

A Vision for the Future of Child Care

Social trends and possible policy options

Report of the FUTURE GROUP ON CHILD CARE commissioned by Mieke Vogels, Flemish Minister of Health, Welfare, Equal Opportunities and Development Cooperation.

Contents	1
Introduction	2
2. Process	5
2.1. Composition of the Future Group	5
3. Findings	8
3.1. Trends and scenarios	11
3.2. A vision for the future of child care	15

1950

Anyone about to become a grandparent in 2003 can look back on his or her own pre-school years as a carefree time. Mother was always at home, looking after a family that was a bit bigger than what we are used to now, and it was usually no trouble for her to feed other children from the extended family or neighbours' children who needed minding at the big family dining table. Anyway, the older children helped to look after the little ones. There was less need for child care: an informal network of grandparents, extended family, friends and neighbours was more or less taken for granted.

For outdoor play space there was the street and open spaces. In the '40s and '50s child care was the exception rather than the rule. Originally, and continuing after the Second World War, child care was a manifestation of "charity": to keep children off the streets and improve their health by providing them with good food.

1975

Our same prospective grandmother of 2003 was herself able to make increasing use of child care. Child minding families became a feature of the child care landscape in the '70s and their pay was fixed. Up to then child care had been dominated by a strict medical-hygienic approach; now little by little the emphasis was shifting towards educational quality. Our future grandmother thought herself lucky then if she was able to find child care for her own children. Rather more grandparents were still working and every year fewer seemed to be available to look after their grandchildren. The family with a single breadwinner was gradually developing into the two-income family. Changing patterns of living also contributed to a systematic increase in demand for child care.

At this stage people did not stop to consider whether child care was good or not; they took the child care on offer as it was. However, educationalists, psychologists and policy-makers were already thinking about where our modern child-care provision should be going.

2003

When our prospective grandparent gets to hold his or her first grandchild in a few months' time, that little tot will be entering a totally different child-care world. Child minding families have been given social security. Academic research has pointed out a number of potential dangers and other effects of child care on children's development. Parents now expect to be able to get the child care that suits them. Quality is taken for granted. People expect the authorities to provide enough places, to guarantee quality, and also to bear a significant share of the cost. Nonetheless, quality and safety are still too uncertain. There are a few children in child-care facilities who have special needs. Thinking in terms of real diversity has started in the world of child care, but it still has a long way to go.

Meanwhile, children's rights have taken up their own place in child care, although here and there a timorous voice can be heard warning that children's rights does not mean that you should not give children structure. It is also essential that parents are involved in their children's child care. Child care is increasingly linked to the family situation. Child care has long ceased to be an isolated provision and it should be part of a neighbourhood or local community. Nevertheless, not everyone needs child care. Many parents choose to use "time credit" (system which allows employees to take additional leave or to reduce their hours under their existing employment contract) or to work part time while their children are small, and there is still a hard core of grandparents who are willing to keep a greater or smaller part of their time free to look after their grandchildren.

2023

What will the child care be like when, in 2023, our grandparents' great-grandchild gets his first tooth at his child-care facility? Let's imagine for a moment. The great-grandchild will have to spend far less time in the child-care facility, as his parents and grandparents will get or make far more time for their small children. They do have other needs too though, so there will still be a need for child care. Mobility will be a problem.

A larger network and different forms of cooperation will have developed between a number of aspects of our lives as they are now: home, work, school, leisure, medical and welfare services such as care for the elderly, care for the sick, ... They are better coordinated and help families to carry out their family responsibilities and to combine work and family life well. As part of the network, child-care facilities can really respond to the, sometimes very flexible, needs of families. However, there are fewer children and, even from an economic or commercial standpoint, it is more practical to work from strong work entities, without having to lose the small-scale approach.

Child care has become an accepted basic service; quality and safety are put first. Children are completely safe there, and they are given every opportunity to develop, regardless of where they were born or where they are growing up. If something happens, though, parents are much quicker to sue. The child-care provision is characterised by great diversity, it is very accessible and parents get more than simply day care. Child care helps people to meet and make contact with other people when they move to a new area, and more and more people are even coming from abroad and do not speak the language that well yet. Families who need it can get extra support from the network. Children are accepted as they are, and they are cosseted. They are allowed to be themselves. They are not specifically prepared for school, but this happy period of pre-school child care is much more like the early learning experiences of the nursery class. What if they cannot go straight home after class? In that case the children will be offered a whole range of supervised leisure activities: sport, art and crafts, individual play, group games or quiet reading. The youngest children are really happy if their mum or dad comes to help at the child-care facility occasionally. The older children, those approaching their teens, prefer not have their parents inhibiting their activities; as they are sometimes testing the limits by getting into mischief.

This is a tentative dream of our future grandparents, because they cannot yet imagine what developments will influence society. Our grandparents await with interest the views of the Future Group, the think-tank commissioned by the Flemish minister with responsibility for welfare services, Mieke Vogels, which has attempted to predict the future of child care.

The views and recommendations of the Future Group may not seem to our grandparents to go far enough and they will not agree with everything. Nor need they, it is, after all, just one vision. The findings of this report emerged spontaneously. The members of the Future Group come from a very diverse range of professional backgrounds and have managed to cross over very quickly from their own fields to the world of child care.

Our aging grandparents belong to a growing group of people, who certainly have more time to help their children live lives free of worries, and especially to show boundless concern for their grandchildren. They hope that the work, vision and recommendations of the Future Group will be able to contribute to a dream of child care and that, for anyone who needs it, child care will not remain only a dream.

2. Process

2.1. Composition of the Future Group

MEMBERS

Ann Demeulemeester has a master's degree level qualification in educational science. After a few years lecturing at the Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA), she embarked on a career in the Christian labour movement at the Federation of Christian Employees' Organisations (ACW) in Kortrijk. Shortly afterwards, she transferred to the education department of ACW, where she was adviser for education, learning policy, and family and work. From 1998 she was attached to ACW management support as head of learning and development. Since 2002 she has been general secretary. In this capacity she is responsible for coordination of vision, standpoints and programme, and for general management of ACW.

Luk De Smet is Director-General of the League of Families (Gezinsbond). He has master's level degrees in law (Catholic University of Leuven 1973) and criminology (Catholic University of Leuven 1975).

Thérèse Jacobs is a sociologist. Since 1999 she has been general director of the Centre for Population and Family Studies. She also teaches courses in "Sociology of life" at Antwerp University. Her research has focused on the fields of sociology of the family, gerontology, demography, sociology of welfare and sociology of life. She has been chair of the "Women's Studies" course and co-promotor of the Panel Study of Belgian Households.

Gaby Jennes is director of the Higher Institute for Family Studies and chair of the local consultative group for out-of-school care in Antwerp.

Jan Peeters has a master's level degree in psychology and educational science. Since 1979 he has been at Ghent University working on projects and action research, aiming to improve the quality of child care. Since 1989 he has been coordinator of the Centre for the Guidance of the Young Child, a research group in the Department of Social Welfare Studies at Ghent University. This resource centre creates learning materials for child care and sets up educational innovation projects. He is editor in chief of KIDDO, Educational Journal for Child Care, and editor of the Dutch-language version of the European journal "Children in Europe". He is active in numerous European networks and organisations working in Early Childhood Education and Care. He set up the European network DECET (Diversity in Early Childhood Education and Training), that is addressing diversity in provisions for young children.

