

Educational attainment of 'looked-after children'

Background information

In early September 2005, Eurydice at NFER received an enquiry regarding the educational attainment of 'looked-after children' or children in public care. Our enquirer expressed an interest in receiving any further information/details of research on this subject in countries outside the UK as well as any general background information on the education of such children. We posted details of the enquiry on the Eurydice Network question and answer forum and the responses we received are summarised in below.

In addition to the responses included in the summary, the Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, Hungarian, Maltese, Norwegian and Swedish Units contacted us to explain that they had not been able to find any statistics or studies on this particular topic. Both the Norwegian and Swedish Units pointed out that, as children in public care normally attend mainstream schools, their educational attainment is recorded with that of all other school pupils - without any mention of their family/personal background.

Please note that the English has not been written by native speakers and is unrevised.

Responses

Czech Republic

There is no information on any research in this field in the Czech Republic. The issues frequently mentioned in debates and in the press are rather educational problems with these children and their integration in society.

Children and young people with serious behavioural difficulties who have been removed from their families by the courts are cared for by special educational provisions, which also ensure their education. Further information on this topic is available in the Czech Republic's section on *Eurybase* - the Eurydice Network's database on education systems in Europe. To access this, go to the URL below and click on 'EN' under 'Czech Republic'. From the list of chapter headings, select chapter 10 'Special Educational Needs'. Afterwards, go to sections 10.6.1 and 10.6.4:

http://www.eurydice.org/Eurybase/frameset_eurybase.html

Finland

In Finland the general rule is that children in foster care or in children's homes are educated in mainstream schools. However in Finland it is not obligatory to attend school to receive compulsory education, and some looked-after children are taught 'on site'.

The Deputy Chancellor of Justice expressed his concern about the quality of education of looked-after children in spring 2004 after some newspapers published articles on the issue. He then asked the Ministry of Education to provide him with the necessary information in order to be able to investigate the matter. As a result of this the Ministry sent a questionnaire to all five State Provincial Offices in Finland.

According to the statistics from the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health about one per cent (i.e. 8,325) of children under 18 were placed outside their home in Finland (2003). According to the survey initiated by the Deputy Chancellor of Justice, 83 per cent of looked-after children of compulsory school age (under 16) received education in school, the remainder (17 per cent) did not attend school, but received education in their foster homes or children's homes.

Arrangements for the education of looked-after children varied considerably between the provinces chiefly because legislation is open to interpretation, is unclear and is even insufficient. The lack of information on looked-after children between sending and receiving municipalities also caused problems. There were also deficiencies in the cooperation between education authorities and the social services administration at local level.

The following problems were specifically pointed out by the Deputy Chancellor of Justice:

- Municipalities are not always aware of all looked-after children placed in their area even though, according to the Basic Education Act, it is their responsibility to provide education for these children and to monitor it.
- There have been cases where municipalities have refused to provide education to looked-after children placed in their area.
- It is often unclear who is responsible for the costs for the education of looked-after children (sending/receiving municipality/foster-home/children's home).

The survey showed that schools do not always have the necessary resources to meet the needs of looked-after children. In some cases, children are discharged from schools and the responsibility for their education is shifted to foster homes and children's homes. However, education provided outside schools often does not meet required legal standards for education. The number of teaching hours can often be lower than those provided by the municipality in schools, and teaching staff do not always fulfil the qualification requirements.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has set up two working groups to review the legislation for pupil welfare and child protection. Both groups will complete their work by the end of March 2006.

In addition, the Deputy Chancellor of Justice has urged the sending and receiving municipalities and the municipalities and foster homes/children's homes to clearly agree between themselves on the costs and educational arrangements for looked-after children. He has also asked the Ministry of Education and State Provincial Offices in Finland to inform him, by the end of 2005, of the actions they have taken to ensure that the requirements of the law are met in the provision of basic education for looked-after children.

France

There is no study focusing specifically on this subject in France. However, more general studies show a higher rate of failure at school and lack of qualifications amongst children in the care of the DASS (Direction des Affaires Sanitaires et Sociales) (social services), as well as amongst children living with foster families.

One example of a more general report includes the following article (in French, see link below), which focuses on the educational attainment of students attending *collèges* (lower secondary schools, ages 11 to 15) situated in education priority zones (ZEPs) at the end of the 1990s. Education priority zones are areas with a higher than average level of deprivation, where schools receive extra funding to help reduce class sizes and appoint more teachers. The article looks in particular at how students' family background influences their success at schools in ZEPs.

