

# Equal Access to High Quality Early Education and Care?

Lessons from other countries

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In collaboration with Daycare Trust  
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# Two part project

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- ▶ How far are children from disadvantaged backgrounds in England able to access the highest quality ECEC?

L Gambaro, K Stewart and J Waldfogel (2013)

“A question of quality: Do children from disadvantaged backgrounds receive lower quality early years education and care in England”

CASEpaper 171.

- ▶ How well are other countries doing at ensuring equal access to high quality provision – and are there potential lessons for us from approaches elsewhere?

L Gambaro, K Stewart and J Waldfogel (eds) (2014)

*Equal Access to Quality Care? Providing High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care to Disadvantaged Families.*

Bristol: The Policy Press

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# Which countries?

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- ▶ **Australia** (Deb Brennan and Marianne Fenech)
  - ▶ **France** (Jeanne Fagnani)
  - ▶ **Germany** (Pamela Oberhuemer)
  - ▶ **The Netherlands** (Janneke Plantenga and Emre Akgündüz)
  - ▶ **New Zealand** (Helen May)
  - ▶ **Norway** (Anne-Lise Ellingsæter)
  - ▶ **USA** (Jane Waldfogel and Katherine Magnuson)
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# Lessons from an English perspective: Generally how are we doing?

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- ▶ ‘Childcare triangle’ of quality, cost and access – a challenge everywhere
  - ▶ *Enrolment:*
    - ▶ Nearly universal 3+ (except US and Australia)
      - ▶ Full-time Norway and France; part-time for many (as for 3s in England) in Germany, Netherlands, NZ
    - ▶ Under 3s: Lower than Norway, Netherlands; similar to France, NZ; above Germany, Australia, US.
  - ▶ *Quality:*
    - ▶ Qualifications: lower requirements than Norway, France, NZ higher than Germany, Netherlands, Australia, US
    - ▶ Children to staff ratios: England is lowest (fewest children to staff)
    - ▶ Curriculum: as in NZ and Norway (though more prescriptive)
  - ▶ *Inequality and social segregation:*
    - ▶ Access for disadvantaged under 3s an issue everywhere except Norway
    - ▶ 3+ Different settings for PT/FT an issue everywhere except France and Norway
    - ▶ High quality of part-time in UK is a strength.
  - ▶ *Price:*
    - ▶ UK most expensive for under 3s
    - ▶ Free part-time from 3 and full-time from 4: better than in Australia, US, Germany, but fewer hours than in France and Norway
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More specific lessons...



# (1) Universal, free provision is the most effective way to ensure high enrolment

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- ▶ Britain, France and NZ: universal free pre-school
  - near universal take-up
  
- ▶ Along with good outreach and data collection/local benchmarking (England)
  
- ▶ Can free targeted provision achieve the same at lower cost?
  - ▶ Move to targeting – NZ
  - ▶ Two year old places – UK
  - ▶ Headstart – US
  - ▶ Income-related fees rather than free for all – Norway



## (2) Where there are fees, some features can help increase participation among disadvantaged groups

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- ▶ **Subsidies should apply to all children, not just to children of working parents**
  - ▶ Norway, New Zealand, Australia, France (crèches), some parts of Germany, NOT UK (until 3).
  - ▶ Norway: 60% of 1-2 year olds with a single parent with no employment income are in kindergarten.
- ▶ **Subsidies should be progressive (income-related), and generous at the bottom**
  - ▶ UK: All parents pay minimum 30% (beyond free hours)
  - ▶ Netherlands: 3.5% at bottom, two-thirds at the top.
  - ▶ Australia: 'gap fee' paid by non-working parents – so subsidy not so helpful
- ▶ **Subsidies should be transparent and stable**
  - ▶ Income-related fees better than reimbursement through tax system?



### (3) Quality: Highly qualified (graduate) staff are important to high quality provision

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- ▶ Quality levers were the same across countries, but with different emphasis: curriculum; staff qualifications; child:staff ratios; inspection and monitoring
- ▶ Qualifications are most demanding in France, Norway and NZ
  - ▶ Evidence from NZ linking process quality to qualifications (as in UK)
  - ▶ Germany, US and Netherlands: Measures of process quality rank the bulk of provision poorly.
- ▶ England: Detailed curriculum instead of graduate staff?
  - ▶ In NZ graduates are seen as essential to deliver the curriculum
  - ▶ Tickell Review for England also makes this point





## (4) There is a danger that promoting quality will price out lower-income children...

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- ▶ Less of a social gradient in quality than we might expect... a puzzle?
  - ▶ England: protective role of state provision
  - ▶ Netherlands: market reforms abolished state provision – now high social segregation but few differences in quality:
    - ▶ Parents don't value/observe quality so market operates on price?
- ▶ Increasing use of quality indicators (Ofsted, star ratings) may increase social gradient



## (4) To avoid this, high minimum standards and well-designed subsidies are necessary

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- ▶ **High minimum standards for all on crucial issues: staff**
  - ▶ Competition on less important things
  - ▶ But either state pays or low-income are priced out (Australia)
- ▶ **Use incentives to promote quality**
  - ▶ Rather than a flat fee to providers, more resources if they invest in quality
    - ▶ US: public funding (e.g. North Carolina) linked to structural features
    - ▶ New Zealand: quality funding bands
    - ▶ England: quality supplements for free entitlement; Graduate Leader Fund 2006-2011
- ▶ **Subsidies to settings with disadvantaged children (pupil-premium for early years provision?)**



(5) Quality can be high in the private (for profit) sector, but because of regulation not pressure of competition

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- ▶ Little evidence that competition itself bids up quality (e.g. Netherlands)
- ▶ Quality is often worse in the for-profit sector (US, NZ, UK)
- ▶ High quality provision *can* operate with a for-profit sector (Norway) but:
  - ▶ Very strong quality requirements (staff)
  - ▶ Plus limits on prices and profits (“reasonable” only!)
  - ▶ The for-profit sector is still small in Norway... a more substantial one may resist reforms (Australia)



# Policy conclusions

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Many current strengths in ECEC provision in England today

- ▶ Reaching nearly all 3s and 4s
- ▶ Quality which is comparatively not bad (though could be better)
- ▶ Disadvantaged children relatively protected by the state sector

Three suggestions for further improvements:

1. Greater investment in graduate staff
  2. Link state funding to staff qualifications and to child disadvantage
  3. More generous subsidies, starting at zero contribution at the bottom of the distribution
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