

English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2020:23

Continuing education for pre-school teachers and management training for kindergarten directors 2020

Continuing education for pre-school teachers and management training for kindergarten directors 2020

This report presents the results from a survey among pre-school teachers who have participated in continuing education, and kindergarten directors who have attended management training courses during the 2019/2020 academic year. This year, the survey has been undertaken for the fourth time. The main picture presented by this year's survey is the same as in the preceding years: most of those who undertake continuing education and management training are satisfied or very satisfied with the study programme.

In the report, we investigate the pre-school teachers' and directors' experiences and appraisals of the study programme. We focus on the participants' experience of the study programme, their perceived learning outcomes and the ways in which the kindergartens have facilitated participation and knowledge sharing. The main source of data is a quantitative survey that was sent to all pre-school teachers and directors who were offered the opportunity to undertake continuing education under the auspices of the Kompetanse for fremtidens barnehage (Competence for the kindergarten of the future) strategy in the 2019/2020 academic year. In addition, we have also conducted qualitative interviews with owners, training course providers and participants.

This year's survey was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic, when all educational institutions and kindergartens were closed. We therefore added some questions about whether this had affected the study programme and its implementation. It seems that the coronavirus pandemic has had little impact on the participants' assessments of the study programme. Some participants report that the teaching has been curtailed, but the majority are satisfied with the teaching that was provided. It seems that the online teaching sessions have functioned well, including for institutions that primarily base their training courses on physical attendance. This was confirmed by the qualitative interviews with participants, who affirmed that the educational institutions had succeeded in making provisions for the study programme to be completed satisfactorily in spite of the coronavirus pandemic.

The survey respondents, pre-school teachers and directors alike, assess the study programme as good, relevant and interesting; this applies across all specialisations and institutions. Most of the respondents felt that there was an appropriate mix of theory, reflection and methodology. As in previous surveys, we find that among both the pre-school teachers and directors there are some who

would have liked the work to be more specifically related to their own kindergarten. This may represent a potential for improvement in the academic institutions concerned. On the other hand, the qualitative interviews with the training providers in this year's study show an awareness of this issue, and that they seek to strike a balance between theory and practice.

In previous studies, some participants have also experienced a lack of guidance/feedback on their assignments; this year, the degree of satisfaction is a little higher in this respect. It could be that the academic institutions have paid more attention to this, or it could be that because of the coronavirus pandemic more written feedback was provided this year compared to earlier.

The survey shows that most pre-school teachers claim to share the knowledge they have gained with their co-workers in the kindergarten. The participants report that their colleagues are interested in what they have learned and that the management encourages knowledge sharing. On the other hand, however, they feel that few provisions are made to enable such knowledge sharing to take place. Most likely, this is related to a hectic work schedule in the kindergartens, making it hard to find both the time and arenas for knowledge sharing.

As in previous studies, the educational grant is held up as important, both for the individual participants who have their expenses covered and for the kindergarten that can call in replacements to cover absence. However, it appears that reimbursement of expenses has been sufficient for most participants, but with some shortfall for those who have needed to travel long distances to the educational institution. This issue was raised by the participants in both 2018 and 2019. In this year's study, the participants report a somewhat higher degree of satisfaction with the facilitation when compared to the two preceding years. This may be due to the fact that the educational grant was increased from NOK 50 000 to NOK 70 000, but could also come as a result of more experience on the part of the kindergartens with regard to use of this funding. As regards organisational facilitation in the workplace, the survey shows that provisions are made for most participants to undertake continuing education, and only a minority reports that their participation entails negative consequences for their colleagues.

The vast majority of those who start a continuing education course for pre-school teachers or management training for directors complete their study programme. Relatively few report to have quit their studies before completing. The reasons for drop-out are complex, but many report difficulties in finding enough time to study, and that it is difficult to combine work and studies. The educational institutions that we have interviewed underscore that the study programme is rigorous and hard to complete while working full time. On the other hand, the institutions refer to the participants in continuing education as an especially motivated group of students. These are students with relevant work experience who are seeking more knowledge in order to do a better job. This means that their

level of motivation is high, but it also means that they demand a great deal from the teaching.

In general, we find that the vast majority, pre-school teachers and directors alike, have a positive view of the study programme. The learning outcome is high, the syllabus is 'suitably' demanding, and the lectures and teaching sessions are appraised as good. We also find that the transition to online teaching during the coronavirus pandemic has functioned well. Those who followed the training course mainly online to begin with obviously did not notice this transition. However, those who mainly attended a session-based study programme to begin with also gave a positive appraisal of the online teaching. This may indicate that the educational institutions have a potential for expanding the opportunity to study online. The advantage of online study is its flexibility and hence adaptability to the participants' lives and work situation. This could be beneficial for students who live far from an educational institution and for those who have significant care responsibilities. It should be added, however, that both participants and course providers consider physical attendance of sessions to be a valuable learning method.

The directors who have participated in management training believe that the training will help them better manage their kindergarten. In this year's study we have also asked two municipal and one private kindergarten owner how they assess the benefits of the management training provided to kindergarten directors. The municipal kindergarten owners emphasise the effect of training in strengthening the directors in their leadership role, and that this is of importance when facing re-organisations or innovations in the kindergarten sector. The private owner also takes a very positive view of the management training and of the public funding of this programme. All three agree that the training course helps build kindergarten-specific management competencies and that it is not a type of management training that leads the directors away from the kindergarten sector.

We have been concerned with finding any differences in experiences and appraisal of continuing education and management training in terms of the size and ownership forms of the kindergartens. In the three studies that we have conducted, we have found that such differences have little impact on the use and assessment of continuing education and management training. We found that large kindergartens appear to have somewhat greater flexibility than small ones when it comes to covering for absence, and they are thus less vulnerable when staff take continuing education (Jensen et al. 2019). As regards the educational grant we find no differences; municipal and private kindergartens participate to approximately the same extent, and a majority of the participants report that the educational grant has been adequate. Nor do we find any differences in the assessments of the quality of the study programme in the continuing education or management training courses. In the three studies that we have conducted, the

participants generally assess the quality of the programmes as good. When most of the participants are generally satisfied, and there is little variation in the responses, background variables such as educational institution attended, kindergarten size or private/municipal form of ownership are of little importance.