Tables 15 (Impact of attending a *collège* in a ZEP on success in secondary studies amongst pupils who started the first year of secondary education (the *sixième*, age 11) in 1989) and table 17 (Impact of attending a *collège* in a ZEP on the probability of obtaining secondary level qualifications) are of most relevance to the enquiry. Of particular relevance are the sections of these tables entitled '*structure de la famille*' (family structure). The three family structures given are '*monoparentale*' (single parent families), '*recomposée*' (reconstituted families) and '*autre situation*' (other family situations, which we assume includes 'looked-after children'):

ftp://trf.education.gouv.fr/pub/edutel/dpd/revue61/article11.pdf

Germany

The German Unit found very little information concerning the specific topic of children in public care, but a considerable amount of information on the topic of the relationship between underachievement and social background or low family income. This is a topic that has been widely discussed in politics and research recently.

The paragraphs which follow provide a summary of the results found in publications by the German Youth Institute and the First Conference of the Forum on Education 2000:

- 1.) The family determines 50 per cent of primary socialisation; school and other public spheres determine the other 50 per cent. The growing reduction in family care makes increasing demands on public institutions like youth welfare services, which partly have to take over some of the responsibilities of (traditional) family care and must be open to new responsibilities.
- 2.) Early individual support and stimulation of learning in pre-school institutions and in primary school seem to be the best prevention against underachievement and help, at the same time, to promote the talents needed for educational achievement.
- 3.) Media competency is becoming a new (cultural) technique which all young people should have access to. A lack of media access reduces opportunities.
- 4.) The risk of poverty/low income/underachievement increases according to the categories "gender", "migration" and "region" e.g. girls acquire higher qualifications and show less underachievement. But at the age of 30, fewer women than men are in a job for which they are specifically qualified or are financially independent.
- 5.) The consequences of underachievement in youth are difficult to compensate for in adult life, as individually-based further training offers are still inadequate.

Greece

We found little information concerning the subject of educational attainment of children in public care, or placed in foster families, as they attend mainstream schools, and their social or family background cannot be traced in the statistics.

However, the Institute of Political Sociology at the Greek National Centre for Social Research (EKKE), in collaboration with the British Segal Quince Wicksteed Ltd. Company, and the Finnish University of Turku, embarked upon a joint research project, entitled "Advantage not Disadvantage". The project, undertaken under the European Union's Leonardo research programme, is intended to help establish new models of accessible initial training for "disadvantaged" young people.

Iceland

In Iceland, children who are temporarily sent away from their families and placed in foster care are the responsibility of the Government Agency for Child Protection:

http://www.bvs.is/?ser=10.

The Ministry of Social Affairs is the ultimate authority in matters of child protection. On behalf of the Ministry, the Government Agency for Child Protection is in charge of the day-to-day administration of child protection services.

The Government Agency for Child Protection organises education for the children in its care. Foster care is often provided in rural areas and children attend the nearest compulsory (phase) school (pupils aged six to 16). They are taught together with other children or in special classes if necessary. Their education is financed by the municipality where the child is registered.

There are no research reports on the educational attainment of such children compared with others.

Netherlands

There is no available published information on children in foster care and their educational attainment.

Most children who are placed in foster care attend mainstream schools. If they have problems they can attend a special school for some time and return later to a mainstream school.

Poland

There is little available information on the subject. However, one recent article (by Arleta Zysko) "Educational problems of children in children's homes" published in *Education and Dialogue* magazine confirms the general intuition that, in general, children in care underachieve at school in comparison with their peers who grow up in their own families. Often, pupils living in children's homes need individual approaches to teaching.

A list of research topics on foster families (years 1974 to 2001) is available at:

http://www.vulcan.edu.pl/eid/archiwum/2004/01/

Unfortunately, these are available in Polish only, but most look at the financial situation of foster families and the health of the children.

Spain

'Looked-after children' follow the general public Spanish education system attending standard establishments corresponding to their age/year and ability (schools, secondary schools, workshops, etc.). As an example, in the II Plan on Childhood and Adolescence of the Autonomous Community of Madrid the "Project Supporting Schooling" takes into consideration the following actions: management of educational support for children in children's homes, coordination of actions with the Education Department, management of economic support for canteen services for children in foster care, management of support for the school integration of children in foster care. Generally speaking, these children and youngsters do receive support to reinforce the basic areas for their social and personal integration.