerically smaller, or perceived as "weaker" in some other way, are at most risk of exclusion, because if resources and opportunities are not adequate competition among individuals rewards those who are "stronger". Policy formation generally begins from a position of meeting the needs of the norm as expressed by the majority, which leads to the exclusion of less represented individuals. Policy then has to create separate and specific situations in order to meet particular needs.

Education and other early support services and interventions need to be culturally sensitive and offer children and families the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills that will improve their ability and competence in education and upbringing.

Children's and family services working in an inclusive way tend to have a high level of regard for the professional competence of practitioners across all services. There is usually a high degree of interdisciplinary working, with the child at the centre. Universal provision is important in working inclusively, as it is the most effective way of ensuring those most vulnerable to exclusion will receive

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Sieczychy Preschool Centre

the support they need. Another key characteristic is an integrated approach to children's provision from the earliest age to entry into compulsory school. Where the whole range of preschool services is integrated under one government department a common thread can link the philosophy relating to education, childcare and child development, making it easier to promote inclusion.

A sense of belonging and a high level of whole-community involvement and shared responsibility are indicators of inclusive working, along with a culture that values childhood and children.

2. What qualities, values and ethics are required to work in an inclusive way? Is democracy a fundamental value? What theories and theorists can give inspiration for working in this way? What are the implications for workforce roles, qualifications and development?

Inclusion policies are highly effective in supporting coexistence and the exchange of understanding. This clearly reflects and supports the recognition of individual rights, social policies and democratic practice.

Humans display a range of social, cultural and biological diversities. This complexity means policy and practice development is necessary

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to promote inclusion effectively. However certain theories are influential in supporting this. The notions of system, and of a services and interventions network, are important reference points in implementing inclusion policies; the human dimension points to the requirement for workforce training in inclusive practices; and the importance of integrating cultural and professional perspectives with different ways of operating, all have an influence on the development of inclusive ways of working.

A degree of standardisation is important in supporting inclusion initiatives, but also flexibility to recognise and reflect local interests, priorities and environments. Interdisciplinary working should be supported, including community-based education to encourage effective parental involvement.

Preschool provision should be based on the principles of democracy; pluralism; autonomy and professionalism of teachers and the workforce; and equal opportunities for all children, taking into account individual differences. Connections with wider economic, social and cultural aspects of society are important in supporting inclusive practice and developing outcomes that will prepare children for a multicultural world, and build cooperation among parents, co-workers and other community partners. Gender equality among professionals is also important.

Curriculum development needs to be democratic and representative of diversity within any given national setting. Care is needed to ensure the curriculum does not inadvertently exclude particular social, racial, cultural or religious groups.

3. What examples – historically and contemporaneously – are there of such work? Does social pedagogy provide a good example of a profession that is well

equipped to work in an inclusive way?

Social pedagogy is well equipped to work in an inclusive way because of its capacity to work cross-sectorally and also across ages.

Workforce training recently trialled in Scotland is a positive step in the direction of promoting competence integration for individuals with a long path of personal development: an interesting perspective if it develops with the capacity of taking into account elements of diversity and specificity.

Implications for the workforce

Delegates addressed three distinct questions in relation to workforce implications.

1. Are there benefits from development of a qualification which can contribute to a variety of roles and across different age groups?

The visit highlighted that Poland, like many European countries, has no single qualification providing access into a career working for the welfare of the youngest citizens.

A nationally recognised qualification for working with children aged 0–8 years and covering a variety of roles would be advantageous in supporting a more holistic approach to children's services; a more inclusive agenda; and a workforce that is better trained in meeting the needs of children who require extra challenge or support.

Such a qualification would provide a level of flexibility in staffing that would be beneficial in developing preschool provision and supporting better consistency of services for preschool children and their families, particularly in rural areas where access is an issue. Benefits to parents include consistent, professional and dependable childcare for the youngest

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children, ensuring a positive preschool experience for children and freeing parents and families to work.

The Norwegian delegation stressed they consider their broad preschool teacher qualification (which in common with other Nordic countries is a social pedagogue qualification) especially important for quality of provision because of the close link between education and care at this age, and the unique position of the preschool teacher in being able to take a holistic view of the child's circumstances, development, and care and education needs, along with developing special competences in play and child empowerment. This makes the preschool teacher an important link between children, parents and families, and other professionals. However they felt the lack of specialisation would highlight the need for an effective support structure so that situations teaching staff might not identify, or might not have the competence to address, would still be dealt with.