Koen Raes is Professor of the Philosophy of Law and Applied Ethics at the research group IN REM (Institute for Law, Ethics and Society) in the Faculty of Law at Ghent University. His teaching includes philosophy and ethics of social work, moral sociology and general ethics. He is also involved in the inter-university research project 'The Loyalties of Knowledge', studying the social responsibilities of scientific experts.

Jan Van Gils has a PhD in educational science and is director of the Child and Community Research Centre. His publications include:

- "Duel of duet, een toekomst voor kindparticipatie" (Duel or duet, a future for children's participation), Mechelen 2001, Bakermat.
- "Kinderen filosoferen over de stad. Een belevingsonderzoek op basis van filosofische gesprekken van Brusselse kinderen van 10 à 12 jaar" (Children's thoughts about the city. A study of children's experience based on discussions with Brussels children aged 10 to 12), Meise 2000, Kind en Samenleving.
- Une pédagogie fondée sur le respect de l'enfant et le dialogue: la contribution de la résilience, in: La résilience: le réalisme de l'espérance. Paris 2001, Ed. ERES.

Mieke Van Haegendoren is Professor at Limburg University and director of the research institute SEIN. Under her leadership, a number of studies have been published that deal directly with the problems and needs of out-of-school child care in Mechelen, Antwerp, Ghent, and also the need for new forms in

Limburg. She is also co-promotor of the Equal Opportunities Policy Centre, a consortium between Antwerp and Limburg Universities.

Veerle Vermeulen has a master's level degree in law and has also studied Management and Policy of Welfare and Health Care. Until mid- 2002, she was an adviser at the education department of the Flemish Economic Network (labour market, welfare, health care). Since mid-2002, she has been an adviser on stakeholder-management and deputy human resources manager at the Flemish Economic Network (VEV).

PROCESS-COORDINATOR AND FACILITATOR

Marc Vanschoenwinkel studied clinical psychology at the Free University in Brussels. He has sixteen years' experience as a consultant in the fields of assessment and development centres, individual coaching, training and competence management in diverse sectors such as public sector, industry and financial services. In partnership with Twynstra Gudde Management Consultancy in the Netherlands, he built up experience as a human talent consultant in large-scale change processes. He is currently a partner-consultant at Teasing Consult, which also has a strategic alliance with Twynstra Gudde.

THE REPORT, REPORTING AND SUPPORT FROM CHILD AND FAMILY

Patrick Bedert, commissioner

Jan Peeters, coordinator of the Centre for the Guidance of the Young Child

Anne Vanden Berge, head of the General Services Department

Katrien Verhegge, head of the Preventive Family Support Department

Katrien Vermeersch, child care client and information manager

Will Verniest, head of the Child Care Department.

The members of the Future Group took part as individuals and not as representatives of an organisation, institution or movement.

The report should, therefore, be seen as a report of the Future Group, not as the compilation of the views of each individual member of that group.

Each member, therefore, reserves the right to his or her personal standpoint with respect to the different elements of the report.

Child care affects so many facets of our lives, so approaching it from so many different perspectives has produced a rich and varied vision.

*The report owes its strength to the diversity of the group and the group process.
It constitutes a basis for further work.*

Our thanks go, therefore, to the members of the Future Group and the process coordinator.

3. Findings

3.1 Trends and scenarios

SOCIAL TRENDS CONSIDERED BY THE FUTURE GROUP TO BE CERTAINTIES

MORE FAR-REACHING TECHNOLOGICAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEVELOPMENTS

It is a fact that we are facing major technological changes and that different forms of communication are becoming possible via the Internet. This has a number of different consequences. Increasing scientific knowledge and technological progress create uncertainty. People ask themselves what else is heading their way in the area of communications, IT and medical technology. A gap has developed between those who have access to information and communication, and those who have much less or no access. There is also a down-side to scientific knowledge; that sometimes raises ethical questions: dangers for the environment, language and culture, body and mind, integrity, privacy and awareness of reality. Faced with these uncertainties and threats, parents and children need more support, both in the child-care system and outside it. The effects of this trend will also be felt in education, work and leisure.

INCREASING EXPECTATIONS WITH RESPECT TO QUALITY OF LIFE – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Our thinking will be governed by efforts to achieve sustainable development, but it is by no means clear how this will be interpreted in concrete terms. Combining sustainable growth with an ecologically and ethically responsible form of production and consumption is a real challenge. People are becoming increasingly aware that there is a connection between their daily lives and consumption patterns and the world economy as a whole that is characterised by inequality. Sustainable development is a foundation on which to build a better quality of life, and this quality of life is jeopardised by lack of safety, feelings of being unsafe and insecurity. Lack of safety and insecurity are both the cause and effect of a more general urban problem that will force the government and civil society into a kind of Marshall Plan. As lack of safety, insecurity and urban problems adversely affect our quality of life, it is vitally important that both government and civil society find an effective response. If insecurity is allowed to increase, democracy will falter, quality of life will decline, local communities will become discontent, and tolerance and trust will ebb away. We need to find an antidote to discontent, isolation and degeneration. We can combat these ills by sweetening urban living with suitable projects in the areas of housing, community development, social-cultural development, integration, mobility and safety.

MIGRATION

There is a conspicuous divide at both European and world level, and this will be further reinforced by the imminent enlargement of the European Union. In the next thirty to forty years, proportionately more children will be born to ethnic minority groups than to the native population. There will be further globalisation of the economy and of society as a whole, and the xenophobic feelings and expressions of such feelings that go with that are unlikely to go away. At the present time, it is less clear where globalisation will lead us and how intensive the xenophobia will become. How native populations and ethnic minority populations will respond to xenophobia and how far confrontation and acceptance will go, remain open questions. What is more predictable is that the increasingly multicultural composition of the population will affect the way society is organised – especially with respect to the way clients are approached. The effect of the EU enlargement on our society is also predictable: it will involve a redistribution of wealth, and this trend is already on its way. The need to take the imminent enlargement of the European Union into account now is one aspect of sustainable development.

AGING POPULATION

Demographers have a good idea of future trends over the next twenty to thirty years. The aging of the population due to falling birth rates and old people living longer is an established trend that will have important consequences for society and for the position of the child in society. Some of these effects can already be predicted, others remain unclear. However, both sides of this development have to be viewed in an international perspective. The trend towards fewer children in society is expressed in the slogan “the country is becoming empty.” There are two mutually reinforcing developments: declining fertility and falling birth rates. If the present low birth rate is maintained, it can be predicted with certainty that even fewer children will be born in 25 years’ time – even if fertility were to increase by then. The reason is that the cohort of women of child-bearing age would by then be smaller than it is today. Children are no longer as popular as they used to be. There are more families with only one child, and some people make a conscious decision not to have children, though there are others who still decide to have two or more children. For the first time ever, children (under 18s) are in a minority, in society and in the family. Longer life spans and the decrease in the desire to have children will have far-reaching consequences: children become a scarcer, more precious commodity; children become “little emperors”; and the expectations put upon children increase. Parents invest more in their children, and so they have higher expectations of those who are responsible for looking after them. All these high expectations are increasing the stress on children.

