

# A Framework for the Engagement of Family Learning with Key Government Policies

A NIACE Discussion Paper

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# Introduction

Family learning makes a considerable contribution to a wide range of government policies and strategies. There is, however, no overall framework to show how family learning engages with different policy areas and how family learning can contribute to the government's objectives.

This Discussion Paper has been prepared as part of an initiative funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to develop a 'Framework for the Engagement of Family Learning with Key Government Policies'. In the first phase of the work, NIACE is asking Family Learning practitioners and their strategic partners to contribute their experience and expertise to address key issues.

The Discussion Paper is divided into two parts. The first part looks at Family Learning generally, including the variety of approaches, the range of contexts and the infrastructure that supports it. The second part examines a number of key government policies and initiatives in relation to Family Learning.

Throughout the paper we ask a number of questions intended to engage practitioners in dialogue and debate. Your responses to these questions will help NIACE to develop a model showing how Family Learning engages with a range of government policies and initiatives. A separate Question Sheet is provided for your answers and we would be grateful if you would leave this behind for the NIACE project team to analyse.

NIACE is convening three events and making a major contribution to the 'Family Learning Works' conference at Warwick University on 20 October. In addition, we are promoting discussion through practitioner networks and events in October and November. If you would like additional copies of the discussion document to use in discussion with your team, please contact Anne Holt, Family Learning Administrator, [anne.holt@niace.org.uk](mailto:anne.holt@niace.org.uk).

NIACE trusts you will find the discussions with colleagues enjoyable and stimulating.

Thank you for taking part.

Jeanne Haggart, Development Officer (Family Learning)  
Dr. Rachel Spacey, Research Assistant (Family Learning)

# **Family Learning: Issues and Questions**

## **Family Learning**

'Family learning' is generally understood to refer to learning approaches that engage parents and children jointly in learning. The term covers a wide range of models, from initiatives such as 'Bookstart' where book bags are distributed through health visitors to stimulate early book sharing in families to structured activities engaging families in museums and galleries to the wide range of family programmes funded through the LSC.

Families learning is linked to, or frequently embedded in, a number of related approaches, for example:

- 'Parental involvement', that is, activity, informal or formal, such as parents talking to and playing with their children, supporting their learning or their schooling, spending time with a purpose with them
- 'Home-school initiatives'
- 'Parenting skills'
- 'Parenting support' and 'family support', as part of a support package.

Terms such as these are sometimes used interchangeably, without explaining the particular meaning in context, creating opportunities for lack of clarity and misunderstanding.

Family learning programmes fundable by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) fall into two categories:

- Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy Programmes (FLLN)
- Wider Family Learning (WFL)

This is the terminology that NIACE has adopted in its current development work for the DfES and LSC and the terms that will be used in the rest of this document.

In *Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy: a guide for policy makers* (DfES 2004), the DfES and LSC present a definition and classification of fundable family learning programmes.

## **Family programmes**

All family programmes encourage family members to learn together. They promote learning together as a family but also learning within the family. They should aim to allow adults and children to pursue further learning. The 'inter-generational' aspect of family programmes is important: the key principle is that children and adults learn together.

### **Family learning programmes**

Programmes in this category aim to get adults and children learning as or within a family, or to help parents/carers learn how to support their children's learning. They have two main aims:

- To develop the skills or knowledge of the adult and the child
- To help parents/carers to be able to support their children's learning and development more actively and with greater confidence, and to be able to understand why that support is important.

### **Family literacy, language and numeracy programmes**

Programmes in this category have three main aims:

- To improve the literacy, language and numeracy of parents/carers
- To improve the ability of parents/carers to help their children
- To help children acquire literacy, language and numeracy skills.

National Occupational Standards recently approved by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) apply to practitioners working in all areas of family learning. National Family Learning Week, organised by the Campaign for Learning, provides an annual opportunity to promote family learning and showcase a wide range of activities and programmes. Finally, the National Family Learning Network supports practitioners working with families in a wide range of settings and delivering a wide range of activities and programmes.

## **Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN)**

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes are a key element of the *Skills for Life* strategy, which identifies parents and other primary carers as a key priority group. As part of a key national strategy, FLLN programmes have been part of a major drive to build capacity and improve standards.

Provision for families is part of the whole Adult and Community Learning (ACL) offer of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) funded by the LSC. In 2004-05, £25 million was available for FLLN.

As part of the *Skills for Life* strategy, FLLN programmes feature elements common to all Literacy, Language and Numeracy (LLN) programmes, including:

- A common learning process, known as a 'learning journey', ensuring that learners experience 8 essential stages in their learning;
- Learning outcomes mapped to a core curriculum in literacy, language and numeracy;
- Training programmes for staff linked to national standards;
- A body of guidance documents and resource materials for practitioners;
- A national test that recognises achievement;
- Nationally provided training programmes for staff.

In addition, a national 2-year initiative known as *Skills for Families* aimed to develop strategic approaches to extending and embedding quality FLLN programmes through building an infrastructure, testing new approaches to programmes and training, disseminating good practice and producing useful resources for FLLN practitioners. In the first year (2003-04) 12 local authority-LSC partnerships received additional funding to build capacity, and in the second year a further 7 partnerships joined the initiative.

## Wider Family Learning Programmes

Wider Family Learning Programmes are widely acknowledged to contribute to a number of government strategies<sup>1</sup>. However, there has not been a key government policy driving their development in the same way that the *Skills for Life* policy has driven the development of Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy.