For staff, the advantage of being trained to work with different age groups lies in the ability to differentiate between individual needs more effectively where necessity dictates that kindergarten groups must be mixed in age. For children, the advantage of being able to work in mixed-age groups is that they are able to learn from each other: older children become role models

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for younger ones, and younger children can stretch and challenge the older ones.

2. Could such a qualification be seen as developing a workforce better able to promote inclusion?

Introducing a qualification of this kind would allow a common standard of practice, supporting inclusion, to be established and evaluated. The wider the variety of qualifications among staff – from degree level practitioners to unqualified workers – the more difficult it is to ensure consistency in inclusive practice.

Mandatory training in child protection and holistic approaches for all the workforce, not just those who request it, would be a valuable addition to such a qualification. It promotes inclusion when staff are able to see the whole child, including interactions between parents and children.

A universal approach and an holistic context, based around the competences of a generally qualified preschool teacher, is the most effective route to promoting inclusion. Research in Norway has shown groups that choose not to send their children to kindergartens are to a large degree from religious minorities, minority language families and Sami families, frequently because they fear a loss of identity and individual values. It is important to meet the needs of all children and respect differences if all families are to find the kindergarten a place for their children.

It is very important that personnel who work with children have time and opportunity to reflect on their own practice and to confront issues regarding inclusion.

3. Is there an advantage in developing such a qualification on a European basis?

On one hand, an internationally recognised Europe-wide qualification would provide greater opportunities for movement of the workforce between countries, and enable both employers and parents to be confident about the level of a practitioner's abilities.

But there are challenges in terms of consistency of government commitment to developing services and understanding of what constitutes high quality pedagogy. In addition some European countries have long-established preschool workforce qualifications while others do not, so each country would be at a different stage of service development.

Educational systems are the product of countries' unique identities and any Europe-wide qualification would have to take into consideration the diversity of cultural factors operating within individual nations.

However, some central values should form the basis for the development of qualifications at European level, including that the child, and childhood, has its own specific intrinsic values that must be respected and nourished, and that children must be allowed to become empowered by participating in decision making.

Individual responses

Croatia/Serbia

Helena Burić

Preschool coordinator for the Open Academy Step by Step

Dragana Koruga

Psychologist

"Research in education in Poland shows that children are good in academic knowledge but not so good in problem solving and strategic thinking. That shows that education is good for those who are growing [up] in good

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Integrated Kindergarten nr 247, Warsaw

conditions, with better educated parents, but is not so supportive for those who are growing [up] without it.”

“All agreed that local interests and local initiatives are the best way to accomplish internal motivation for education in children and their parents, especially in rural areas and disadvantaged conditions.”

“Regarding inclusive initiatives in early education, participants agreed that standardization is very important, but also the harmonization of the regulations, rules and specificity of the environment/local community. Those three factors should be integrated through the offered structures in education, through the quality standards, enabling ... flexible organizational models”

Hungary

Márta Korintus

Head of international relations at the Institute for Social Policy and Labour, Budapest

“I found that the visit gave a good insight into the country’s way of working with children, which still bears many of the signs of the former socialist system ... the difficulties of diversifying previously ‘all-state-provided’ services both in terms of privatization and in terms of user friendliness take a long and enormous effort.”

“Poverty and disadvantages can be seen to a greater extent in rural

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areas ... Many of the efforts – as we heard about in Poland and is the case in Hungary as well – are about bringing businesses to the area and/or supporting small local enterprises, ensuring the wellbeing of the inhabitants, to retain the population in the smaller settlements, and to provide all kinds of necessary services. Often, what we see is what can be done/achieved with little money in a useful way. The visited children's programmes were excellent examples of such solutions."

"I would have enjoyed having some time spent on discussing different meanings and approaches to pedagogy of working with young children."

"... such and similar visits would be to the advantage of all working with children or for children. Having the opportunity to visit places, to discuss similarities and differences and recognize and understand common and/or different attitudes and approaches are really the only meaningful way to learn. Sharing practices in this way is the best thing the EU can help to happen."

Italy

Aldo Fortunati

President of La Bottega Di Geppetto

In general, working for inclusion means shaping and directing processes over time. All this, even if there is a lack of data about the distribution of early years services that is still far from desirable levels, is a clear feature of the provision we experienced during the study visit.

The most striking elements are:

- a general shift toward the appreciation of individual potentialities starting from children

- strong involvement of local communities – local governments, families, associations – in the development of experiences
- the role of non-governmental organisations in giving inputs and impulses to the development of inclusion policies.

