



# Family Learning Works

The Inquiry into Family Learning  
in England and Wales

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# CONTENTS



<b>Foreword</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> What is family learning?	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b> Family learning in England and Wales	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b> The impact of family learning	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b> Key messages	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>32</b>
Appendix 1 Family Learning Programmes	
Appendix 2 Key funding streams	
Appendix 3 Locations for family learning	
Appendix 4 What are the characteristics of the most effectively designed family learning programmes?	
Appendix 5 Resources to support quality	
Appendix 6 Creative practice	
Appendix 7 Participation in family learning in England	



# FOREWORD



It has been a pleasure and a steep learning curve to have been able to chair the Inquiry into Family Learning for NIACE. After many years of involvement with children and families, many suffering severe deprivation, and a deep commitment to the role of learning in and for families, I have spent the last 18 months hearing evidence and testimony about the real difference it can make.

We are a nation in a crisis as far as skills and the attitudes to our citizens' learning are concerned. The recent results of the OECD's survey of adult skills show that in England and Northern Ireland, parents' educational attainment has a stronger-than-average impact on adults' proficiency in both literacy and numeracy. Furthermore, adults whose parents have low levels of education are eight times more likely to have poor proficiency in literacy than adults whose parents had higher levels of education.<sup>1</sup> Surely it is a moral outrage that a nation such as ours should be in this position? The commissioners on this inquiry suggest very strongly that it is only by addressing the issues within families, working with them to develop positive attitudes to learning, that we can ever hope to make that step change difference that is needed.

Learning as a family has multiple benefits, of that I have no doubt. Family learning raises children's attainment and schools have a major role to play here – all great schools involve parents. Evidence has shown that family learning could increase the overall level of children's development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups.

As an intervention that is aimed at parents and carers as much as at children – in fact the whole point is that it is intergenerational – we believe we have firm evidence to show that family learning is an effective element of any adult learning and skills strategy. We have seen first hand how disadvantaged adults can be brought back to learning through their families, improving their confidence to take up learning and employment through improved health and well-being and increased engagement with society and their community.

Furthermore, we know that family learning reduces the cost of supporting vulnerable families. It embeds changes in attitudes, behaviour, understanding and skills in the family. Evidence from the USA shows that for every \$1 spent on family learning there is a \$12<sup>ii</sup> return – it is unfortunate that there is no similar evidence in the UK.

Family learning, for the commissioners on this inquiry, is a single intervention, delivered in a range of ways and in a range of settings, which has multiple outcomes for adults and children, for families and communities. It could, in one generation, change the lives of a whole generation. We would be foolish to miss such an opportunity.

Can I finish by saying a very big thank you to the commissioners who have supported me through this, to the staff at NIACE and to the many hundreds of learners, practitioners and policy-makers who gave their time to us.

*Valerie Howarth*

Baroness Howarth of Breckland, OBE

i OECD (2013) Survey of Adult Skills, First Results, England and Northern Ireland.

ii J. J. Heckman *et al.* (2010) 'The rate of return to the HighScope Perry Preschool Program', *Journal of Public Economics*, Elsevier.



# INTRODUCTION



*I was in a complete mess ... I didn't want to leave the house. I didn't know how to deal with my money or anything. I was really struggling. My confidence had hit rock bottom ... Family learning made me feel human again. It gave me hope for the future. I was a single parent. I realised I did have options and I wasn't alone anymore. I did have support. My kids see me learning now. We all sit down and do our homework together and they understand how important it is to listen at school. It's such a good feeling as a parent to be involved in your children's education.*

Zoe (learner)

## What is family learning?

'Family learning' refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family.

Family learning programmes vary in length and make up but generally include adult-only time, where parents and carers will work on their skills needs – which could include literacy and numeracy and which are often in a context as varied as family history or wildlife; children-only time, a chance for teachers to work with children on particular aspects of their development; and also time for adults and children to work together, learning together, modelling behaviour and learning how best to support child development.

Family learning matters. It matters because parental engagement in family learning has a large and positive impact on children's learning, giving children greater confidence and self-belief, with measurable benefits to their literacy, language and numeracy skills. It matters because for parents – especially those parents who are considered 'hardest to reach' – the wish to better support their children is often the key

motive in overcoming any practical, financial or dispositional barriers to learning. Just as importantly, family learning matters because it is a source of stimulation, joy and solidarity for adults and children alike. It is something we should celebrate and support. NIACE believes it should be part of the day-to-day life of every family.

Families are the bedrock of our society. The family provides both a safety net and a springboard from which to make a place in the world. Parents are the primary teachers, mentors and guides for children and young people. Research shows that children stand a much better chance of succeeding in life if their parents are engaged in learning. Yet the lives and life chances of far too many are frustrated by the circumstances of their birth and restricted by their parents' own poor educational attainment. There is no greater problem facing our society today. Millions of children are being held back, not only by material poverty but also by poverty of ambition and poverty of opportunity. This report challenges the perception that we can do nothing to change this. Family learning can close the attainment gap and help end the 'life-chance lottery' by creating a culture of aspiration in every family.

Family learning works. It not only secures better outcomes for children and their parents, but also has measurable positive

impacts on a wide range of economic and social policy agendas. In England, eight times more money is spent on reacting to the 'problems of troubled families' than on delivering 'targeted interventions to turn around their lives'.<sup>1</sup> This makes no sense, particularly in times of fiscal constraint. That is why NIACE is asking government and other stakeholders to think positively about families and, through learning, help to make them stronger, more resilient and more socially mobile – in short, to give every child a chance to succeed.

impacts on health and well-being, employability and community engagement. One local authority estimates that for every £1 spent on family learning there is a return on investment of £7.58.<sup>5</sup>

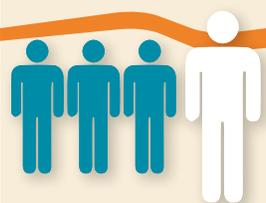
**£9 billion**



### Troubled families

The overall cost of troubled families to the Westminster government is estimated to be around £9 billion per year. Of this, £1 billion is targeted and £8 billion reactive spend.<sup>2</sup> The available evidence suggests that the overall costs could be reduced significantly with a greater focus on targeted, preventative measures.

There are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK today. That's 27 per cent of children, or more than one in four.<sup>6</sup>



However, it is not just about the economic impact. Family learning improves social mobility. It enables families to feel part of their community; it develops confidence and self-esteem; it gives people the skills they need to manage their lives better and find and get on at work; and it enables them to see a way out of poverty.

### The case for investment

A US study of a pre-school programme which included 1.5 hours per week of 'parental training' found that for every dollar spent when the participants were young, society had saved \$12.90 by the time they were 40.<sup>3</sup>

Investment in family learning programmes makes sense. Family learning saves the country money. It represents a cost-effective and sustainable approach; a single intervention with multiple outcomes: helping adults to improve their basic skills; supporting children in improving their skills, thereby breaking what Ofsted terms the 'long tail of underachievement';<sup>4</sup> and having demonstrable

### The attainment gap

Only 36.8 per cent of pupils from poorer backgrounds achieve an A\*-C grade in English and maths GCSE, compared with 63 per cent for all other pupils: a 26.2 percentage point gap.<sup>7</sup>



We cannot afford to tolerate a situation where as many as five million adults in England have difficulties with everyday English, while eight million have difficulties with everyday maths.<sup>8</sup> Levels of functional illiteracy are higher still in Wales.<sup>9</sup> Across the UK, tens of thousands of young people leave school with no or very few qualifications and, in many cases, poor employability skills. Young adults in England score among the lowest results

1 Department for Communities, Learning and Local Government (2013) *The Fiscal Case for Working with Troubled Families*, [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/79377/20130208\\_The\\_Fiscal\\_Case\\_for\\_Working\\_with\\_Troubled\\_Families.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/79377/20130208_The_Fiscal_Case_for_Working_with_Troubled_Families.pdf)  
 2 *ibid.*  
 3 Schweinhart, L. J., *et al.* (2005) 'Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool study through age 40', monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 14., Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.  
 4 Ofsted (2013) *Unseen children: access and achievement 20 years on*, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-access-and-achievement-20-years](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/unseen-children-access-and-achievement-20-years)  
 5 Sheffield City Council Adult and Family Learning; calculations towards an SROI analysis.  
 6 Save the Children (2012) *Child poverty in 2012: It shouldn't happen here*, [www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/child\\_poverty\\_2012.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/child_poverty_2012.pdf)  
 7 Department for Education; Data, Research and Statistics: figures for 2011–12.  
 8 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *Skills for Life Survey*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey)

in international literacy and numeracy tests when compared with the same age group in other countries in the industrialised world.<sup>10</sup> If we are serious about addressing these issues, we must ensure that the combined impacts of family learning are not lost in the spaces between policy silos.