A parallel development to the fall in the number of children in society is the increase in the number of old people, and this will also lead to changing norms and values. More and more older men are going out with young women, and people are having children at a later and later age. Will these parents still be able to look after their children when they may need care themselves? When parents of 60 have 20-year-old children, this represents an unprecedented development, which is likely to have major social consequences. An aging population means that expenditure on care goes up. There is pressure on budgets due to rising care needs of the elderly and children. There will have to be a new funding mechanism for social security, because the present one in which the contributions come from falling numbers of economically active people cannot be sustained for much longer. Choices will have to be made. One such choice would be for everyone to work longer in the future, not only because of falling birth rates but also because two incomes will be necessary to fund people’s high expenditure on leisure activities. There is expected to be a shift in the future from caring for children to a greater focus on caring for the elderly, a development that could have a significant impact on how young people view the future. This impact was recognised at the Madrid Conference, even in developing countries. It is important that children are offered the prospect of being well-cared for in their old age. If we allow the elderly to be neglected, we are taking away children’s motivation to become old in an aging society. There are signs that grandparents will start to take a greater role in bringing up their grandchildren again. Grandparents who have a career behind them will be less reluctant to look after their grandchildren. Even those who are still working will play a role in the lives of their grandchildren – though it is not clear what role that will be. This does not mean that grandparents will devote themselves full-time to their grandchildren, but that they will probably be more involved than they are now. Some predict a reversal of the current trend, where grandparents are giving up looking after their grandchildren. In a world with many grandparents and few children, might there even be fights over the grandchildren?

COMMERCIALISATION AND MARKETISATION

There is a visible, general trend towards governments taking a step back and letting private companies run public services: mobility, care services, electricity, gas, water and communications. The entry of the private sector leads to competition, and therefore to liberalisation and marketisation. This can be seen throughout society, in the economy and in soft sectors such as education, culture, health and care services – with all the consequences that brings for access and quality. New markets are already being created to provide what used to be public services, such as transport and mobility: the government is stepping back and companies are taking over some of these tasks. There is a tension between liberalisation and the provision of public services and, to the extent that there is a link between globalisation and liberalisation, this development can also lead to less democracy. Liberalisation also leads to a division between north and south, and between the privileged and the excluded.

A number of consequences of this trend can be predicted. Care becomes individualised, as a consequence of client-based funding and demand-led care. Human relationships become commodities subject to competition, selling to the highest bidder and marketisation. Pressure to allow social networks to provide care increases, which is especially problematic for weaker networks. How far will the pay-for-care trend go, for instance, in the area of allowances for unpaid carers or care insurance? It seems likely that caring roles will be carried out by people who find it difficult to get a job on the normal labour market, which will necessitate closer monitoring of quality.

In this context, many families find it difficult to combine work with family life, caring responsibilities, social engagement or free time activities. Measures that aim to achieve better integration of these activities, such as “time credit” or the career breaks it replaced, are not sufficient. These difficulties increase the need for support services for families, such as child care, home care services and domestic work – but there is creeping commercialisation and marketisation in these areas too. Commercialisation also increases the pressure on the structural health service and health insurance: areas where we want to guarantee access and ability to pay. It remains unclear how health and welfare services will be funded and organised in the future, but in general far more emphasis will be placed on prevention.

Up against the commercialisation of so many aspects of society, comes the call to strengthen democracy. Politicians may proclaim the primacy of politics, but, in reality, more and more essential aspects are escaping their influence, due to the impact of the economy, science and the media. Public services are going through major changes, due to privatisation, electronic forms of service provision and modernisation. The latter is expressed in, for instance, restructuring, the core tasks debate, management principles and giving autonomy to activities or departments. In the end, the measure against which changes should be judged is the service to the independent, individual citizen. We dream of a “democratic ideal”, but that is sometimes very remote because of trends towards putting more tasks into the hands of legal and other experts and specialists. In the future, society ought to put more value on the contributions of volunteers and those with expertise developed through experience and engagement.

CHANGING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Family types are becoming more and more diverse. There are families with only one parent; unstable families and families which have found a new form of stability; new relationships and new types of families are being created. The effects of this diversity are equally varied. Poverty and insecurity are on the increase, due to family breakdown and the number of one-parent families. Children’s relationships with adults and other children are getting more complex. One of the reasons why children’s relationships are getting more complex is because their parents often have a series of different relationships with their own brothers and sisters, with their half-brothers and half-sisters and with their step-brothers and step-sisters. In that tangled web, the only real relationship that remains is that between mother and child. Inter-generational solidarity runs through the women: there is a sense of duty in that relationship (Caribbean model). However, there is also a counteracting trend of fathers who want to get involved. No matter how diverse the types of family and no matter how different the relationships within the family are, the child’s need to be socialised remains the same and this, by definition, interferes with relationships in the nuclear and extended family.

The trend towards smaller families also has far-reaching consequences for family relationships. Less care is provided by the family, and more by professionals. Parents rely on the extended family less, which loosens social ties. Nevertheless grandparents may take on a bigger role. Grandparents who have a career behind them will be less reluctant to do things with their grandchildren. This does not mean that grandparents will devote themselves full-time to their grandchildren – it does mean that they will look after them more than people would have predicted based on what is happening now. The present trend in which grandparents are giving up looking after their grandchildren is going to be reversed. In the future, some people will be looking after children throughout their lives. Those who still work will also play a role in the lives of their grandchildren. However, the grandparents’ own situations are becoming more complex: grandparents also get divorced and remarried, as a result of which there will be many grandparents for

fewer children. Look at the “Japanese scenario”, where grandparents sometimes “fight” to be allowed to look after their grandchildren.

DUALISATION OF SOCIETY

The society of the future is going to be characterised by duality from several different perspectives: financial, knowledge, housing, work, and also in relation to access to new forms of information and communication. This duality will also be expressed in the decision as to whether or not to have children. A decision like this leads to two very different lifestyles and ultimately to a social conflict: will the group without children want to contribute for the group with children? The Future Group is in no doubt about the fact that this complex, dual society will continue, and the society of tomorrow will have its weaker and poorer members. The question to be asked rather is how this dualisation will continue, what form it will take. Is our society going in the direction of ghetto-formation? It is a fact that urban problems are becoming more serious, that there is greater insecurity as a consequence of internationalisation and globalisation of the economy, and that life is becoming more and more fragmented – especially for the less well-educated.

Alongside the financial duality, there is social duality in the area of knowledge: the split between those who do have the means to gain knowledge and those who do not. The distribution of opportunities is very unequal and highly predictable based on people’s background and, especially, the level of education enjoyed by their parents. It is possible to argue that the importance of education as a cause of social inequality is still increasing, due to the knowledge gap between those with higher education and the rest. That is why breaking through the unequal opportunities in education is one of the most important challenges facing us in the attempt to tackle exclusion and lack of opportunity. Closing the knowledge gap is one of the biggest challenges for the next few years. While the importance of education is increasing, lifelong learning is only exacerbating the gulf between those with higher education and the rest. Opportunities to engage in lifelong learning are also distributed very unequally. It is essential that we create learning opportunities for all, and also get rid of the barriers to learning for those whose experiences in school and while they were growing up have been less fortunate.

Just as real as financial duality and knowledge duality is the digital gap, that is the unequal access to information and communication technology. Children and young people at school do not all have the same access to personal computers and the Internet. The same can be said of employees, who are not all given the same opportunities at work, women, retired people and those who live in the southern hemisphere. New forms of inequality are being created because most government services are now provided digitally. Telesales also involves new risks for inexperienced consumers.

Housing is another area leading to a divided society. Housing is becoming more and more expensive for a growing group of people who are finding they cannot afford to get a home of their own. It is becoming a challenge to provide affordable, good quality housing for all. Residents in social housing have virtually no say in their housing situation, and yet the contribution of residents ought to be an important source of information about real needs - and that is after all a condition for improving services. People want to continue to live in their own homes for as long as possible; a new and integrated view of adapted living and homes for life is needed.