Emanuele Trinchetti

President of the council commission for social policies for the municipality of San Miniato

"The interesting elements of Polish experience that can produce reflections and useful strategies for other situations are:

- the capacity of having created a movement that from the beginning sees people and associations as active agents, promoters and guides for local and national governments;
- that the organisations that work in this sector show a dynamism and an intellectual curiosity that leads them to recognise and value other nations' experiences without being conditioned by them, but being stimulated to keep going in their path."

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

"What really struck me during the study visit in Poland was:

- the pressure non-government organisations are able to put on national and local governments, providing knowledge and tools to make children's and families' conditions better according to the needs and possibilities of the

Delegate feedback

- country and of its communities;
- the approach the Comenius Foundation has towards communities, discussing possibilities with administrators trying to present flexible solutions that can be adopted by different situations with a strong involvement of families too;
- the great and rapid changes faced by the nation in recent years, trying to give better chances of living to children through education and social services and projects such as those run by the Nobody's Children Foundation."

Norway

Henny Aune

Upbringing coordinator for Bodø municipality

Wenche Rønning

Researcher at Nordland Research Institute

Frid Sund

Advisor in Nordland County municipality

Wiveca Wilhelmsen-Holm

Kindergarten specialist, office of the County Governor in Nordland

"Specialisation might work in urban areas, but it doesn't work in rural areas. If demands regarding different qualifications become too specific, it will be very difficult to develop viable services in rural areas."

"Lack of specialisation might result in staff facing needs they do not have the necessary competence to tackle or that they are not able to see ... The comprehensive model requires a well-functioning support system. We think it is very important the specialist (from the support system) comes to where the child is, not the other way around. The specialist must see the children in their daily context. This is important not only to be able to give good advice and counselling to the staff working with the children, but also to develop and show respect for each other's qualifications and competences."

"One of the major impressions is the

importance of NGOs for the development of basic services for young children. We found that there was a lack of strategy and, perhaps, a lack of ambitions, at national level ... [this may result in others such as NGOs] developing their own systems and services, and may lead to major differences and an inequitable situation ... this is something we think that we need to discuss in our own context. What is the division of labour between municipalities and NGOs and why is it like that, and how ought it to be?"

"What we have found through the project is also that parent authority varies from country to country. It seems to be much stronger in Poland and Italy [than] Norway, due to historical and cultural reasons. This is something we feel we need to discuss and become more aware of in the development of our own ECEC services."

"We were struck by the clear relationship between lack of ECEC services and falling birth rates in Poland. It almost seemed like women had to choose either work or children"

"With regard to competence development and support systems we thought that the way the Comenius Foundation works to develop competences in rural areas provides a very good example to be followed."

Scotland

Elizabeth Paterson

Inspector of schools with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

"There is no doubt that members of the Comenius Foundation are doing their utmost to provide early education in difficult circumstances and they have to be commended for their sustained input."

"It became obvious as the week progressed that there is a growing commitment to

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developing services for children.”

“There is an intense commitment of staff and parents to developing services for children. The longer term plans for support and guidance would help with the consistency in ensuring high quality provision for all children.”

Isabel Hutton

Executive portfolio holder for social policy, West Lothian Council, and COSLA spokesperson for education, children and young people

“I would like to raise two questions. Firstly, what would be the impact on the ratio of one teacher to six pupils in Poland, currently fully funded by the EU, if funding were to be withdrawn? And secondly, issues relating to disclosure checking: there appears to be a lot of parental involvement within the Polish system, which is not the same as that operated in Britain.”

“We have very clear national standards in terms of those working in early years – nursery nurses who have a professional qualification, teachers who have a very demanding professional qualification and support staff working with the younger aged group require formal training and registration (now being rolled out). We would want to protect this professional standard in Scotland since the quality of the staff will determine the quality of the children’s experience and educational growth at this critical time in their development – something that will impact throughout their lives.

Any international standard would need to be a high one but I am not convinced that a European wide approach would best meet the needs of different contexts.”

Kathleen Easton

Headteacher at Eyemouth Primary School, Berwickshire

“Particularly following the conference ... the pedagogue and the role of the pedagogue was raised for further consideration ... data presented at the conference clearly demonstrated the impact on children’s wellbeing.”