## The impact of family learning

Research shows that family learning could increase the overall level of children's development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups<sup>11</sup> and provide an average reading improvement equivalent to six months of reading age.<sup>12</sup>

We know the impact that poor basic skills can have on a range of personal, social and economic outcomes. We know that children who start school at a disadvantage will, by and large, not only remain at a disadvantage but actually fall further and further behind. Recent research shows that by the age of seven the future gap in GCSE results between rich and poor children has already been established.<sup>13</sup> Schools can only make so much difference. For those with the poorest skills and fewest life chances, the whole family has to be engaged in developing a range of skills and resources critical in overcoming disadvantage.

Disadvantaged adults can be brought back to learning, and encouraged to develop, through their families. Family learning provides a low-pressure, safe and enjoyable step back into formal adult learning – one that appeals to parents' strong desire to support their children. It strengthens communication and maths skills, develops confidence to learn and can be a stepping stone to further education and training. It has an impact on employability and engagement in society and can be applied in different settings, adapted to the specific needs of individuals and local contexts. Family learning should not only be an element of adult learning and skills strategies, but should also be embedded across a range of policy areas, supported

by those budgets to which it makes a contribution in terms of savings, for example health and community participation. It should be included in the policies and strategies of government departments to achieve cross-departmental outcomes.

## Why an inquiry into family learning?

The Inquiry into Family Learning was launched in October 2012 to gather new evidence of the impact of family learning, to develop new thinking and to influence public policy.

NIACE's decision to sponsor the inquiry was made in response to a reduction in provision in England – the latest figures show a 10.4 per cent decrease in participation in family English, maths and language courses and a 3.4 per cent drop in participation in wider family learning provision<sup>14</sup> – and in the context of growing concerns about the lack of strategic join-up at government level. Following the restructure of national support agencies and cuts in local authority budgets, there are serious concerns about reductions in training and expertise and the impact on quality of provision.

In Wales, nearly one child in three lives in poverty and levels of adult literacy are lower than those in England. The Welsh Government's approach to policy on family services is rooted in its mission to tackle child poverty. It recognises that the best way to support children is to work with the whole family and emphasises preventative and early intervention, encouraging an overarching 'team around the family' approach. However, while there are some instances of high levels of co-operation, overall the picture is very mixed. There is a clear need to marshal evidence of impact in order to promote family learning as a cost-effective intervention, the increased use of which could address Welsh Government policy intentions.

9 Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) *How Fair is Wales?* [www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded\\_files/Wales/how\\_fair\\_is\\_wales.pdf](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Wales/how_fair_is_wales.pdf)

10 OECD (2013) *Skilled for Life? Key findings from the Survey of Adult Skills*.

11 Sheffield City Council, analysis of foundation stage pupil data, 2011–2012.

12 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf).

13 Save the Children (2013) *Too young to fail: Giving all children a fair start in life*.

14 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; Data Service statistical first release, January 2013.

Against this background, the Inquiry into Family Learning sought to both stimulate new and more positive thinking about families and learning, and show how family learning can prevent people ‘disappearing’ in the gaps left by shrinking budgets. We hear daily about what a ‘good parent’ looks like, about ‘troubled families’, that parents are responsible for poor diet, poor behaviour, lack of social mobility and so on, but far too little is said about how we might better support those families who are struggling with poverty, poor housing and a lack of skills to do better by their children.

It is obvious to anyone who has ever worked with struggling families that most want the best for their child and want their child to do better than they did – they just may not know how to achieve this. Giving such families the support they need can make a huge difference, addressing the range of societal factors that tend to cluster around adults with poor skills; for example, poorer housing and health and more engagement in crime.<sup>15</sup> We know that adults with poor literacy tend to have children with poorer literacy.<sup>16</sup> Learning can have a transformational effect on these families. The Inquiry set out to explore how family learning interventions could support the most vulnerable and at-risk families, giving them the resources they need to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

A survey of parents of babies at seven months and under has found that **64 per cent of parents never share books with their babies.** The research, carried out by ICM on behalf of Booktrust, suggests that more than half of families (57 per cent) do not own a single baby book.<sup>17</sup>

A survey in Wales showed that **just under half of parents of children aged 3 to 7 in the lowest socio-economic groups looked at books with their**

**children on a daily basis** whereas the number of parents sharing books with their for those in the wealthiest economic groups was a third higher.<sup>18</sup>

*Our experience proves that family learning engages parents and carers who are living in the most difficult and chaotic circumstances. The approach works because it builds on the positive while finding learning experiences for the adult learner at their starting point. Family learning provides ‘successes’ often for the first time for many learners. These successes build the self-esteem and self-confidence that participants need to recognise themselves as learners and to develop their skills further. Without these skills they would not be seen as employable. We have seen how learners’ progress impacts on the whole family, partners as well as children, and indeed can impact on the community.*

Family learning manager

## What the Inquiry did

To steer the Inquiry, a group of 11 commissioners was appointed, chaired by Baroness Valerie Howarth. Over the course of a year, the Inquiry gathered evidence, capturing the voices of teachers and learners involved in family learning in England and Wales, through calls for evidence (on creative practice and impact against a range of policy agendas), expert seminars, focus groups and site visits. A review of national and international research on the impact of family learning was commissioned and a research reference group was formed to consider the evidence. A series of filmed interviews gathered personal testimonies about family learning from learners, teachers and managers. Their voices can

15 Bynner, J. and Parsons, S. (2006). *New Light on Literacy and Numeracy*. London: NRDC.

16 The National Literacy Trust Research Review (2011) *Literacy: a route to addressing child poverty?* [www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/1032/Literacy\\_\\_Child\\_Poverty\\_2011.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/1032/Literacy__Child_Poverty_2011.pdf)

17 Booktrust, Bookstart research summaries [www.niace.org.uk/documents/Booktrust\\_evaluation.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/documents/Booktrust_evaluation.pdf)

18 Welsh Government (2013) National Survey for Wales results 2012-13: Parental engagement <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills>

be found at different points throughout this report and at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnmtXgNOgoM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EnmtXgNOgoM). An overview of what the inquiry found is in Chapter 3.

## What the commissioners want to see

This report does not call for a substantial additional investment in family learning, welcome though that would be. Our recommendations focus on low- or no-cost interventions which build on existing work and aim to ensure family learning is planned and co-ordinated to the best advantage of families and communities. We want to see family learning built into the core offer of early years provision and seen as an effective use of school funding, to ensure that the parents and carers of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are offered high-quality family learning opportunities.

## Involvement

Studies show that parental involvement in school is more than four times as important as socio-economic class in influencing the academic performance of young people aged 16.<sup>19</sup>



In addition, we want to see family learning integrated into strategies to engage those furthest from the labour market and improve employability where, evidence shows, learning can be hugely effective – perhaps more so than any other single intervention. It is far better, we believe, to invest public money in low-cost family learning programmes than to spend it addressing the consequences of our failure to target interventions.

## Headline recommendations

The commissioners agreed the following headline recommendations, designed to maximise the impact of family learning on children and their parents or carers, and on a range of other policy agendas (the full recommendations can be found in Chapter 4).

1. Family learning should be integral to school strategies to raise children's attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers.
2. Family learning should be a key element of adult learning and skills strategies to engage those furthest from the labour market and improve employability, especially through family English/ language and maths provision.
3. Every child should have the right to be part of a learning family. Many children grow up in families that can support their learning, but some do not. Public bodies should target support to help these families.
4. Key government departments should include family learning in their policies and strategies in order to achieve cross-departmental outcomes.
5. The governments of England and Wales should regularly review the funding for and supply of family learning against potential demand.
6. There should be a joint national forum for family learning in England and Wales to support high-quality and innovative practice, and appropriate policy, advocacy, research and development.

