Equal Access to High Quality Early Education and Care?

Lessons from other countries

IFS/MISOC event, 8 May 2013

Ludovica Gambaro, Kitty Stewart and Jane Waldfogel (CASE, LSE)

In collaboration with Daycare Trust
Research funded by The Nuffield Foundation
Two part project

- 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
Which countries?

- **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)
Lessons from an English perspective: Generally how are we doing?

- ‘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, Neths, 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
More specific lessons...
(1) Universal, free provision is the most effective way to ensure high enrolment

- 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

- **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

- 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…

- 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

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

- 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

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