The active welfare state is based on workers. Those who do not work do not exist – but what about all those who do not work then? As well as the right to “work to suit individual needs”, it is important to guarantee a sufficiently high, inflation-proof substitute income. The failure to coordinate health care and pensions at European level will in the future jeopardise the possibility of funding national systems that are based on solidarity. Growing ambivalence is a general social trend: everything has its supporters and opponents, so conflict in society is growing. Some, for instance, see care services as something very positive, whereas for others they are a burden. Ambivalence is on the increase in all kinds of areas, so “you can never please everyone.” Organised civil society needs to prepare for this development.

CHANGING VIEW OF LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Lifelong learning will become more and more important and the educational career will evolve. The working career will get shorter. Formal education in a block will get shorter and we will start work earlier, but the acceleration in the acquisition of knowledge and longer life expectancy will mean that we will continue to learn throughout our lives.

CHANGING CULTURE OF WORK, FREE TIME EQUALLY IMPORTANT, WORK BECOMING LESS IMPORTANT

The society of tomorrow is searching for a balance between work and free time. This search implies that the right balance has not been found yet, and this doubt is reflected in the conclusions of the Future Group. However, the Future Group recognises, as a definite trend, the fact that people in the 21st century are looking for a new balance between participation in the labour market and investing in other areas. The signs are there already: the level of participation in the labour market is increasing, but people still aspire to a less busy life.

For several members of the Future Group, work is the most important value next to the family. This belief implies that free time is also very important. However, people are happy to work; it gives them security in their lives; in fact they are brainwashed to find work important. Others put a completely different emphasis on it: they see the work ethic increasing rather, meaning that people devote themselves entirely to their work. However, the work ethic need not stand in the way of the leisure culture: people choose quality in culture, work and leisure. These two different standpoints elicit diverse comments. Priorities in spheres of life other than work are different for different groups and at different ages. People have shorter working lives but they are under greater pressure at work, which necessitates new initiatives all the time to reconcile the demands of work and family. Work remains extremely important because of the income people earn from it, the sense of meaning it gives them and the relationships it allows them to have. It is true that the quality of personal time and family time is more important, but this does not detract at all from the position occupied by work: it is the balance between the two that is important. It is certainly true that a new leisure culture is developing; changing the work culture, however, is proving to be more difficult.

Despite these different views and comments, a clear definition of this social trend emerged in the Future Group. People are taking a more conscious approach to work and free time. The view of work is changing, and leisure and caring responsibilities are becoming just as important. The value people put on their free time is going up all the time and they give more deliberate thought to how to spend their leisure time. People like their time off work and young people are less fond of work. Despite this, many people need two incomes and have to work longer in order to be able to pay for everything they want. The norm that sets the balance between work and leisure time is usually the desire to participate in the life of society. In this sense it is possible to speak in terms of an evolution from a work ethic to a participation ethic. Many families still have problems combining work with family life, care responsibilities, social engagement and leisure. Partly as a consequence of lifelong learning and longer working (themselves consequences of the aging of the population and the accelerated growth in knowledge), the need for family support services is increasing – in child care, home care services and domestic work. These are areas which are undergoing creeping commercialisation and marketisation.

CHANGING VIEW OF THE CHILD

The perception of the child is changing and the Future Group identifies three, sometimes contradictory, dimensions: the child is overprotected; the child is standing up for his or her rights and is starting to dominate; and there is a more balanced relationship between child and parent.

As parents deliberately choose to have children and as children become a scarce commodity, parents will have higher expectations of their children. Parents will also transfer those expectations onto those who

are occupied with their children in some professional capacity. They will want these professionals to help them to realise their expectations and projections regarding their children: that the children must succeed and that they must shine at something. This is an expectation that is reinforced by the media, by commerce and by peers.

Parents want to protect their children and bring them up with as few risks as possible. Children have been called “little emperors”. They are no longer allowed to be ordinary, as they are. The high expectations put upon them will lead to stress among these children. Some members think that a very high value is put upon these scarce children already; for many it is already the case that the “child is king.” These members doubt whether much will change in this respect in the future, unless more space were to be created for children.

Set against the tendency to overprotect, the Future Group also found an apparently contradictory trend: children are starting to dominate, they want to stand up for themselves, and they want to give a concrete expression to children’s rights that are today still mainly situated at the symbolic and rhetorical levels. This kind of concrete interpretation of children’s rights can relate to efforts to achieve ecological balance, world peace, or sustainable development by including children in dialogues, etc. “Demands” will be made for space and infrastructure for children, minding facilities for teenagers and youth welfare services. It is certain that children will take a greater part in social debate.

Where will the balance be found between participation and children’s rights on one side and extended adolescence and dependence on the other side? Those involved in a professional capacity with the bringing up and education of children have an important job to do to moderate the high expectations. A realistic balance is also desirable on account of the dualisation in society: on the one hand, middle-class children are growing up like princes surrounded by the greatest care; on the other hand, large numbers of children are living in poverty and miserable circumstances – such as in London where no less than 53 percent of children live below the poverty line.

2. SOCIAL TRENDS CONSIDERED BY THE FUTURE GROUP TO BE UNCERTAIN

MOBILITY

Flanders is heading for the equivalent of a cardiac arrest in mobility. The roads are seizing up and there is chronic congestion. The country is overrun with cars which end up in longer and longer traffic jams. Children are transported all over the place, spending several hours in the car every day. Playing on the street has become a thing of the past.

We say that we need to rethink our mobility but, in practice, we do not manage to become more mobile: there are limits to energy and space, and the demand for good alternatives remains open. Even if mobility were to increase, that would still lead to less time. It is no longer about the number of kilometres we cover, but the time we take to do it. This applies to travelling to work, for leisure activities and for children. How mobile we are will be measured in terms of the net time at our disposal. Children will probably spend an hour on the bus to get to a high-quality out-of-school child-care facility (because their parents only want the best for them?). Due to mobility problems it will be well-nigh impossible to organise collective meetings. Perhaps we will all start to live nearer to each other? It is a fact that there will be greater diversity in transport and, in addition to the Internet, new forms of communication will be tried out. The government will take a directing role by rewarding desirable behaviour and penalising undesirable behaviour, for example: encouraging working from home, taking measures to combat congestion and promoting housing close to places of work.

INDIVIDUALISATION VERSUS SOCIAL COHESION

The Future Group found a paradox between increasing individualisation and tentative initiatives towards greater social cohesion. Both tendencies are present, but at the present time it is difficult to predict how

they will balance each other out. This trend is usually described in the form of a debate between two opposing views. This debate is important because it says something about the pattern of norms and values over ten years.

It is generally felt that voluntary social engagement is decreasing and individualism is on the increase. The sense of solidarity is in decline and fewer and fewer people are active in social clubs and organisations. Many people live in a limited social world, within their own immediate and close family - all other relationships are confined to strictly business contacts. Today, as in the future, many young people feel entitled to all kind of things, as research has shown, and almost everything is considered to be "a job for the government". This individualisation produces discontent, isolation and even degeneration – developments which are further reinforced by the problems of the cities. We urgently need to find an antidote to this. Urban living needs to be ameliorated with suitable projects in the areas of housing, community development, social-cultural development, integration, mobility, safety etc. Both civil society and the government need to launch a kind of Marshall Plan for our cities.