<sup>19</sup> Nunn, A. et al. (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility, Research Report No. 450*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

# CHAPTER 1

## What is family learning?



In this chapter we set out what family learning is, what forms it can take and what excellent family learning practice looks like. Learning as a family has, existed for as long as there have been families. The family unit is, by and large, a safe place to develop and practise new skills and encounter new experiences. We understand a family to be any intergenerational relationship based on parental responsibility or kinship, including foster parents, carers and grandparents. Learning in the family can take place in a wide range of situations, including informal family gatherings, watching and commenting on television programmes, at parent and toddler groups, in discussion with health visitors, and through children supporting adults with new technology.

Alongside this type of informal activity there are a range of structured programmes to support learning in the family. Family learning programmes draw on a number of traditions – from adult literacy and community development to school improvement and parental engagement. They could be considered as a bridge between informal home learning and formal school learning. The generations learn from and with each other and, because the learning is linked to home experience, there are opportunities to practise school learning in the real world in the context of the family and community.

*I can remember the first time my son brought home his maths homework. I didn't understand what he was saying because he was going on about number lines and chunking. He didn't understand what I was talking about either, but through going on*

*the family maths course I understand the terminology and how they're doing it at school. I can help him more.*

Linda

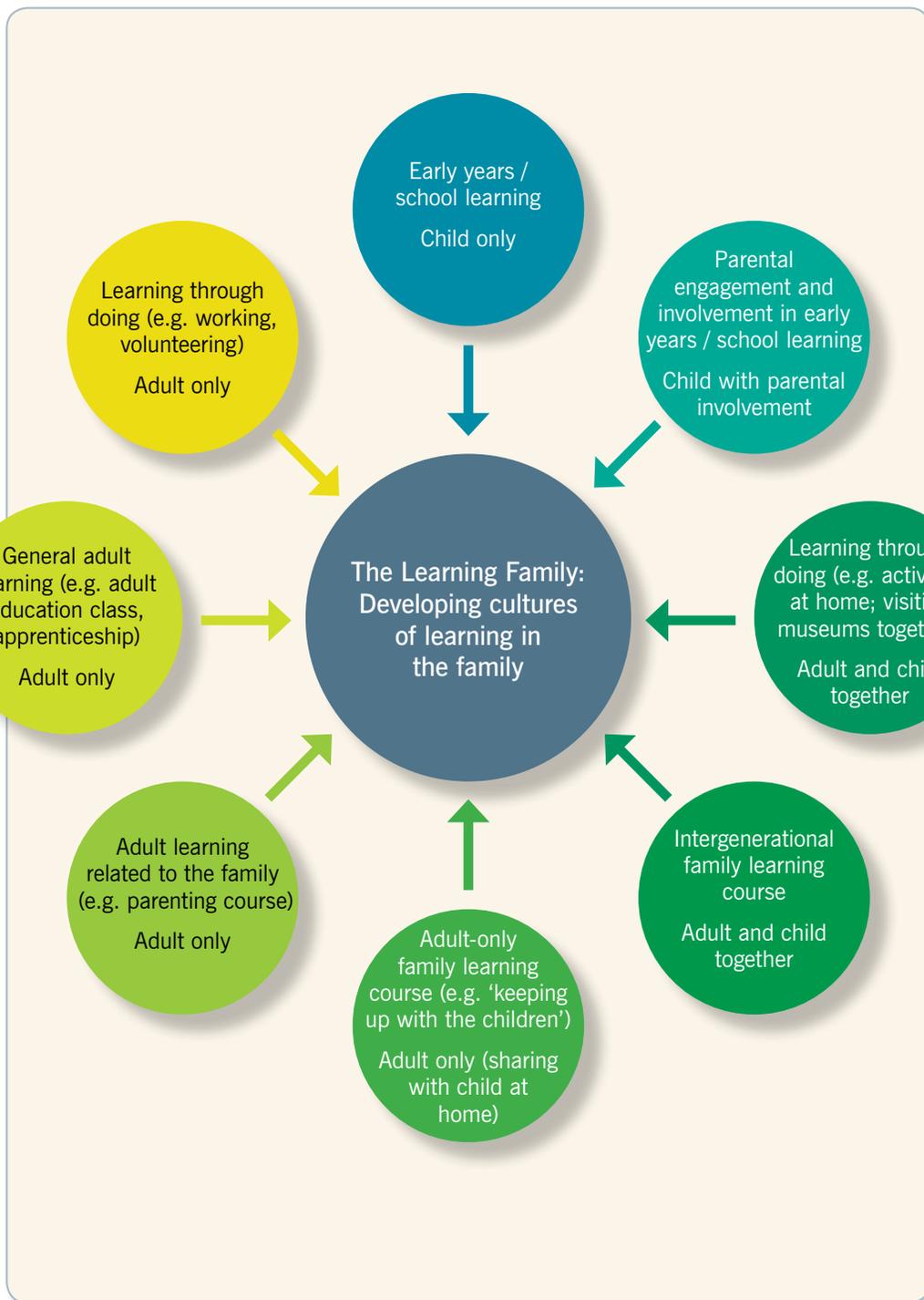
The variety of family learning activity is diverse and ranges from informal engagement activities to formal, accredited learning opportunities. It can include family English/language and maths programmes, the national Bookstart programme, Forest Schools groups, family learning in libraries and museums, family science days and parenting courses. A range of possible programmes can be found in Appendix 1.

All family learning programmes share an approach to learning which values the family as a learning environment, builds on home culture and experience, supports the growth of family relationships and promotes a culture of aspiration in adults and young children. Wherever and however family learning happens, it is learning that has at its heart the welfare and advancement of the child, set in a context of learning for the whole family.

*My kids can have a better start in life from me knowing more about how to help them.*

Learner

The commission adopted a model (opposite) to highlight the different facets and layers of learning as a family, and to reflect the focus of the Inquiry. It describes the different kinds of activity that family learning can entail and that contribute to the development of a culture of learning within the family.



Using this model, we know that the range of organisations engaged in supporting families learning together is vast – from libraries to recreation departments, from faith organisations to the BBC, from the culture sector to country parks.

## What does excellent family learning look like?

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NIACE suggests that the hallmarks of excellent family learning provision can be outlined in five principles:

- 1. Family learning is about engaging families in learning together.** Family learning programmes are about working with the adult and the child. Their primary purpose concerns learning. Every member of a family is a potential lifelong learner in their own right; every member of a family needs access to learning, through a range of pathways and access points.
- 2. Family learning is about empowering families to take control.** It is about listening to families, starting from where they are, providing opportunities for learning in contexts and for reflective practice. It requires the active involvement of families in the development and shaping of services and the recognition of their expertise.
- 3. Family learning recognises context and culture.** Family learning programme organisers develop and manage a range of interventions depending on context, culture, timing and access issues; and work in partnership with local, national and international organisations and agencies to bring together all aspects that touch families' lives.
- 4. Family learning starts from a positive not a deficit model.** Practitioners strive to understand and build on adults' strengths, knowledge and skills. It is important that

those working in family learning recognise economic, social and cultural power, and do not unwittingly participate in the victimisation of disadvantaged families.

- 5. Family learning is planned, funded and delivered at a strategic level, whether local or national.** Programmes have clear learning outcomes, agreed study arrangements, trained and qualified staff, adequate resources and clear progression opportunities.

An Ofsted survey<sup>20</sup> found that where family learning was most effective it was characterised by outstanding teaching, a planned approach to learner development, provision offered throughout the year and at various venues in the community, and opportunities for intergenerational learning, together with a clear and appropriately defined proportion that was adult focused. We say more about success factors and the components of good family learning in Appendices 4 and 5.

## Our vision of family learning in the twenty-first century

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Parents and carers have the greatest influence over the well-being and educational attainment of their children, but some families, some of the time, need support to maximise the life chances of their children. High-quality family learning is a cost-effective way of targeting those most in need of support, boosting family aspiration and attainment and creating a culture of learning and self-efficacy which can be instrumental in tackling low attainment, mental and physical illness, crime and violence, while supporting government ambitions for children, schools, poverty reduction, health, culture and citizenship.