“Parents were very proud of their preschool centres and were clearly learning alongside their children but there was debate about whether parents being used on a rota basis provided the coherence and consistency of approach which would be of benefit to the management of the class and pupil wellbeing.”

“We were very aware that our host country was at the early stages of a journey – they themselves freely recognise this too. Presently their concern with providing preschool opportunities to more children across the country is getting underway with the involvement of parents and community members – from the centres visited it was evident that this was success for them, at the moment. Would the next step in promoting inclusion be, to debate and develop with those staff working with children just what the characteristics of inclusion are?”

“On reflection it is important that the countries keep their unique identities and their educational systems are a result of this. It was clear that we all learn from each other, no matter where we are on the journey, but that our common vision of children’s wellbeing and the important role of early childhood is a uniting factor.”

Slovenia

Nada Požar Matijašič

Psychologist at the Ministry of Education and Sport

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"[The conference was] an excellent opportunity to see different protagonists from the ministry of health, ministry of labour and social affairs, ministry of education, ministry of science and higher education to the ministry of finance who, each from their point of view, discussed and showed a strong political commitment to young children's policy."

"For the development of the skills and qualifications of the preschool workforce, the partnership of different protagonists is undeniably important, which must keep in mind the wellbeing of the child and the future citizen – from the legislation and regulations to the quality initial training and the possibilities of lifelong learning, to the competences of the preschool teacher (motivation for their occupation), the principles of work (activities in smaller groups, respect of the child's right to privacy, the possibility of choice, the right to creative expression, equal progress opportunities) and the partnership between parents and

preschool teachers."

"We are all aware of the importance of a high quality education of preschool teachers ... the connection with the economic, social and cultural aspects of society are also an important principle, as professional workers in education carry out work which is based on social inclusion and the development of potentials of children for life in a multicultural and global society. The cooperation between parents and the local community, coworkers and other partners ... is an indispensable component of their work in the field of education."

"An important element of a quality preschool institution is cooperation with parents ... Parents should consider the professional autonomy of preschool institution workers, who, on the other hand, should consider the culture, identity, language, world view, values and convictions, customs and habits of parents."



Working for Inclusion delegates

Conference: The youngest citizens of Poland: care – education – upbringing

“Our mission is to build the culture of the small child as an integral part of society”
Izabela Kulakowska,
Institute for Early Childhood Development

Delegates concluded the study visit by attending the Parliament in Warsaw for Poland’s first national conference for early years policymakers and practitioners, where ministers and senior representatives from across the Polish government joined the debate around improving service provision for the youngest children and

discussed the emerging findings of the Working for Inclusion programme, the result of research undertaken in 28 countries.

Minister of Education Katarzyna Hall spoke passionately about her use of nurseries when her children were young, describing how a nursery “helped me to live, to function, to work”. A greater focus on under-threes, she said, would require a workforce able to provide care and nurture as well as a stimulating environment for learning.

The Prime Minister’s first minister Michal Boni concluded the issue of 0–3s would need to be a priority both for the government and the new President after the forthcoming Polish elections.

There are many reasons to invest in small children, the conference heard, including research showing the best time for investment is in early childhood as this yields the greatest return.

Pawel Kaczmarczyk, a member of the advisers’ team to the Prime Minister, called for good, affordable childcare and better support for families to be prioritised as a means to

increasing economic and professional activity, by encouraging women into the workplace and retaining older workers who may otherwise leave the workforce early to care for grandchildren.

The conference brought together early years practitioners from across Poland to hear that decentralisation of the education system has brought many benefits but also some unexpected losses, in that local responsibilities and regulations have led difficulties in promoting inclusion in some areas. Local interests and initiatives are the best way to motivate children and their parents in education, delegates heard, especially in rural areas and disadvantaged conditions. Education and early support needs to be culturally sensitive and provide children and families with the knowledge and skills which will improve their capacity for further education and competence in upbringing.

The conference heard only a minority of European countries combine fully integrated children’s services with high levels of universal entitlement and strong entitlements to parental leave – yet these countries are the most effective at addressing poverty among children and families. Ministers agreed to work together to target and improve services for under threes.

Results of the debate are being fed back to Polish policy makers.



Conference delegates at the Polish Parliament

Conclusions



Integrated Kindergarten nr 247, Warsaw

“You get ‘house blind’ (Norwegian expression) when you only stay inside your own context and never have the opportunity to see alternative systems and solutions.”