The trend toward individualisation has far-reaching consequences. Parents rely on the extended family less, which loosens the social ties. In the future less care will be provided in the family and more by professionals - an opinion that goes somewhat against the conviction that the role of grandparents will experience a revival. Individualisation of care is reinforced by various forms of client-based funding and demand-led care: a development that is not neutral and which threatens to create new inequalities. The trend towards individualism may be irreversible, but there is still a need for new forms of social cohesion, ways of living together and engagement, and where there is a need, sooner or later it will be met. That can be seen already in local communities, albeit embryonic, being set up around schools. Anyway the tendency toward individualisation is more a matter of subjective ideology than reality. More and more people say that they prefer to mix with people and groups of their own choosing, but it has to be said that this can create a problem at the level of wider society (Durkheim). A trend toward individualisation does certainly exist, due to higher levels of education and less social control as a result of urbanisation, but that trend need not rule out social cohesion: people will put energy into having good relationships with their family and friends and they will be far freer to choose their own friends. It is not clear whether this involves a change in values: on the one hand, "you have to put something in to get something back" but, on the other hand, individuals are taking responsibility themselves without expecting everything from the government.

PRIMACY OF HUMAN WILL

We are faced with virtually endless choice. This is why it is becoming increasingly difficult to respond adequately to problems and setbacks that happen to us: each time we are again faced with various options to choose from and make a decision. We surround ourselves with superficial gloss as we live our lives, and, if something unfortunate happens to someone else, we turn back in on ourselves with the alibi: "It's your own fault." In ten years' time the people of Flanders will take it for granted that they can decide for themselves how to live their own lives, even more so than they do today. People get angry if a pattern is imposed on them. The normative importance of relationships you have chosen yourself, children, friends, work, is increasing. Consequently, the responsibility for all these choices also becomes more important, which can undermine solidarity based on one's lot. Is the primacy of the human will an established social trend? It implies that people make choices but, in many cases, there seem to be fewer and fewer opportunities for free choice. The idea that we are holding things together by force of will is out-of-date: life is more complicated than that. The Future Group regards the primacy of human will as an uncertain social trend.

FLEXIBILISATION - 24-HOUR ECONOMY

The way work is organised is changing radically. Flexibilisation, globalisation, the rise of and need for a 24-hour economy are facts of life. Nevertheless, the Future Group considers that these developments must be put into perspective. Some relativisation is called for. On the other hand, flexibilisation is not all

negative: in a time of continued urbanisation, Flanders is becoming a vibrant city day and night.

The Future Group acknowledges a trend toward further globalisation, parallel with a 24-hour economy that needs a flexible work force. Instead of working 9 to 5, people can work 8 to 4; others will work in the evenings, at night or at the weekend. Different kinds of work coexist side by side: subsidised jobs for the young unemployed, temping, and working from home. All this has its positive and negative sides. Pressure of work and stress are increasing and, as a result, it is becoming even more difficult to balance family, social engagement and leisure time. Work and private life are merging into one another more and more, which causes some to ask whether our society is reverting to forms of work from before the industrial revolution. Is it possible to reconcile quality of life with rising numbers of people in employment, whether this is due to more women or more older people in the work force? The more flexible employment situation will force companies to provide various facilities, including child-care facilities.

Flexibility at work is a fact of life, but we still need to keep this development in perspective. While employment participation is increasing, there is also a trend toward slowing down. Many employees also want time to spend on their families and leisure activities, and they are seeking to find a balance between work and investing in other areas. It has also been found that the majority of employees still continue to work normal working hours, despite all the attention that has been given to flexible working hours. There are also other developments which thwart the dogma of flexibility: lifelong learning is becoming more important and new forms of learning and new types of skills are being evaluated. The increasing flexibility can be seen especially in the organisation of the working career: people start younger, study for a while, and then go back to work. The career path is also shorter: people start to work sooner and study for a shorter time at one go. There is another reason why the flexibilisation in the current labour market must be put into perspective. Until fifty years ago, there always was a great deal of flexible working: farmers worked in the summer and rested in the winter, shops and cafés did not have set closing times and were “always” open. In the future, consumers will demand a more flexible service from shops, public services etc., but although shops may be open on Sundays, tendencies toward the development of a new collective rhythm can be seen. The Future Group concluded that the trend discussed here can actually be broken down into three separate developments: increasing flexibilisation, further globalisation, and the arrival of the 24-hour economy. However, the way we use our time, for instance with night or Sunday working, shows that this is not a uniform trend.

3.2. A vision for the future of child care

1. SOCIAL ROLE

Responsibility for children will always be shared between the family and society. The importance of child care in the exercise of this responsibility is increasingly being recognised. The child-care facility is the third child-rearing environment, alongside the family and school. Child care does not only promote participation in the labour market; it is also a means to create equal opportunities – both for children and their parents. The viewpoint of the children themselves must be brought into the picture, as well as the perspectives of parents and the government. Society cannot get around this: it is a social responsibility to include the children’s perspective in all areas, especially areas that affect children directly.

The Future Group does not see child care as a basic right, in the sense of free or almost free care for everyone for at least five days a week. Rather child care is seen as a ‘basic provision’ or ‘universal service’: every parent must have access to child care within a reasonable distance. It is essential that the pricing structure is adapted to facilitate access for families with lower incomes. There must be enough facilities for babies, pre-school children and school children, as well as inclusive child care for children with a handicap. In order to justify the public funding to society as a whole, child care must in the first place be available to working parents, but others should also be able to use it.

1.1. WORKING PARENTS

Child care as part of the multi-track policy for participation in the labour market

Child care is organised in the first place because people work. There are other measures that also make a contribution to the combining of work and family responsibilities. More flexible working careers allow employees to make choices to suit their own family needs, which may include staying at home for a while. Child care is one aspect of this multi-track policy, in which the government has to strive to facilitate a social and financial balance between the various alternatives.

Different views emerged in the Future Group on the subject of family-friendly work regimes. Can we and do we want to expand these regimes further or improve them, possibly in combination with a longer career that will be made possible by a flexible labour market? What will be the impact on parents who cannot make use of them, such as the self-employed and business managers? Good schemes for career breaks, such as they have in Denmark and Sweden, are most successful during the first year of life. Almost 80% of parents stay at home with their baby during the first year, even though both countries have very high-quality child-care facilities (Starting Strong 2001). Proposals have been drawn up to make "time credit" accessible for families on low incomes, to lengthen parental leave and to encourage fathers to use it. As in the Scandinavian countries, raising the contributions and more flexibility in the use of "time credit" could result in a fall in demand for child care for one-year-olds.

The increasing number of people who work at home is no alternative for child care for young children, unless parents are working unusual hours. For primary school children, more parents working from home could reduce the need for out-of-school child care. The Future Group supports the encouragement of temporary informal care by family members and friends, but there are risks involved in 'cash for care' measures for longer periods (Moss and Deven 2002 p 247). The low pay and long period out of the labour market can have negative long-term effects on the women who provide this kind of care. In any case, decisions in this area have an impact on child care. Put the other way round: the availability of child care will affect the use of alternatives. Financial resources are also finite: we have to choose. We cannot have everything: "time credit" and early retirement.

Flexibilisation of work, child care, and the question of whether child care is good for the child

Surveys of people's values have shown that families in Flanders value two aspects of their lives most highly: family and work. The Future Group assumes that parents put family first and that family time is increasingly important, but that in the present social context they also want to work or to be encouraged to do so.