*I was pregnant at school. I had my kids young. I want to show them they can go on and do something with their life. My parents brought me up and they were on benefits. I want to show my kids you don't get what you want if you're on benefits.*

Lisa

Our vision of families as places of learning is underpinned by the concept of the learning family, developed by NIACE, which identifies the factors that contribute to a learning culture within a family:

In the learning family, every member is a lifelong learner in their own right. However, it is much more than a collection of individuals on learning programmes: the intergenerational combination of encouragement and involvement in each other's learning activities by all family members raises aspirations and creates long-term change in the culture and patterns of learning.<sup>21</sup>

The learning family 'supports parents, grandparents and wider family members to be active participants in their children's learning as well as learners in their own right', and recognises that 'both elements are crucial in building resilience in families, in creating community well-being, economic prosperity and social cohesion'.<sup>22</sup>

## Research

Ofsted research has found that adults engaged in learning became more involved in school life and improved their parenting skills, helping them to communicate with their children and better manage their behaviour.<sup>23</sup>



*Our Troubled Families Unit is very keen to refer families onto courses, because one of their primary outcomes for the coming year for their families is increasing employability and getting the adults back to work. As the vast majority of the families have significant literacy needs, across the generations, without education and training this is going to be impossible to achieve. As we know, family learning engages adults who would never access mainstream provision; it offers a safe and unthreatening learning environment to people whose previous experience of learning has been very painful. Whereas some of the troubled families will have a way to go before they're in a place where they can engage with learning, for others this will be the intervention that coheres other support and action into something that can really move them forward as a family.*

Family learning manager

The learning family is a pivotal piece in the wider, interconnected framework of lifelong learning, which we believe to be essential in creating bottom-up social and economic change. Family learning engages those furthest from learning and from the labour market, gives them the means of supporting their children in achieving and attaining more, and offers progression routes into further education and training and into employment.

We believe that family learning has a critical part to play in achieving government policy in a range of areas. However, to be effective, it must be properly co-ordinated, take account of local context and the problems that affect families and, critically, be targeted at those who need it most. Politicians have a crucial leadership role. The challenge for national and local government, working in partnership with

21 NIACE (2009) The Learning Family: a NIACE briefing note, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/learning\\_family\\_briefing.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/learning_family_briefing.pdf)

22 *ibid.*

23 Ofsted (2009) An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning)

learning providers, civil society organisations and other key stakeholders, is to ensure co-ordinated support that reaches those families that are experiencing the most significant problems. If we can ensure that parents and children have access to the resources they need to address the issues of their own lives, we will give them the means to transform their futures and the future of wider society.

*The courses have really boosted my confidence and helped me change my direction and career. I've got a job now in childcare.*

Linda

# CHAPTER 2

## Family learning in England and Wales



There was considerable growth in family learning provision – and its recognition in public policy – throughout the 1990s, driven by, among other factors, concern about literacy ‘standards’. The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit developed a model for family learning programmes with three required components – basic skills instruction for parents, early literacy education for young children, and parent/child activities – which was supported by government and gradually became mainstream in the UK. The model was developed to include family numeracy and family language. At the same time, smaller-scale family learning programmes sprang up, with various forms of short-term funding.

### The development of family learning in England

The funding situation changed in 2001 with the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council in England, and the development of two funding strands for family literacy, language and numeracy, and wider family learning. Policy interventions, such as the Family Learning Impact Fund, acknowledged the role of family learning in increasing social inclusion and reducing intergenerational transfer of disadvantage. This was reflected in key policy documents such as *Every Child Matters*<sup>24</sup> and *Every Parent Matters*,<sup>25</sup> as well as in government investment. Between 2008 and 2011 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (before June 2009, DIUS) spent £25 million per year for the delivery of family literacy, language and

numeracy programmes and £12 million per year on wider family learning.

With the publication of *New Challenges, New Chances*,<sup>26</sup> the coalition demonstrated a commitment to financially supporting the most disadvantaged and those least likely to participate in community learning. The piloting of Community Learning Trusts in 2012–13 aimed to ensure that community learning funding meets the local needs of individuals, families and communities, testing different approaches in the planning, delivery and funding of community learning. However, despite this support, family learning has gradually become a less prominent part of public policy discourse.

There has been a corresponding drop in participation in publicly funded family learning programmes. Participation in family learning programmes dropped by 6.7 per cent in 2010–11 – with 10,100 fewer parents and carers accessing these programmes compared with 2009–10. The numbers continue to decline, with a 10.8 per cent decrease in participation in family English, maths and language courses and a 3.8 per cent drop in participation in wider family learning provision.<sup>27</sup> This drop in participation is likely to have been caused not by a fall in demand but by a static budget, resulting in fewer family programmes being offered. Pressure on local authority budgets and the drift in family learning policy appears to be undermining earlier government investment in community outreach and programme development. If the lack of central co-ordination and erosion of learner numbers continues, the slow-growing but essential networks and expertise that underpin family

24 Department for Education and Skills (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for children*.

25 Department for Education and Skills (2007) *Every Parent Matters*.

26 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *New Challenges, New Chances: Further education and skills system reform plan: Building a world class system*.

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/32313/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/32313/11-1380-further-education-skills-system-reform-plan.pdf)

27 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; Data Service statistical first release, June 2013.

learning will be lost. The cost of recreating them will be much greater than the annual cost of sustaining them.

Voices in the sector, including Ofsted, have raised concerns about the lack of a national lead body and of any strategic join-up at government level. Anecdotal reports suggest that programmes are struggling with funding issues and that these are having a direct impact on quality. Clearly, there is a need to better understand these developments and, in particular, who is accessing family learning provision and who is not.

## The development of family learning in Wales

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From the same beginnings in the Basic Skills Agency, family literacy and family numeracy became part of the National Basic Skills Strategy for Wales (2001). Welsh Government-funded programmes have continued since then, with reviews and refinement of the schemes leading to an increasing focus on reaching disadvantaged families and communities and under-attaining children. A core of funding, mostly from an early-years grant programme, is provided to local authorities – who can add to the funding from other sources. In practice, there is considerable variation, with some family learning programmes delivered almost entirely in selected schools and others working in a partnership and linking closely with wider family services.

There has never been a dedicated fund in Wales for wider family learning. However, there is a wide range of family learning opportunities offered by community and third-sector organisations, frequently funded on a project-by-project basis. Larger organisations, such as the bigger museums, are able to build programmes of family learning activity into their educational provision and engagement strategies.

Unsurprisingly, given the Welsh Government's aim of creating a bilingual Wales, there is a significant strand of family

learning linked with the learning of the Welsh language. In addition, the Welsh Government supports Booktrust Cymru to deliver a range of programmes intended to provide books and activities and encourage parents and other carers to share them with children at home.

## Who is accessing provision and who is not?

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Family learning programmes are targeted at disadvantaged families, often areas of low income. In addition, black and minority ethnic parents and carers are well represented [see Appendix 7].

Although publicly funded family learning has succeeded in engaging people from disadvantaged communities where adult participation in education is typically low, there are some troubling trends, which suggest we might do more to widen participation in family learning. It has been the case for some time that family learning is accessed predominantly by women, while the groups that are most under-represented are men and parents, grandparents and carers from either end of the age range. Adults with a disability are also under-represented [see Appendix 7].

It is especially worrying that younger and older parents and carers are under-represented in publicly supported provision. Younger parents, in particular, frequently struggle with social isolation and are often those most in need of support. There is a need for family learning to be more inclusive, attracting more learners with a learning difficulty or disability, as well as more fathers and male carers. The inquiry found that there needs to be improved access to family learning programmes in some rural areas. It is important that we find ways to extend the reach of family learning provision. We know that when funding and programme design is targeted, it has the power to attract these under-represented groups.

The Inquiry's findings confirm how effective family learning can be in engaging

people from disadvantaged backgrounds. This, in a way, is unsurprising – wanting the best for their children is a powerful incentive for families to engage in learning. All parents desire a better life for their children – and this can be a crucial hook for those parents and carers whose own early experiences of education were negative and who, perhaps, retain fears of their own about re-entering the classroom, alongside issues to do with confidence and self-esteem. There are, of course families who have more extreme issues and need intensive support. However, these families too can benefit from the positive experiences involved in family learning. Indeed, learning is essential to help families move forward.

When families learn together, all generations benefit. Parents are more confident and capable; their children aim higher and achieve more. It is troubling, therefore, that in times of economic crisis – with many families struggling to keep their heads above water – we should be seeing a fall in the overall numbers participating in family learning programmes, at least as evidenced in the English data. Research shows that learning as a family builds robust individuals and cohesive communities and enables children to develop skills for life, work and community.<sup>28</sup> These are skills that we will need in abundance as we seek to emerge from the current climate of fiscal constraint.