Delegates felt *Working for Inclusion* had been a valuable and worthwhile opportunity to reflect on practice in their home countries, as well as observe practice elsewhere. Awareness of other political, economic and cultural contexts in which services are provided offers a fresh perspective that can clarify the values and philosophy on which service provision is based.

Poland was felt to have a clear opportunity to establish shared values as part of laying the foundations for services in the future. Delegates acknowledged the challenge of progressing from a system in which official provision was entirely through the state, to one where private providers and service users have an equally important role, and they were impressed with the commitment to development across a range of early years services. For those from countries where systems and organisations are already well established, the question is rather how to move established services forward.

The need for consistency was seen as paramount, with the emphasis on building consensus among practitioners about the underlying principles of inclusive early years services; clear cross-sectoral

Conclusions



Indoor play facilities, Warsaw Nursery

communication; and consistent delivery of services across all regions.

There is an undoubted commitment to service development and extensive community support in some areas, but Polish services are operating less effectively than they could due to inconsistency in service planning and provision and variable understanding of what high quality early education can include.

High quality training promotes consistency and deeper understanding among service providers,

Conclusions

and raises the professional standing of early years practitioners. Establishing a clear qualification path to a career with young children, and a single qualification enabling work with different groups and ages, would be helpful in promoting good practice. Establishing lifelong learning as a core principle and making some aspects of training, such as in child protection and inclusive working, compulsory for existing staff, was also felt to be beneficial. Common standards contribute to better evaluation and therefore promote inclusive working more effectively.

Public services, private service providers, service users and all other stakeholders need to be fully engaged and involved in developing services if they are to be consistent, effective and sustainable. This needs to be part of the process of developing and establishing shared values.

Good communication between partners and agreement among stakeholders contributes enormously to sustainability. Sharing experiences of practice should be promoted: currently, providers in Poland may not currently be aware of practice even in neighbouring villages, far less in other parts of the country.

Addressing inconsistency across services would help create a clearer pathway for services to develop. It would also make it easier to communicate educational objectives and to support inclusive practice. Presently this is difficult owing to the presence of large numbers of unqualified and untrained staff.

The level of community involvement in service delivery has significant positive aspects, but heavy reliance on the involvement of parents and families can lead to overdependence on unqualified staff with little in-depth knowledge of how children learn.

Preschool teachers have an important role to

play in the social inclusion of children, and also of their families. Dividing preschool institutions into nurseries and kindergartens is therefore inappropriate, as children's development and learning represent continuous processes. It was felt to be important to pay more attention to the 0–3 age group in Poland, so that all early childhood education and care can operate in a more integrated and consistent way. It would be beneficial as part of this to bring responsibility for all early years services from birth upwards under one government department, to ensure the needs of young children and their families can be met efficiently through an holistic approach. This also contributes to inclusive working.

Considering how best to promote inclusion, particularly of children with special needs, raised the need to debate the relationship between universal and targeted services. While good quality universal services are beneficial in many ways, they can lead to challenges in supporting children with special needs effectively. To overcome this good support systems are required to ensure the right competence can be found when it is needed, especially in rural areas.

An important element in promoting inclusion is the democratisation of the curriculum to ensure that it is not unintentionally exclusive or based on 'hidden' assumptions and directives.

The growing gap between rich and poor is an issue in Poland, along with other European countries, which is frequently expressed in differences between urban areas, where services tend to be better funded and more widely available to reflect demand, and rural areas where development takes place much more slowly. The point was made that education needs to be part of a package of measures including bringing businesses to the area, supporting small local enterprises and

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ensuring inhabitants' wellbeing to reduce income and skills gaps.

The final conclusion of delegates was that it is

important to keep unique identities within countries, cultures and educational systems, and to share experience, knowledge and practice.



Outdoor play facilities, Warsaw Nursery

Acknowledgements

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Services visited

Faculty of Pedagogy, University of Warsaw
Nobody's Child Foundation, Warsaw
Social Policy Office, Warsaw Municipality

Warsaw

Integrated Kindergarten nr 247

Rawa Mazowiecka municipality

Kindergarten and primary school, Pukinin
Preschool centre, Boguszyce

Głuchow municipality

Primary school and preschool centre,
Janisławice
Kindergarten and primary school, Wysokienice

Długosiodło municipality

Culture centre, Długosiodło
Preschool centre and primary school,
Sieczychy
Preschool centre in Dalekie

Jakubów municipality

Preschool centre in Wiśniew
Preschool centre in Jakubów

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Further information

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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.

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Hungary

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Appendices

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Slovenia

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