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Pieces of the Jigsaw:  
Where Adult and Community Learning and Family  
Learning sit in the new Children's Services  
environment

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*Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES 2003), the green paper that proposed reform to improve outcomes for children, young people and families, was formally adopted in the *Children Act* in late 2004. To achieve the five outcomes for children including *Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Making a Positive Contribution, Achieving Economic Well-being* and *Enjoying and Achieving*, local authorities were tasked with integrating key services for children and young people as part of Children's Trusts. It was anticipated that Education, Children's Social Services and other relevant local services would integrate - led by a Director of Children's Services.

A recent survey by NIACE captured local authority activity to meet ECM's requirements. All 150 local authorities in England were asked to detail their progress towards the *Children Act* and the real or imagined impacts on both Adult and Community Learning (ACL) and Family Learning (FL). Just over 100 authorities replied - a response rate of 69% with the results presenting a fairly representative picture of what was happening late 2004, early 2005.

In terms of moving towards integrated services, around half of responding authorities are in the process of reorganisation with a further ten having already done so. Almost half are appointing a Director of Children's Services. A number of authorities are hoping to reorganise, work more closely across existing services and appoint a Director.

With reorganisation comes a new location for ACL and FL in many local authorities. The intended locations of ACL according to these survey results are diverse; approximately one fifth will be located in Children's and related services such as within a Children and Young People Directorate, whilst a similar proportion will be in Community and related departments, e.g. Community Services Directorate. Services in two authorities are being contracted out to local colleges but the largest proportion, approximately two fifths, do not know.

In terms of the potential impacts of the *Children Act*, a shift in the location of ACL presents opportunities for many, such as developing services with other council departments or building partnerships both within and out with the authority. In one authority where ACL was moving to the Community Services Directorate it was felt that this offered "*New opportunities to work with Adult Services previously located in Social Services and Libraries, also in the new Community Services Directorate*". Some authorities felt that a move to a department with a focus on children would award ACL a higher profile as one county council with ACL coming under the Children, Schools and Families department observed, "*In this authority, a higher profile service and ability to impact on community and family support, children's learning, preventative work, and parents and carers*".

However, there was some unease about the impacts of the *Children Act*. Negative impacts identified by ACL managers included marginalisation or distancing from schools and/or FL. A manager in a unitary authority in which both ACL and FL came under a Directorate of Adult and Community Services felt that there would be a number of negative effects including a "*Reduction in formal and informal links*", a "*Negative impact on strategic planning*" and "*Limited opportunity for joint planning of service*". Interestingly, of those who expressed negativity the largest group were made up of those who did not know what was happening, illustrating the fear and negativity associated with any change.

There was a great deal less uncertainty amongst managers with regard to the location of FL; less than one third of respondents were unsure. This was because whilst the final location of

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ACL was unclear there was considerable confidence on the part of many authorities that FL would stay with ACL, wherever that might be. Again, while it was often too early to say what the impacts might be, the overall sense from the responses to this question was slightly more optimistic than perceptions of the impacts on ACL. Amongst advantages, a wider range of opportunities was identified and an improved profile of FL. For example, one London borough felt that if the authority did create a single department for children and young people it was "*Likely to raise the profile of FL as an agent of support for vulnerable families in the eyes of other agencies, e.g. Social Services, Health, Probationary Service. Will strengthen arguments for establishing greater secondary school involvement in the programme*". It was also hoped that relationships between departments and other agencies would be improved; "*Integrated services raise the profile of FL and increase opportunities for partnership work*".

Possible disadvantages identified included, again, the marginalisation of the FL service and restrictive working. For example, one authority whose ACL was in a Community Directorate but whose FL was in Children's Services felt that "*There is a danger of becoming tied into a section that may restrict our scope e.g. just Early Years or Key Stage 1 as target*".

The survey also found that approximately one third of respondents will have their Children's Trust set up by 2006 although a similar proportion were unsure and nine were planned for 2008. This is worrying when the Government anticipates most local authorities should have their trust set up by 2006. Four authorities already had their Trust set up whilst five of the respondents were Pathfinders set up in 2003 to develop the Children's Trust model.

Finally, the picture created by the survey revealed, much as expected, that this is still very much a work in progress. There are obviously pros and cons in every decision, which emerges from a particular history in each authority. For some authorities this shift brings worry and a sense of frustration, for others, a variety of welcome opportunities.

#### References

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April 2005