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28 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*,  
[www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review__final_-_8_june_2012.pdf)

# CHAPTER 3

## The impact of family learning



This section brings together the available evidence of the impact of family learning – on children’s attainment, on the attainment of parents and carers, and on a number of important policy agendas. There is a need for more research here. We highlight the areas where this need is most pressing.

### Research



6 ... research shows that parental involvement in children’s learning is a key factor in improving children’s academic attainment and achievements, as well as their overall behaviour and attendance. The role of parents during a child’s earliest years is the single biggest influence on their development. Good quality home learning contributes more to children’s intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. A parent’s attitudes, aspirations and behaviour are all important, as is their ability to:

- understand their child’s day-to-day progress;
- undertake family learning together;
- talk regularly with their child about their learning.

For some parents, developing this confidence can be difficult ... especially if they also need help with their own literacy, language and numeracy skills.

Department for Education, April 2012

[www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/a00203160/role-of-parents-in-childs-learning](http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/a00203160/role-of-parents-in-childs-learning); accessed March 2013.

### What the Inquiry into Family Learning found

The Inquiry found evidence of the impact of family learning on the skills, capabilities and aspirations of children and their parents and carers; on the ability of parents and carers to assist in their children’s education and development; and on a range of other critical policy agendas, including employability, health and well-being and community involvement.

Research provides particularly compelling evidence that family language and maths programmes benefit children’s skills, as well as those of their parents and carers. There is especially strong quantitative evidence of the impact on children’s attainment.

In addition, evidence shows that family learning has important wider benefits, including an impact on adults’ confidence, self-esteem, motivation to learn, parenting skills and practices, health and well-being, employability, progression to further learning, improved integration and community involvement, involvement in culture and sport, and reducing re-offending. There is less quantitative evidence on the impact of family learning on these broader benefits. Evaluation of wider family learning programmes is often under-resourced and based on the use of interviews and observational data, alongside the personal testimonies of participants. Nevertheless, the consistent reports of the wider benefits of family learning strongly attest to its positive impact and highlight the need for these research gaps to be addressed.

## Impact on children's attainment

My son's learning quicker now because he gets help at home as well as at school.

Allan

The attainment gap between children from different socio-economic groups has been a seemingly intractable issue for many years. There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that early years interventions have the most impact on children's attainment.

The SPOKES (Supporting Parents on Kids' Education in Schools) programme,<sup>29</sup> targeted children just beginning primary school and aimed to address two issues in one intervention: children's reading difficulties and behavioural problems. A research trial found that in one year the intervention group showed an average reading improvement equivalent to six months of reading age, on top of the development expected of children of this age; children also improved their writing skills and behaviour. Parents improved their use of reading strategies with their children. Despite the success of this programme, it does not appear to have been taken up widely.

The impact of parental involvement in a child's education is well evidenced. It can be a key factor in bridging the attainment gap and promoting social mobility. Sénéchal and Young,<sup>30</sup> examining international evidence on family learning, found that programmes in which parents taught reading skills to their children had a significant impact on their children's reading skills, when compared with the reading skills of those children who did not receive this additional parental support.

Research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that the attainment gap which emerges early in children's lives continues throughout

childhood and into adult life.<sup>31</sup> The Foundation's review of evidence for effective interventions found that parental involvement in a child's education has a causal influence on children's school readiness and subsequent attainment. This, it argues, 'suggests that an immediate focus for both policy and practice should be on developing a full cost-effective method of delivery of this type of intervention and ensuring detailed ongoing monitoring'.

In recent years, local authorities have begun to collect and analyse data on the impact of family learning on children's attainment. Looking at pupils deemed to be achieving a good level of overall development at the end of the foundation stage, Sheffield City Council's analysis shows that the difference between those pupils involved in a family learning programme is as much as 15 percentage points higher for some groups compared with those that have not been involved in family learning programmes.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, not all interventions are of equal value. Nobel prize-winning economist James Heckman and colleagues found that those programmes that produce long-term and sustainable benefits are those that focus on non-cognitive development and not just the improvement of cognitive skills.<sup>33</sup> Family learning programmes are particularly well suited to bring about these sustainable changes in non-cognitive traits in both children and parents. A longitudinal study of a Turkish family learning project showed that children who participated in the project had improved educational outcomes up to and including university and also tended to have higher occupational status as adults.<sup>34</sup>

The impact of family learning on children is not limited to attainment. An Ofsted survey of teachers of children participating in family learning courses found that children settled better in class and had improved relationships

29 Sylva, K. et al. (2008) 'Training parents to help their children to read: A randomised control trial', *British Journal of Educational Psychology* 78(3) 433-455, Wiley.

30 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf).

31 Carter-Wall, C. and Whitfield, G. (2012) 'The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap', Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

32 NIACE (2013) A summary of research and evidence of impact of family learning.

33 Heckman, J. J., Moon, S. H., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. A., Yavitz, A. (2009) The Rate of Return to the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, IZA DP No. 4533.

34 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf)

with their peers and their teachers. Teachers felt that these children had become more self-confident and had improved their communication and interpersonal skills.<sup>35</sup>

An evaluation of the Dads in Demand programme of over 400 families found that 95 per cent of dads reported an improved relationship with their child's school. Fifty-four per cent of dads said that they would now speak to teachers, go to school events and get involved in school activities where previously they would not have done.<sup>36</sup>

## Impact on parents'/carers' attainment

*I left school at 17 after having my first child and I thought that was the end of my academic history. After having another two children I enrolled on a course in family learning... I always thought higher education was out of my grasp but these courses showed me that I could do it. I have now gone on to gain a first class honours degree in Childhood Studies at the University of Leeds and I am on the waiting list to start my MA in Social Work.*

Cathy

Evidence attests not only to the impact of family learning on children's attainment but on the attainment of their parents. English Government statistics show that, in 2011–12, of 58,000 adult learners enrolled on family English, maths and numeracy programmes, 50,900 (87.8 per cent) achieved their learning aims, while of 72,800 adult learners on wider family learning programmes, 67,500 (92.7 per cent) achieved their learning aims.<sup>37</sup> An evaluation of family literacy and

numeracy programmes by Brooks *et al.* found statistically significant improvements in literacy skills for parents. A follow-up study two years later found that these skills gains were sustained.<sup>38</sup>

Another study, by Swain *et al.*, found that the average proportion of parents achieving a qualification (looking only at family literacy programmes) was 71 per cent on standard courses.<sup>39</sup>

Progression is one of the main aims of family learning programmes, which often provide a crucial first step back into formal learning. A review of programmes supported by the Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF),<sup>40</sup> which was targeted at families from disadvantaged backgrounds, reported that 85 per cent of a sample of 2,643 learners experienced some sort of progression after participating in a FLIF course. In addition:

- **Sixty-one per cent reported progression in terms of their own learning or employment.** This includes progression to another family learning course, a higher level of learning, any other learning or training, or new or improved employment.
- **Sixty per cent reported progression in their social and personal lives.** This includes increased involvement in voluntary and community activities and improved personal confidence.
- **Fifty-nine per cent reported that they were better able to support their children's learning and development.**

A 2009 evaluation by Ofsted found that in many programmes most adults progressed onto longer courses where Skills for Life was more central, with many going on to further learning and vocational qualifications and others to volunteer in their child's school or local community.<sup>41</sup>

35 Ofsted (2009) *An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community*, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning)

36 NIACE (2013) *A summary of research and evidence of impact of family learning*.

37 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; Data Service statistical first release, January 2013.

38 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf) (p16)

39 *Ibid.*, p.15.

40 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *Family Learning Impact Fund 2008 to 2011: Summary paper*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-learning-impact-fund-2008-to-2011-summary](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-learning-impact-fund-2008-to-2011-summary)

41 NRDC (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, [www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family\\_learning\\_research\\_review\\_final\\_-\\_8\\_june\\_2012.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf) (p16)

## Impact across other policy agendas

The Inquiry found evidence of the impact of family learning on a range of other policy agendas.

