

# EVALUATION OF LSC FUNDED FAMILY PROGRAMMES REPORT ON NIACE/LSC DISSEMINATION AND CONSULTATION EVENTS

## Introduction

This note provides feedback on the six regional dissemination and consultation events that NIACE ran in conjunction with the LSC in June 2003. It outlines the main messages from the events and the main thoughts of the delegates on how each of the recommendations should be taken forward. A forward action plan is also included.

## Main messages

- Delegates welcomed the opportunity to hear about the findings of the research and particularly welcomed being consulted on the main recommendations;
- All of the main recommendations received support but delegates would like them taken forward in a spirit which acknowledges practice at ground level. In other words, the infrastructure should be developed in such a way as to be flexible and enabling, allowing providers to be locally responsive. It should also be built from the bottom-up wherever appropriate and possible.

## Delegates' thoughts on recommendations

### A) National framework for family programmes

Participants at all events expressed general support for the development of a national framework for family programmes. However, for a few groups, this decision was arrived at after some debate, often fuelled by worries that a national framework would be prescriptive rather than flexible and enabling.

It was thought that a national framework would be useful in terms of raising the profile and status of family programmes. Delegates also felt that a national framework should be used to emphasise the importance of both adults' and childrens' learning and to recognise the diversity of family programmes.

### B) Increase the role and status of wider family learning/broaden and embed the wider family learning curriculum

The need to develop the role and status of wider family learning was recognised. This was seen as important in its own right but also reflected recent developments in FLLN, namely the Skills for Families initiative and significantly increased funding. Related to this, some delegates highlighted that a strong wider family learning sector was in the interest of the development of FLLN and achieving basic skills targets.

The need to broaden and embed the wider family learning curriculum was also supported, although some delegates pointed out that the funding for wider family learning was in its infancy at the time of the evaluation and therefore some provision will have moved on since then.

In terms of how to develop the role and status of wider family learning, a number of suggestions were put forward. These included the recognition of soft outcomes by the LSC,

defining the relationship between wider family learning and FLLN, and recognising and funding outreach.

### **C) The development and extension of regional and local family learning networks**

This recommendation was also supported by delegates at all of the events. Local and regional networks were seen as important in disseminating information and sharing good practice, mapping and understanding existing provision<sup>1</sup>, and raising and debating key issues.

Some groups tackled the differing roles of local, regional and national networks and how they would interact. The following framework of roles was proposed:

- Local networks – should focus on identifying existing provision and need, engaging new partners, delivery issues;
- Regional networks – should focus on strategic issues, exchanging information and good practice, debating issues and developments, and engaging with RDAs;
- National network – should focus on a campaigning role, as well as disseminating information and sharing good practice.

It was also seen as important that local networks communicated with and fed into regional networks and the national network, and vice versa. Indeed, improved communication between national and local level was cited as one of the benefits of having networks at different levels. However, the costs of running networks and the funding of them was highlighted at many of the events as a key issue. Interestingly, it was apparent that some delegates were not aware of the existing National Family Learning Network. It will be important to address this point.

### **D) Staff development and LEA and LLSC capacity building**

#### **National staff development strategy**

Delegates at all events expressed support for a national staff development strategy for practitioners working in both FLLN and wider family learning. It was felt that this would improve the quality of provision and raise the status of the workforce. However, there was a very clear call for the framework to be flexible and accessible to all. Other key features of the strategy that were highlighted by delegates included modularity, clear identification of training routes and the recognition of prior learning and qualifications.

Delegates at the events highlighted that the funding of training would be an issue for some organisations and individuals, particularly part-time tutors. Delegates also expressed concern about current problems in recruiting qualified tutors.

#### **Clarify and develop the role of family learning co-ordinators**

Again, there was support from delegates at all events for this recommendation. Discussion tended to focus on the operational versus strategic role of co-ordinators. Some delegates felt that where there was only one co-ordinator in an LEA, the strategic role was often crowded out by the day-to-day co-ordination of programmes. It was also reported that some people outside LEAs were unaware of the role of LEA family learning co-ordinators and how their role differed from, say, co-ordinators in the FE college sector.

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Coventry and Warwickshire Family Network's audit of family learning provision and subsequent strategy and action plan.