In the future, child care will have to respond flexibly to new needs created by changes in the way work is organised. Part-time work and flexible working hours have resulted in greater demand for atypical child care, at difficult times and irregular times, and also for walk-in facilities. There is a need to investigate what the barriers to flexibility are, how financial incentives can be used to promote flexibility, and how to plan for occasional and emergency care needs. It is also important that the child care sector develops pedagogic concepts, appropriate to these atypical forms of care. The new forms of child care must be considered in the context of what the child and his family can cope with. Where do children fit into family life and work, and where does child care fit in? Unfortunately, experts in the field have not been able to agree up to now on what the child and his family can cope with and it will be difficult to find a conclusive scientific answer to this question.

The Future Group takes the view that scientific research needs to be carried out into what children can cope with. An American study by Belsky found that toddlers who had been in full-time day care between the age of 0 and 1 showed 17 % more minor social-behavioural problems. Although this study was methodologically sound, it failed to find an explanation for this negative effect of long-term child care in the first year of life, so it is difficult to work out policy measures that could prevent these negative effects. On the one hand, child care should never be used to allow extreme flexibility of labour. On the other hand, there is no point in blaming parents who have no choice but to put their children in child care for long periods, as happens in the media on a regular basis. Parents have to work to earn an income, and then they are blamed for not doing enough for their children. We have to start from the assumption that families want to make a good job of it; so, for instance, parents should be free to choose the location of their child

care – close to home or close to work.

1.2. THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE

From the child's perspective, child care has been designated "the third growing-up environment"; the emphasis is not on what the staff are doing (bringing up), but on what the child is doing (growing up). The child's perspective varies with age, moving steadily along the protection – autonomy continuum. The protection perspective predominates for the young child; from the age of six there is a greater focus on autonomy. For the young children you can still talk about 'child-minding', for the others, this term expresses a rather one-sided adult perspective and is best avoided.

Young children want to be looked after in a secure place, where they are given plenty of opportunities to play and therefore to learn. An opportunity to get to know their own capabilities, other children and the material environment without pressure meets their drive to explore. The child care for these children should be lively but, at the same time, offer sufficient structure, rest and security.

For somewhat older children, the time after school and in the holidays should resolutely be put in the category of free time and leisure. They need a place that offers them opportunities to grow up. A rich and varied environment with plenty of outdoor space to stimulate creative play, and enough other children and supervisors to give them attention, can be the platform from which they develop their own leisure-time activities. Children have to be seen as actors in how they spend their own free time and be given the best possible opportunities. These platforms need to be more firmly integrated in society: they should be linked to other community facilities, such as sports, arts and care facilities, and less segregated by age.

1.3. SUPPORTING PARENTS

The Future Group recognises the need to support parents. Because families have fewer children and family networks are looser, parents get less support in their day-to-day dealings with their children. They have a need to exchange experiences and ideas with people who have more experience and expertise than themselves. All facilities for children, such as schools, child-care initiatives and even youth work, have to deal with parents' questions, often raised very casually. The closer the facilities to the family, the more important role they can play in supporting parents. Child-care and leisure facilities can become a meeting place for parents, where the diversity of other people can open up new options to them and where worries can be shared.

Time and space must be created to contribute to this, including in the job descriptions of the social, educational and paramedic personnel. Subsidised day nurseries should be one way to meet this need, but the services for child-minders should also equip their child-minders to do this. It cannot be taken for granted that independent facilities, which have inadequate support structures and fewer qualified personnel, will be able to fulfil this task. People need to actively work on these networks, if they want to achieve a situation where parents will stay and talk despite the pressure on their time. Any hint of fault-finding will scuttle such an initiative.

1.4. THE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The proportion of families with only one child in Flanders is not increasing, but that of families with two or three children is. All the same many children have fewer contacts than they did in the days of larger families or when children still used to play in the street. Because of this child care has an additional value for children who do not have many other children to play with at home. There they meet other children, including children of different age-groups and backgrounds, and learn social skills. Child care can actively promote this, for instance, by offering games that teach children to play together. Child care will, in the future even more than it does now, have to play the important role of social learning place, where children learn to respect the great diversity in ethnic background, religion, family composition, sexual preference and physical abilities. Diversity in wider society is set to increase further: this should also be reflected in

the “the third growing-up environment”, so that children actively learn to treat others with an attitude of mutual respect. This should result in children who are ‘different’ developing a positive self-image. From the government’s perspective, child care can play a role in counteracting the dualisation of society, by giving children opportunities they do not have at home – such as specific social skills, forms of expression, or the chance to experiment with computers. For parents, child care can function as a place where, together with the carers, they can seek solutions for new child-rearing issues.

2. CHILD-CARE MODELS

2.1. GREATER, MORE DIVERSE SUPPLY WITH ONE ENQUIRY POINT PER LOCAL AUTHORITY

Amount of child care

There is consensus that the need will increase sharply in the short term, despite the falling number of births and despite the downturn in economic growth. As a result of the latter, there will be more people available to provide care at home. Migration is not expected to have much of an effect: most of the migrants are young people who assimilate and will quickly adapt their birth rates to Flemish norms. From the conviction that factors other than births could play a significant role, the Future Group is divided on whether demand for child care will decrease and when.

Demand-led provision

Child care will need to be more responsive to different families’ needs in the future than it is today. The needs of a single parent with flexible working hours may not be the same as those of a family in which both partners combine looking after the children with part-time work. Care of the sick child of a self-employed parent who lives a long way from the grandparents requires a different approach than that required when there is a willing grandpa living locally. Then again disadvantaged groups require provision that is appropriate to their needs and characteristics.

The Future Group anticipates that child care will take on a broader role than its present one of looking after the children of the white middle class. The specific needs of various target groups need to be taken into account: single parents, newly constituted families, ethnic minorities, disadvantaged families, children with a disability etc. Increasing access, inclusivity and coping with this diversity requires knowledge, skills and resources.

For certain target groups, for instance, it is not only physical distance and ability to pay that are problems, there is a cultural gap between them and the prevailing norms and characteristics of the middle class: planning and registering ahead, lack of diversity among the staff, layout of buildings etc. If opportunities were created for these groups, child care could develop into a fully-fledged third circuit for all children to grow up in.

There is a need for greater diversity in forms of child care that are demand-led. The system of subsidies is working against the development of this diversity in child-care facilities. Parents must be offered choice. The Future Group takes the view that priority must be given to those models of child care that contribute to a policy to work against the divided society with its segregation into advantaged and disadvantaged. The Future Group warns against increasing bureaucratic control over child-care facilities; they have to be able to operate dynamically and flexibly, in order to be able to respond efficiently to the new developments. We ought to start an exercise in deregulation of child care and, furthermore, new forms should be supported by a clear educational vision in order to be able to respond appropriately to demands for atypical child care, always bearing in mind what the children can cope with.

Informal child care

Although informal child care provided by grandparents, other family members and friends fell from 52% in 1991 to 32 % in 2001, it will continue to play an important role – even if that is mainly an occasional role

and mainly for school children. Some members even expect the contribution made by grandparents to increase. In fact there will be a few children who, because of the increase in reconstituted families, have many grandparents, some of whom will be more than willing to look after the grandchildren. Women who have a paid occupation seem, moreover, to be less reluctant to look after grandchildren than housewives. A recent study conducted by the Higher Institute of Labour Studies (HIVA) also found that, looking ahead over the next five years, grandparents want to stay involved.