Gaining employment and skills for employment is a key benefit and progression outcome for parents who engage in family learning in England, according to an Ofsted study. Parents often progress into paid roles, such as teaching assistants or lunchtime supervisors, frequently starting from very low levels of confidence and qualification. Ofsted reports that family learning made a long-term impact on employment in one disadvantaged area, with 15 per cent of the adults who took part in the programme finding work over a three-year period.<sup>42</sup> This had a positive effect on the employment rate for the area and on household incomes, which rose by eight per cent. This broadly equates to the findings of the recent review of progression routes of participants in the Family Learning Impact Fund, in which 17 per cent of participants had gone on to new or improved employment.<sup>43</sup>

*Going back to learning has completely changed my life for the better, not only because I am working but because I have something to offer now. I also feel I know a lot more about me as a person than I did before. I feel complete.*

Learner

In addition, there is evidence that participation in family learning improves health and well-being. To give one example, an evaluation of Skilled for Health programmes, which included family learning activities, found that 88 per cent of participants reported that they were eating

more healthily by the end of the course, while 65 per cent said they were exercising more often.<sup>44</sup>

*I did a healthy eating course which was good because it told us about the nutrients our kids should be getting – rather than [before] just getting a bag of crisps out of the cupboard.*

Zoe

Family learning also improves family relations, parenting skills and practices. A recent BIS review confirmed evidence that family learning:

- improves parenting attitudes,
- decreases parental stress,
- increases knowledge of child development,
- enhances parenting skills, and
- supports bonding with children.<sup>45</sup>

*It's helped give a good positive atmosphere at home.*

Lisa

Furthermore, the BIS study found evidence of how family learning can boost community involvement, integration and volunteering. The wider benefits it identified included a sense of community, improved social cohesion, greater integration into the community and an enhanced capacity for families to advocate for themselves and their community.

*Since I did the first course I've been a volunteer in school. I've been a school governor. I'm chair of the partnership board in the centre. I'm also a dinner supervisor in school, which I've got from volunteering.*

Zoe

42 Ofsted (2009) An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning)

43 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) *Family Learning Impact Fund 2008 to 2011: Summary paper*, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-learning-impact-fund-2008-to-2011-summary](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-learning-impact-fund-2008-to-2011-summary)

44 [www.tavinstitute.org/projects/evaluation-of-phase-two-skilled-for-health](http://www.tavinstitute.org/projects/evaluation-of-phase-two-skilled-for-health)

45 Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2012) Evidence of the wider benefits of family learning: A scoping review, [www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-of-the-wider-benefits-of-family-learning-a-scoping-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evidence-of-the-wider-benefits-of-family-learning-a-scoping-review)

These findings are supported by other research. In one local authority study of over 1,000 parents who came to family learning programmes, nearly half said they were now more involved in school and community life.<sup>46</sup>

The Inquiry found that family learning programmes provide a catalyst for long-term changes in the aspirations, confidence and life chances of children and adults. However, there are gaps in the research. Conducting robust research is resource intensive and

provision does not usually include sufficient funding to collect and analyse data in a systematic and rigorous way. We believe it is essential that these gaps are addressed. Promising areas for research include longitudinal studies of impact, randomised control trials and measuring return on investment.

# CHAPTER 4

## Key messages



We know that the ‘long tail of underachievement’ starts at birth and must be tackled in the early years, and that educational interventions involving the whole family can make a huge difference not only to the aspirations and attainment of children, but also to the skills, confidence and ambition of their parents or carers. It is, therefore, disappointing that, despite widespread concern about ‘problem’ families and the persistent attainment gap that affects many in our society, so little weight is given to the potential impact of positive, targeted family learning interventions, both in raising aspirations and achievement and in cutting reactive costs to the public purse. If we are serious about addressing these problems, this has to change. Schools cannot do it on their own. Family learning must be placed at the heart of interventions intended to narrow the attainment gap and improve the skills and capabilities of adults and children, particularly those from the least advantaged and ‘hardest-to-reach’ communities.

We have seen that there is strong quantitative evidence of the impact of family learning on children’s attainment. Research shows that family learning could increase the overall level of children’s development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups and provide an average reading improvement equivalent to six months of reading age. Importantly, family learning has long-term benefits, as it affects behaviours and attitudes to learning across the whole family. We believe that it should be incorporated into the core offer of early years provision and that it would be an effective use of school funding, such as the Pupil Premium in England and the Pupil Deprivation Grant in Wales.

Family learning not only improves the skills and aspirations of children, it also has a demonstrable impact on the attainment and aspirations of their parents and carers, with important benefits in terms of confidence, motivation and willingness to learn, as well as a range of other factors crucial to progression to further education and employment. This is important, as recent reports show UK skills levels to be poor in comparison with other developed nations. In addition, there are important social advantages, such as improved integration, social capital and community involvement. These are particularly powerful in more disadvantaged communities and among communities where participation in education is typically low.

At the same time as improving the skills and capabilities of children and adults, research shows that family learning has an impact on a range of policy agendas, such as health, employability, involvement in the community, culture and sport, and reducing re-offending. It is this breadth of impact that makes family learning such value for money. Longitudinal research from outside the UK has found that family learning produces large returns to society: by their mid-20s, children who participated in family learning earned more and were more likely to have attended university. The lesson for policymakers is plain. Family learning should be funded to cut the costs of reactive spending.

The message could not be clearer: family learning supports economic growth and helps build a better society. It has an impact on employability and engagement in society. It develops self-efficacy, inspires children and their parents to aim higher, and gives them the resources they need to change their lives for the better. Its multiple outcomes

mean it can be applied in different settings and can be adapted to meet the needs of individuals and different local contexts. Not only should it be an effective element of any adult learning and skills strategy, it should be embedded in strategies to raise

children's attainment, and integrated into the policies of government departments to ensure cross-departmental outcomes. The recommendations below set out how the commission believes this should be achieved.

## Recommendations for England

01



**Family learning should be integral to school strategies to raise children's attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers. In particular:**

- Schools should utilise funding, such as the Pupil Premium, to ensure that the parents and carers of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are offered high-quality family learning programmes.
- Governing bodies should ensure the environment in schools is welcoming to parents and carers and that schools promote learning in the family.
- The Department for Education should research the impact of family English and maths interventions on the achievement and attainment of children at the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and 2 to influence schools and autonomous providers, e.g. supplementary schools, of the cost-effectiveness of the model.
- Initial teacher training and professional development should include evidence and training on the significance of parental involvement and learning as a family.
- Ofsted should carry out regular thematic survey inspections on family learning delivery across the range of providers, including schools and colleges.

02



**Family learning should be a key element of adult learning and skills strategies to engage those furthest from the labour market and improve employability, especially through family English and maths provision. In particular:**

- Local Enterprise Partnerships should capitalise on the ability of family learning programmes, for example through ESF funding, to reach out to those furthest from the labour market and, with adult providers, ensure its inclusion in partnership plans.
- The Education and Training Foundation should develop capacity and expertise in the family learning workforce.
- Local authorities and other commissioners of family learning should ensure providers work within an appropriate quality assurance framework, which includes trained teachers, accessible and family friendly venues, available childcare, clear progression routes, accreditation opportunities, and the use of mentors or champions for recruitment and support.

- Providers of family learning programmes, including colleges, libraries, museums, and voluntary sector organisations, should ensure staff are appropriately qualified to deliver high quality learning opportunities in accordance with the National Occupational Standards for family learning.

## 03

Every child should have the right to be part of a learning family. Many children grow up in families that can support their learning but some do not. Public bodies should target support to help these families. In particular:



- Local authorities should work with Health and Wellbeing Boards and Community Learning Partnerships to identify ways to target resources on families that would benefit from family learning programmes. This would require a co-ordinated strategic approach.
- Local authorities and commissioners of adult and children's services should ensure that family learning is a central and funded part of the core offer of children's centres and other community provision.
- Local authorities in England should ensure that their Troubled Families programmes include the provision of family English and maths interventions, particularly in light of the additional £200 million spending review commitment to this programme.

## 04

Key government departments should include family learning in their policies and strategies in order to achieve cross-departmental outcomes. In particular:



- The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) should promote family learning as a key element of adult and community skills.
- The Department for Education (DfE) should use its influence and leadership role to promote family learning as an effective tool in raising achievement and reducing the attainment gap.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should actively build family learning into relevant programmes to tackle worklessness and potential worklessness in future generations.
- Building on the findings of this inquiry, BIS, the DfE, the DWP, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Justice should invest in research, development and impact measures to understand better how supporting parents and carers and family English and maths can contribute to their agendas.