## **Provide staff development and awareness raising for LLSC staff**

There was widespread support for this recommendation given variations in the quality of advice and support provided by LLSCs. A number of practical suggestions were made by delegates including that LLSC staff should visit providers and programmes, that more secondments and shadowing opportunities between organisations should be developed, and that LLSCs should be members of local and regional networks and should attend network meetings.

### **E) Further research**

A large number of suggestions were made for future research projects. A few delegates thought the “ship should be steadied” before undertaking further research. However, there was more support for summarising, disseminating and making better use of existing research whilst continuing to fill in the gaps in knowledge. At many of the events, this included recognition that a longitudinal study of the outcomes for both adults and children was required.

The most frequently requested research projects were as follows:

#### Outcomes

- Evaluating adults’ achievements - progression and destinations, but also why some learners do not continue learning;
- Soft outcomes (such as confidence building, self-esteem, healthier lifestyles, improved family relationships) and related performance measures;
- Measurement of children’s achievements.

#### Practice

- Sharing practice – database of provision and/or materials, including good practice on what works, so practitioners are not ‘reinventing the wheel’ when setting up new programmes;
- The location of family programmes within LEAs (and LLSCs) and whether this makes a difference to the focus and performance of programmes;
- Engaging men and other target groups;
- What kind of programmes learners want.

### **Other issues raised at the events**

The issue of Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspections and the monitoring and recognition of children’s outcomes in family programmes was raised. As ALI are focussed on monitoring the quality of adults’ learning, it was felt that children’s outcomes were not being recognised, nor was the quality of teaching and learning for children in family programmes being monitored.

This links to another important issue about the emphasis of family programmes. Many delegates were concerned, some deeply, about family programmes losing sight of children’s learning. Some delegates observed that helping their children is one of the main reasons parents attend family programmes and raising the achievement of children is also the main reason why schools become involved in family programmes. Delegates therefore felt it was important to focus equally on adults’ and children’s learning.

## ACTION PLAN

<b>Action</b>	<b>Meets Recommendations:</b>	<b>Main organisation(s) to take forward</b>	<b>Timing</b>
Develop a web based contact list of LEA family learning co-ordinators and managers	(C) Development of local, regional and national networks D) LEA and LLSC capacity building	NIACE	December 2003
Develop a web based list of named LLSC personnel with a responsibility for family learning	(C) Development of local, regional and national networks D) LEA and LLSC capacity building	LSC and NIACE	December 2003
Develop a national family programmes website as part of the National Family Learning Network, encompassing both FLLN and wider family learning, in order to disseminate and share information	(C) Development of local, regional and national networks, (B) Broaden and embed the wider family learning curriculum	Campaign for Learning, NIACE and ContinYou (formerly CEDC and Education Extra)	April 2004
Developing, testing and disseminating new approaches to FLLN	(E) Further research (D) Staff development and LEA and LLSC capacity building	BSA for ABSSU and LSC - Skills for Families	March 2004
Develop national occupational standards for practitioners in family learning, in parallel with those in parenting education and support	(D) Staff development and LEA capacity building	NIACE, Parenting Education and Support Forum (PESF) and PAULO	June 2004
Publish a family learning edition of Adult Learning and Skills	(D) LLSC capacity building (B) Develop the role and status of wider family learning	NIACE	February 2004
Examine the role of Family Learning Co-ordinators as part of a series of pilots	(D) Staff development and LEA capacity building	BSA, ABSSU and LSC	March 2004
Research the impact of participation in family programmes on adults (including progression and destinations)	(E) Further Research (B) Develop the role and status of wider family learning	NIACE with LSC, DfES and Lancashire County Council	June 2004
Capacity building regional	(C) Development of	LSC, NIACE,	July 2004

seminars	local, regional and national networks (D) LEA and LLSC capacity building	ABSSU and BSA	
Link with existing LSC and NIACE research into soft outcomes (RARPA - Recording and recognition of progress and achievement in non-accredited learning)	(E) Further Research (B) Develop the role and status of wider family learning	LSC and NIACE	Ongoing
Provide enhanced guidance to LLSCs and LEAs on family programmes	(D) LLSC capacity building (E) Disseminating research	LSC, ABSSU and NIACE	December 2003
Develop a guidance leaflet on delivering family programmes as Bitesize courses	(B) Develop the role and status of wider family learning	LSC, ABSSU, BSA and NIACE	July 2004
Assessing the costs of family programmes	(E) Further Research	LSC	September 2004
Develop a national framework for family programmes	The LSC is considering the best way to take forward this recommendation.		