A new form of care

The Future Group argues for parents being able to organise formal child care themselves as well as informal child care. Local informal child care, referred to in the English literature as *friend-family networks* (neighbours who agree among themselves to take turns in looking after the children during the school holidays), could be given support by the authorities. Local child-care organisations, for instance, could give advice on insurance, tips for activities and ideas on traffic-calming measures. Parents should also be given the opportunity to start up formal child care on a small scale. In the fast growing mini-crèche sector, the authorities could create the scope for parents to set up their own small-scale facilities along the lines of the French *crèches parentales* with support from the services for child minding families. This would be an incentive to allow employees or civil servants, who want to take a break from the labour market for a while in order to look after their own or other people's children, to retain their status. Local child-care organisations could support parents who want to start up a child-care initiative. Could this be a new role for the services?

Specific forms of child care

Company crèches are an alternative, but the Future Group has more confidence in the route of cooperation between companies and day nurseries – so that everyone is staying within the realms of their own areas of expertise. Different views also emerged within the Future Group about the potential pressure that the employer can exert on family life.

The Future Group is not in favour of making the provision of care for sick children a basic provision. There are too many disadvantages to this: care outside the home is not to be recommended; care provided in the home is expensive; and it is not good for young children to have to face strangers when they are ill. The best option here is for work to be organised to allow parents to take leave. There has to be a safety net for people who cannot do this, and in those circumstances, care provided in the home is to be preferred. Home care may also have to be considered for people with flexible work.

Centralisation and decentralisation: monitoring quality and focusing on cooperative networks

As far as central government is concerned, child care is a policy instrument that not only has an important impact on employment and family life, but more than ever before is coming to have a broader social significance: supporting parents, creating opportunities and learning to handle diversity. Its responsibility is not confined to the quantitative sphere, or creating enough places. Flanders leads Europe in monitoring the quality of its child care and is one of the few regions that has a central quality system. The Future Group hopes that it will stay so, because this enables the government to set common standards throughout Flanders and in Brussels, and to monitor and stimulate quality.

Local authorities also have a responsibility to facilitate child care provision and to facilitate access. There is a role for them in promoting networks and cooperation.

In more general terms, the Future Group believes in the usefulness of developing and encouraging these cooperative networks: between different providers of child care and activities for children (child care, youth work, schools, sports clubs, holiday organisations etc.) and also beyond that with other organisations such as old people's homes or organisations that provide care to families in their own homes. The use of volunteers should also be encouraged. Parents and retired people could be involved, for instance. The role of the child-care facilities, to provide high-quality child care, will be expanded to include the coordination of supply and the promotion of cooperation.

For school children in particular, better coordination of leisure activities and local programmes is needed, but cooperation would also yield dividends in the day-care sector.

As a natural consequence of the diversified supply of all forms of child care in the broadest sense, there is a need for greater transparency at municipal level which could be achieved by the creation of a single enquiry point, where parents could obtain a complete overview of what is available (what facilities, where they are located, how much they would have to pay.) They could view the waiting lists there, so that they would be clear about how things stand and they would have no need to put their children's names on several waiting lists. They would also be able to express preferences.

2.2. CHILD CARE IN THE FAMILY SETTING: CHILD MINDING FAMILIES AND SERVICES FOR CHILD MINDING FAMILIES

As the Dutch researcher Kremer (2000) argued, child care in Flanders is based on a 'historic monstrous alliance of mothers': in order to be able to work, women used voluntary child minding families and grandparents.

Only in Denmark, Finland and Flanders is the proportion of under-threes being cared for in a family setting greater than the numbers in group settings. Flanders has the highest percentage in family settings: 62% against 45% in Denmark and 54% in Finland. The high figure in Finland can be explained by the fact that Finland is so sparsely populated that child minding in private homes is the only option. In Denmark and Finland child minding families have employee status with their own regulations and they have to undergo training. Many Finnish child minding families work together in two's or three's in an apartment or small house. In both Denmark and Finland, therefore, child care provided by child minding families is expensive child care.

It is questionable whether Flanders can maintain this high percentage. The number of private child minding families has been falling for some time: from 1,643 in 1999 to 1,433 in 2002, a decrease of 12.78% in three years. This decrease has occurred despite the fact that, since 2001, anyone looking after six or seven children is no longer classed as a private child care parent but as a child minding family. What will be the effect of the new regulations? Could it stem the fall in the number of child minding families affiliated to the child-minding services? Their numbers dropped from 7,892 in 2000, through 7,656 in 2001, to 7,348 in 2002: a decrease of 544 child minding families or 6.89% in two years.

It is certain that the government will have some choices to make in the near future. Child minding families constitute a very high proportion of child care in Flanders and it is expected that this will decrease further without intervention. When young women of today want to work, they aspire to something other than offering child care from home. Young people consider it important to work in a group and to have social contacts at work. It seems realistic to assume that, even with the recently introduced improvement in the form of the regulations, numbers will drop to around the order of magnitude of Denmark (+/-45%).

In Belgium too, child minding families are going to demand employee status with their own regulations, so that this type of child care will become more expensive and availability will decrease – due to sick leave for instance. Depending on the parameters used, the cost is comparable to the cost of day nurseries. If a policy decision is taken to give child minding families employee status, child-care workers and others may decide to become child minding families as well.

Child minding has been successful but it needs to be adapted to changing social trends. The key question is what must be done to keep this popular form of child care affordable, attractive to child minding families and of a high quality, bearing in mind the new social role that child-care facilities need to fulfil in the future (diversity, inclusion, gender, etc.).

The Future Group believes in investing in small day nurseries with parental participation, which combine the advantages of smallness of scale with those of a day nursery, and which make maximum use of the

expertise that child minding families have built up. The policy needs to involve pro-active measures for the professional development of child minding families. If the government gives child minding families a specific status with regulations, an educational qualification will become a requirement and there will have to be transitional measures for current child minding families who have not had training. The new system of recognition of previously developed competences (EVC) offers interesting possibilities here.

As things develop, account must be taken of a number of typical, positive characteristics of child minding. Child minding continues to be successful because it is small scale and because it is like being at home with mother. It is especially suitable for rural areas, where it can be arranged close to the parents' home. Child minding offers greater opportunities for flexibility. There is also a social aspect: less well-educated parents choose child minding relatively more often.

However, child minding families have problems with the new needs: diversity, gender and inclusion. There are fewer male child minders (0.07%) than male workers in day nurseries (0.35%). As the care is provided in the child minder's own home, it is easier for them to turn away people who come from a different background than themselves.

Services for child minding families could play a role in coaching their child minding families, and supporting them as they develop new services. They could play an important role in the future in activating networks.

2.3. SUBSIDISED DAY NURSERIES

The subsidised day nurseries are well-equipped to fulfil the new social tasks. While child minding families devote all of their time to the children and their parents, in the subsidised day nurseries there are opportunities for management jobs because of the larger scale and higher funding. They also have staff with paramedical, social or educational training. This gives them more opportunities to pursue a policy to prioritise diversity (inclusion of children with a handicap, attracting male carers, opening up to disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups). This scope should also be used for networking and for cooperation with other initiatives within and outside the child-care sector. The disadvantages of day nurseries are that they are expensive and less flexible: due to their more rigid organisational structure they are sometimes less able to accurately meet child-care needs outside normal hours.

Nevertheless, large-scale public initiatives cannot be the only form of child care. One cannot argue against the value of the contact provided in the small scale facilities.

2.4. PRIVATE CHILD CARE

The policy plan has opted to promote private child care.