## 05

The governments of England and Wales should regularly review the funding for and supply of family learning against potential demand. In particular:



- A baseline assessment should be carried out into current investment in family learning across all government departments. The Skills Funding Agency should assess the incentives and disincentives in its funding systems for providers in delivering family learning.
- The Skills Funding Agency should carry out an impact assessment of its new funding system on the delivery of family learning, particularly ensuring that the dual outputs and outcomes of family learning can be recognised.
- The Skills Funding Agency should 'inflation-proof' the community learning budget and, over a period of time, restore the budget to its original level.
- The Skills Funding Agency should ensure that all local authority areas invest community learning monies in targeted family learning programmes to meet and stimulate demand.

## 06

There should be a joint national forum for family learning in England and Wales to support high quality, innovative practice, appropriate policy and advocacy, research and development. In particular:



The national forum should:

- advocate with government and other bodies for more understanding and investment in family learning;
- be a centre for best practice and a 'go to' point for resources, training and access to new ways for delivering, including through the use of new technologies;
- celebrate and promote the value of family learning;
- ensure there is a focus on outcomes for children, adolescents and adults;
- lead and disseminate research into family learning;
- be a focus for the development of quality standards;
- ensure regular contact with key ministers to ensure family learning's contribution to a range of policy agendas is understood; and
- be an inclusive partnership of civil society organisations, government departments and networks which have an interest and stake in advancing family learning.

# Recommendations for Wales

## 01



Family learning should be integral to school strategies to raise children's attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers. In particular:

- The Department for Education and Welsh Government Department of Education and Skills should research the impact of family language and maths interventions on the achievement and attainment of children at the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and 2 to influence schools and autonomous providers of the cost-effectiveness of the model.
- Initial teacher training and professional development should include evidence and training on the significance of parental involvement and learning as a family.
- Schools should include family learning as an effective intervention to support disadvantaged children and Welsh Government should include explicit references to family learning within guidance for use of the Pupil Deprivation Grant and in Communities First areas the associated match fund.
- Estyn should continue its current work on family learning and child and adult literacy and numeracy and include explicit reporting on family learning within relevant inspections.

## 02



Family learning should be a key element of adult learning and skills strategies to engage those furthest from the labour market and improve employability, especially through family language and maths provision. In particular:

- Welsh Government, Adult Community Learning Partnerships, the emerging Regional Learning Partnerships and others wanting to reach those furthest from the labour market should capitalise on family learning as an effective motivational engagement strategy.
- Welsh Government should work with all providers of family learning programmes including local authorities, colleges, libraries, museums, and voluntary sector organisations to develop the capacity and expertise of the family learning workforce. This should include development opportunities that will ensure that staff are appropriately qualified to deliver high-quality learning opportunities in accordance with the National Occupational Standards for family learning.

03

Every child should have the right to be part of a learning family. Many children grow up in families that can support their learning but some do not. Targeted support should be available for these families. In particular:



- Local authorities should include family learning programmes in Children and Young People's Partnership plans.
- Families First plans should include family learning as part of the team around the family delivery of services and family learning co-ordinators should be involved in the planning process.
- Welsh Government should acknowledge and celebrate and seek to support the value of wider family learning and recognise the provision offered by a range of bodies, particularly in the community, cultural and environmental sectors in Wales.

04

Key government departments in England and Wales should include family learning in their policies and strategies in order to achieve cross-departmental outcomes. In particular:



- The Department for Work and Pensions should actively build family learning into relevant programmes to tackle worklessness.
- The Welsh Government Department for Education and Skills should use its leadership role to promote family learning both as an effective tool in raising school achievement and reducing the attainment gap between the poorest and the richest and as a key element of engaging harder-to-reach adults in learning.
- Welsh Government should invest in collaborative cross-departmental research, development and impact measures to understand better how supporting parents and carers, and family language and maths can contribute to their agendas.
- Welsh Government should support the gathering of information across the breadth of the family learning curriculum and identify a single co-ordinated responsibility for facilitating the achievement of shared and cross-departmental outcomes.

05

The governments of England and Wales should regularly review the funding for and supply of family learning against potential demand. In particular:



- Welsh Government should continue and seek to extend its current targeted family learning programmes.
- Welsh Government should ensure that family learning is considered as an effective tool in the delivery of a wide range of its policy agendas and encourage those delivering services to commission family learning as part of their work.

## 06

There should be a joint national forum for family learning in England and Wales to support high quality, innovative practice, appropriate policy and advocacy, research and development. In particular:



The national forum should:

- advocate with government and other bodies for more understanding and investment in family learning;
- be a centre for best practice and 'go to' point for resources, training and access to new ways for delivering, including through the use of new technologies;
- celebrate and promote the value of family learning;
- ensure there is a focus on outcomes for children, adolescents and adults;
- lead and disseminate research into family learning;
- be a focus for the development of quality standards;
- ensure regular contact with key ministers to ensure family learning's contribution to a range of policy agendas is understood; and
- be an inclusive partnership of civil society organisations, government departments and networks which have an interest and stake in advancing family learning.

# Appendix 1

## Family learning programmes



The beauty of family learning is that it can be delivered flexibly, to meet local situations and needs. The table below is an indicative example of types of courses available.

Area of family learning	Examples of courses/activities
Art, history and culture	Museum exhibitions and related family activities, Family French, Building your family tree, Learning through London
Child development	Stay and play, School readiness, Dad power, Baby chatter matters, Family SEAL (Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning), Introduction to child development
Citizenship	Law and order – Introduction for families, Making your community a safer place, Family ESOL – how to access services
Employment and enterprise	Read and rhyme, Music and story, Stepping up with maths, Letters and sounds together, Talking together, Count me in 1,2,3, Hungry caterpillar, Kitchen fun (maths), Story sacks, Early number matters, Family English for speakers of other languages, Family English and maths, Fun with phonics
Financial capability	Pots of gold, Managing your money, Bargain summer, Making the most of your money, Making sense of money
Health and well-being	Music and movement, Dads and lads football, FITT buggy classes, Family health matters, My family and me, Living safely – living well, Healthy eating, Baby massage, Mr Bump – first aid
ICT	Creative computers, Internet safety, Using iPads, ICT Number Fun, ICT songs and rhymes
Learning for resilience	Jewellery making, Family sewing and craft workshop, DIY, We can build it, Grow it Cook it Eat it, Card making
Parenting	Stay and play, Parenting, Parents with prospects, Family talk
Science and environment	Simple science, Building robots, Where does lightening come from? Let's investigate, Family k'nex

# Appendix 2

## Key funding streams



In England, the main government funding source for family learning is the Skills Funding Agency's Community Learning Budget, which supports family English and maths and wider family learning programmes.

Other sources of funding include:

- Pupil Premium
- DWP/DCLG troubled families programmes
- Family Intervention Project
- Big Lottery
- Charitable trusts
- Small local community funds
- In kind school support for classrooms
- School funding for release of staff to co-tutor activities
- Early years' additional crèche support where required
- Learning Champions' schemes
- Volunteering

The levels of funding for family learning and participation figures from across these various sources are neither available nor aggregated at the national level.

In Wales, Welsh Government supports family literacy and numeracy programmes in each local authority through a grant scheme. Each local authority area develops its own delivery plan. In many areas, the Welsh Government programme provides the central core which is enhanced by funding from other sources to expand and extend provision.

These have included:

- Adult Community Learning Funding
- FE college outreach support
- European Social Fund
- Big Lottery
- Charitable trusts and funds
- Pupil Deprivation Grant
- Communities First funding
- Communities 2.0 (for digital inclusion projects)
- Partnership activities
- Community Focused Schools (though this fund no longer exists)

Other sources provide funding for parenting courses and family support that may also fall within the family learning definition.