The independent sector can offer customised child care and is flexible in operation, but there are also disadvantages associated with it. Parents do not understand the differences between subsidised child care and private child care: the quality standards for private providers are much lower and the cost to the parents is not based on income.

The Future Group is concerned that further expansion of the private sector should not involve any risk for the weaker members of society, who are less able to use these more expensive facilities, as this could stand in their way of finding a job. That is why the government must ensure that total supply remains sufficient.

Of the Flemish child-care facilities for 0 to 3-year-olds, mini-crèches are growing at the fastest rate. Between 2001 and 2002, the number of places in these mini-crèches rose from 8,697 to 9,585. They combine the benefits of small scale with those of a day nursery, and they have the potential to quickly take advantage of new needs of parents or of industry. Here too, there are problems of sustainability: 305 places were lost in 2001 due to businesses closing down (Child Care Annual Report, 2001). The viability

of private facilities, that get most of their funding from parental contributions, cannot be taken for granted. This is a barrier to the employment of qualified personnel under normal employment regulations. The size and isolation of these mini-crèches aggravate the problems of introducing new educational insights through this type of care.

This small-scale group care has a lot of potential, but the Future Group would prefer to have the same quality system for private providers as for subsidised care. There may be a role for the child-minding services in quality care for mini-crèches.

The Future Group considers it important that the support structure for private child care improves. There is no consensus about what qualifications are required. Supporters base their case on the poor performance of Flanders in meeting the educational recommendations of the European Child Care Network. Other members fear over-regulation and diploma-fetishism, preferring the adapted further training and previously developed competences (EVC) route. The hoped for evolution to high-quality staff will increase the financial pressures even more and it is not clear that this can be achieved without additional government support.

2.5. OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILD CARE

Many actors are involved in out-of-school child care: specific out-of-school child-care initiatives, day nurseries, child minding families, schools, youth organisations, etc.

Out-of school child care, like all the other forms of child care, must stress its distinctive characteristics from the child's perspective: here the child can be himself, relax, and feel good about himself. Educational considerations should not come first. Facilities have to offer activities indirectly that children are free to join in or not as they wish. Some members of the Future group think that out-of-school facilities should also offer activities of a more educational nature (music, drama, painting, sport, culture...). These should be offered in a friendly way and may not be compulsory. There could be a coach in the third circuit to supervise ten or so children in their activities.

If schools start to take on more caring tasks, the boundary between care facility and school will start to blur. A close eye must be kept on the situation to make sure that learning is not shifted onto child care facilities; otherwise they will just become second schools. A good example of this is homework supervision. There needs to be a clear break between school and child care, to be achieved through a different approach and through autonomy. For financial and practical reasons the infrastructure for child care, school and youth club may be the same. In the future, child-care facilities are going to have to cooperate more with other organisations that work with the same target groups. Practically feasible points of contact must be sought between policy plans for child care, education and youth – for example, with respect to opening hours.

3. QUALITY

WHAT IS QUALITY?

As well as guaranteeing physical safety and health, quality must start from the child's perspective: child care must offer a place where children can be themselves and feel good. The child's capacity is a limiting condition: what can the child cope with? Under the influence of thinking on participation, out-of-school child care will also have to take more account of the views of children who are becoming more and more articulate.

HIGHER QUALITY STANDARDS

On the one hand, parents are less and less prepared to accept that a child is as he is; they want to keep a

grip on the situation. On the other hand, children are becoming a scarce commodity. It is for these reasons that parents set high demands when it comes to the quality of the service. They appeal to organisations (including child care) to rectify problems (risk of pushiness on educational aspects). Some members think that parents also set high material standards in terms of infrastructure and food, possibly too high standards.

One of the risks associated with these quality standards is an over-educational approach, that is one-sided emphasis on the position and role of the educator. Another risk is that too many demands will be placed on the child and the child-care facility will be over-subscribed.

Instead of being clients, parents should be partners who participate in the facility. This should increase the parents' confidence and engagement and keep expectations realistic. The Future Group came up with a few ideas on this: defining a basic package can dampen down over-high expectations; parents could play a role in the child care through a child-care consultative body; parents could also be involved in a practical way in its operation. The challenge is to achieve this with parents who are short of time.

QUALITY VIA COMPETENCES

Great demands are going to be placed on child-care workers in the near future. This is already evident in the job profile drawn up by the Social and Economic Council of Flanders and set at the level of nursery school teacher. The high requirements in this job profile, drawn up by the sector, contrast sharply with the training that child-care assistants in Flanders have had. An estimated 75% of those who work with children have no qualifications at all. Some of them (assistants in out-of-school child care) have done a short two-month training course. Child minding families have at best had a few days' training. The certificate in child care, possessed by the other 25%, is at a very low level compared with other European countries, at the level of a seventh year of vocational education. The OECD report "Starting Strong" (2001, p151) mentions the low level of education of child-care assistants in Flanders as a problem.

Some members warned against fetishising diplomas. Demanding high qualifications cannot solve everything: it is not about bringing in workers who have acquired more knowledge. Child care workers in the future should be capable of reflecting on child-rearing practice. This attitude is essential for the workers to continually question their own practice and by doing so to respond to new needs of children and parents. Non-formal education and recognition of competences play an important role in this. The new system of recognition of previously developed competences (EVC) could offer a solution here. This system could help the mass of untrained people working in child care to get onto a non-formal education track that would take account of their experience and existing skills. At the same time this track could lead them to a certificate which would improve the career prospects of this group.

ONE QUALITY STANDARD AND SYSTEM

With the introduction of the quality decree for the subsidised sector, facilities can make their own choices about how to meet the requirements of the decree in concrete terms. Unfortunately, different quality standards were set for the independent and the subsidised facilities. This is confusing for parents and is difficult to defend from the child's perspective. Building on existing strengths, the Future Group would like to keep the centralised quality system. Some members warned against assessment systems that are too bureaucratic.

4. FUNDING

The Future Group judges present resources to be insufficient. The child-care sector will need a significant financial input in the next few years, not only to finance expected growth, but also to make the sector sustainable. In any case a great deal of money will be needed to protect the number of places that are currently filled by child minding families: first, to fund employee status for child minding families, and second, to support new initiatives to compensate for the falling number of places with child minding

families. There are also continuity problems in the private child care sector: the management of high-quality, private child care without government support is not something that can be taken for granted.

At the same time there is the challenge of spending the funds efficiently. The Future Group questions the great divide between private and subsidised child care. Ways should be found to get rid of this financial distinction, because it paves the way for dualisation.

The principle of lump-sum funding is supported by everyone. The Future Group argues for taking account of the nature of the child care provision within this system. Needs-based incentives should promote facilities that cater for individual needs and respond creatively to new developments and trends. Parameters should be chosen that promote diversity in the facilities. For instance, incentives could be given to facilities that organise day care as well as out-of-school care, that care for sick children, or that offer flexible child care.

Funding must be through the solidarity of all tax payers: employees, self-employed and pensioners. Funding of child care through the social security system or through wage costs was rejected, because this system would not share the burden of child-care costs proportionately over all groups.

The Future Group argues that it is not necessary to make child care free. Parents will continue to pay a share of the cost, but this payment must be dependent on income, taking account of the family's ability to pay and thereby safeguarding access.

In view of the amount of financial input that will be needed in the near future, some members of the Future Group also pushed for investment from individual companies. This is in keeping with the general social trend toward marketisation of care services. Other members feared that this would give employers too much say.

The Future Group did not express an opinion on the share contributed by the different payers. Nevertheless, the Group is very well aware that this is a crucial issue.