# Appendix 3

## Locations for family learning



Family learning can take place wherever parents and carers come together, including:

- Home
- Schools
- Sure Start children's centres
- Adult education centres
- Community centres
- Supplementary schools
- TV
- Internet
- Museums, libraries, galleries
- Outdoor centres
- Leisure and sport centres
- Health and well-being centres
- Prisons
- Play groups
- Foster carers
- Care homes

# Appendix 4

## What are the characteristics of the most effectively designed family learning programmes?



In 2009, Ofsted carried out a small-scale survey of 23 local authority adult and community learning services that were offering family learning provision.<sup>47</sup> As well as exploring delivery models, the report gave examples of features of effective family learning programmes that were observed. Where family learning programmes were effective, Ofsted identified the following features:

- Teaching and learning were good or outstanding with most provision enriched by external visits to extend learning, promoting a group identity and providing an incentive for regular attendance.
- There was a planned approach to learners' development, beginning with short taster courses and workshops, progressing to short, wider family learning courses and on to family, literacy, language and numeracy provision.
- Provision was planned throughout the year, with some programmes offering longer courses in the summer term.
- Programmes were offered in a range of venues, including schools, Sure Start children's centres, libraries, family centres, pupil referral units, teenage parents' projects and youth centres.
- Opportunities for intergenerational family learning were available, together with a clear and appropriately defined proportion that was adult focused, particularly in family literacy, language and numeracy courses.
- Strategies were implemented to ensure that the learning needs of both adults and children were met, building on the needs of participants.
- Planning demonstrated clearly identified outcomes for both parents and children linked to the adult Skills for Life core curriculum, personal targets or the national curriculum and there were regular opportunities for formative as well as summative assessment.
- Family learning courses were jointly planned by the children's teacher and adult learning tutor, to ensure that all learners' needs were met.
- Staff were selected, recruited and developed through the local authority in order to meet local and national priorities.
- Team teaching by family learning staff and class teachers or teaching assistants enabled flexible and responsive teaching.
- Schools supported family learning delivery with learning support assistants, family workers or mentors, with many adults who had attended family learning themselves progressing to these roles, thereby using their own experience to provide effective support.
- Providers consulted widely with parents and carers, schools and partners through face-to-face conversations, evaluations of learning sessions, inductions and celebration events, to determine local needs.
- Careful consideration was given to the range of challenges that learners faced and providers deployed a range of strategies to make provision accessible to targeted groups, for example by offering free crèche facilities to learners and offering courses at venues and times to suit learners.

As part of a two-year research study carried out by NRDC on behalf of LSIS between 2007 and 2009, a number of additional

<sup>47</sup> Ofsted (2009) An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community, [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/family-learning).

success factors were outlined in the report to help local authorities, schools and teachers plan effective family literacy provision.<sup>48</sup>

These additional factors were:

- strong leadership, with managers who had a strong educational background and were able to understand school structures, as well as head teachers who recognised the benefits of family literacy and the role of parents in their children's learning;
- a flexible approach by local authorities to family learning, including a willingness to maintain programmes when adult enrolments were low to keep schools engaged and allow interest in provision to grow;
- local authorities developing strong relationships with schools and developing partnerships with colleges, which enabled access to qualified adult literacy tutors;
- celebration assemblies held by schools where children could see their parents gaining qualifications;
- use of parent support or liaison officers and learning champions to recruit parents;
- practitioners starting from where the parents and children were in terms of their understandings of literacy and their literacy skills; and parents-only sessions linked directly to the school curriculum and included information for parents on how, as well as what, children are taught in school;
- commitment and regular attendance from parents who formed good relationships and supported each other;
- home-time activities set so that parents could support their children at home in between sessions.

# Appendix 5

## Resources to support quality



A range of resources have been developed over the past few years to help family learning providers offer the best quality family learning programmes.

In 2008, an updated version of the 'Raising Standards Guide' contextualised for family learning was produced, based on the Common Inspection Framework. Previously published by the DfES Skills for Life Strategy Unit, the guide was one of a series of booklets that aimed to help family learning teachers and managers improve the quality of their programmes for parents and carers.

Teaching and learning resources to support quality improvement in family and learning were developed by LSIS through the family learning national programmes, now archived on the Skills for Families website. Support was additionally offered through Skills for Families advisers to provide strategic help for authorities and their family literacy, language and numeracy providers to improve the quality of their family learning provision.

A core curriculum for family learning was developed to show family learning practitioners and managers how literacy, language and numeracy skills underpin familiar family learning contexts, tasks and activities. See [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/17599](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/17599)

National occupational standards for family learning were first developed and agreed alongside the standards for working parents in 2005. These standards provide statements

of skills and knowledge needed by the family learning workforce and were updated in May 2013.

Following on from its 2009 family learning survey report, Ofsted published a good practice resource from Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning Services in May 2013. This report describes how effective partnership working with children's centres can increase provision and successfully attract hard-to-reach learners back to learning and employment. See [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-family-learning-childrens-centre-hertfordshire-adult-and-family-learning-ser](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-family-learning-childrens-centre-hertfordshire-adult-and-family-learning-ser)

Estyn has identified the good practice in place at Capcoch Primary School, Abercwmboi, Cynon Valley. The school has developed a strategy for improving parents' perceptions of school life and raising educational expectations. Among other activities, they offer a range of adult education courses, e.g. literacy, numeracy, parenting, IT, cooking and nutrition. The school has reported an improvement in family mathematics, English and science alongside improvements in attendance from 88 per cent to 92.5 per cent and greater involvement in parents' evenings, concerts and open days.

The Building Blocks of Quality initiative aimed to stimulate debate and create a consensus as to what constitutes good quality in family learning.

# Appendix 6

## Creative practice



Evidence for the Inquiry shows a range of creative and innovative practices across England and Wales. Practitioners use a wide range of delivery formats to suit local needs and a variety of locations to create positive opportunities and overcome access barriers. They host learning in non-threatening environments, link to people's interests and choose locations which enhance the learning experience. They work in partnership with schools, community-based organisations, children's centres, learning champions, museums and employers to engage people with learning and support their progression.

Examples include:

### Learning in non-traditional settings

- Football clubs (see for example [www.safc.com/foundation-of-light](http://www.safc.com/foundation-of-light))
- Forest schools ([www.forestschools.com](http://www.forestschools.com))
- Fishing ([www.fishwish.co.uk](http://www.fishwish.co.uk))

### Learning to engage and support families in school subjects

- Festival of Triangles ([www.mathsontoast.org.uk](http://www.mathsontoast.org.uk))
- Rowdy Robots (<http://cms.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/practicle6511.htm?id=147068>)
- Using iPads ([www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/project/family/NIACE\\_research/neath\\_port\\_talbot\\_case\\_study\\_final.doc](http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/project/family/NIACE_research/neath_port_talbot_case_study_final.doc))

### Learning to engage target groups

- Story Book Dads (Fathers in prison) ([www.storybookdads.org.uk](http://www.storybookdads.org.uk))
- Supplementary schools (BME and second language speakers) ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuDJB2NaWo8&feature=plcp](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuDJB2NaWo8&feature=plcp))

### Teaching and learning

- Communication friendly spaces kit bags ([www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk](http://www.elizabethjarmantraining.co.uk))
- Pop-up story shop ([www.inspirerotherham.org](http://www.inspirerotherham.org))

# Appendix 7

## Participation in family learning in England



**Table A: Community learning participation by gender, age, disability and sector subject, England 2010/11<sup>49</sup>**

	Family literacy language and Numeracy (FLLN)	Wider family learning (WFL)	FLLN/WFL combined
Gender	90.2% female	85.2% female	87.7% female
Age	78% aged 25-44 2.6% aged 60+ 9 % aged 19-24 8.6% aged 45-59	73% aged 25-44 4.5% aged 60+ 8.7% aged 19-24 11 % aged 45-59	75.5% aged 25-44 3.5% aged 60+ 8.8% aged 19-24 9.8% aged 45-59
Regions with highest numbers of learners (highest number of learners first)	London, North West and South East	South East, London and West Midlands	London, South East, North West
Regions with lowest number of learners (lowest number of learners first)	South West, East Midlands and North East	South West, East Midlands and North East	South West, East Midlands and North East
Disability	7.1%	7.2%	7.15%
Ethnicity	66.2% White British 6.5% Black 17.7% Asian	76.6% White British 4.3% Black 10.1% Asian	71.4% White British 5.4% Black 13.9% Asian

<sup>49</sup> *Community Learning by type, by region, equality and diversity: participation and achievement (2005/6 – 2010/11)*, BIS/SFA Data Service: July 2012

**Table B: Community learning participation by disadvantaged status and type, England 2011/12<sup>50</sup>**

	Disadvantaged learners		Non-disadvantaged learners		Total learners
<b>Total learners</b>	<b>206,600</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>476,700</b>	<b>69.8%</b>	<b>683,300</b>
Personal and community development learning	137,200	26.5%	381,400	73.5%	518,600
Neighbourhood learning in deprived communities	25,800	46.4%	29,900	53.6%	55,700
Family English, maths and language	27,700	47.1%	31,000	52.9%	58,700









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