In its guidance for local LSCs and local authorities, for example, the national LSC writes that Wider Family Learning Programmes are 'central to community capacity building and to the regeneration or renewal of neighbourhoods and communities<sup>2</sup>.

Whereas FLLN programmes are taken from a menu of programmes that have been developed and piloted nationally, many Wider Family Learning Programmes are developed locally and accredited through local Open College Networks. There are, however, some notable national programmes, including the Workers' Education Association's (WEA) 'Helping Your Child in School' and ContinYou's SHARE programmes.

Provision for families is part of the whole ACL offer of LEAs funded by the LSC. In 2004-05, £11 million was available for Wider Family Learning Programmes.

### Questions

1. How can the terminology relating to family learning be made clearer to promote greater understanding across government policy areas?
2. How can FLLN and WFL programmes be linked to ensure that all the needs of families are met and that opportunities for progression are maximised?
3. What are the lessons/features from the Skills for Families initiative that could realistically be applied to the development of Wider Family Learning Programmes to enhance their quality and status?

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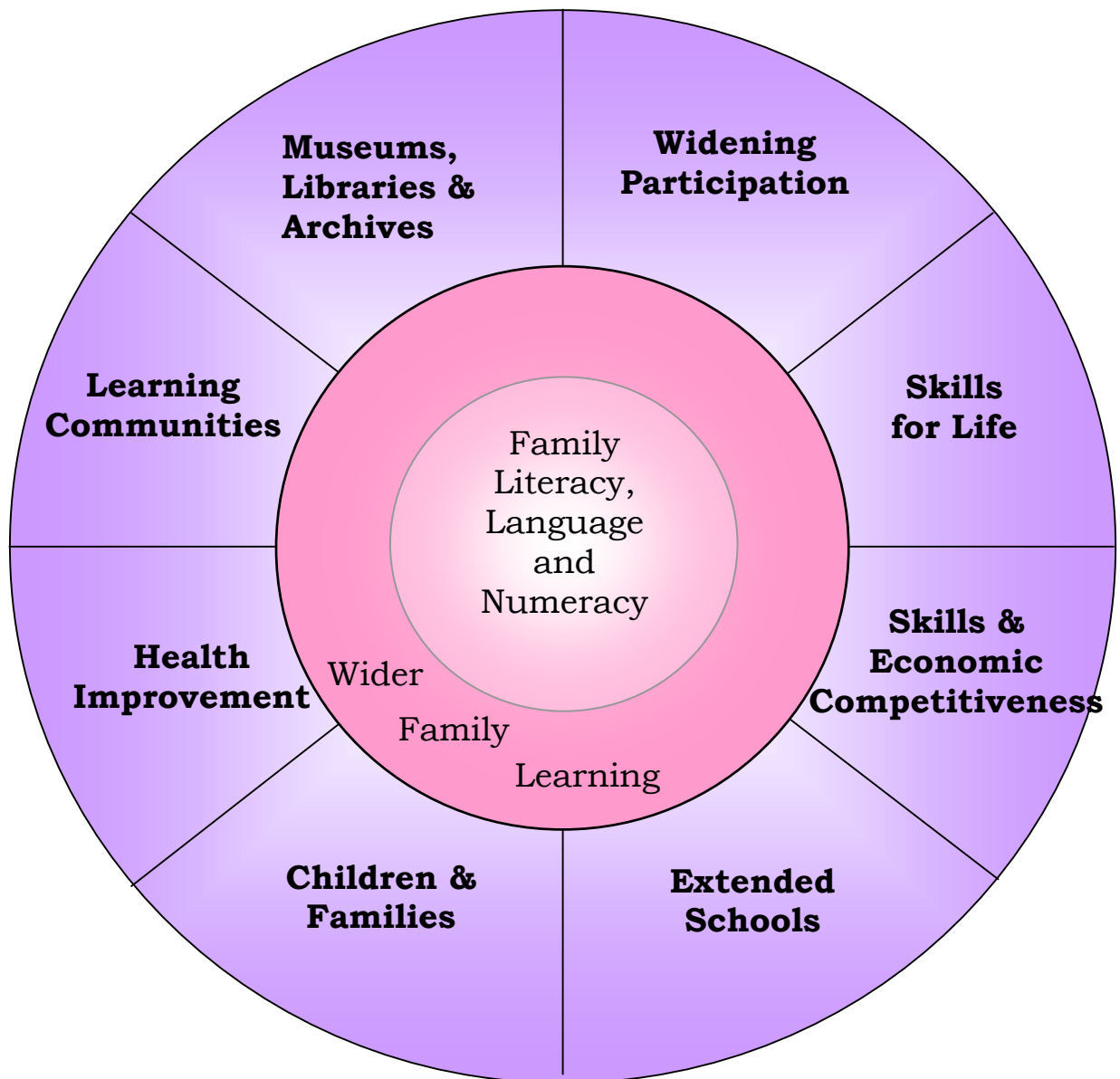
<sup>1</sup> NIACE, 2005. *Family Learning Funding: A Scoping Study*. Leicester: NIACE. Unpublished.

<sup>2</sup> LSC, 2004. *Family Programmes: Guidance for Local Learning and Skills Councils and Local Education Authorities 2004/5*.

## **Policy Context: Issues and Questions**

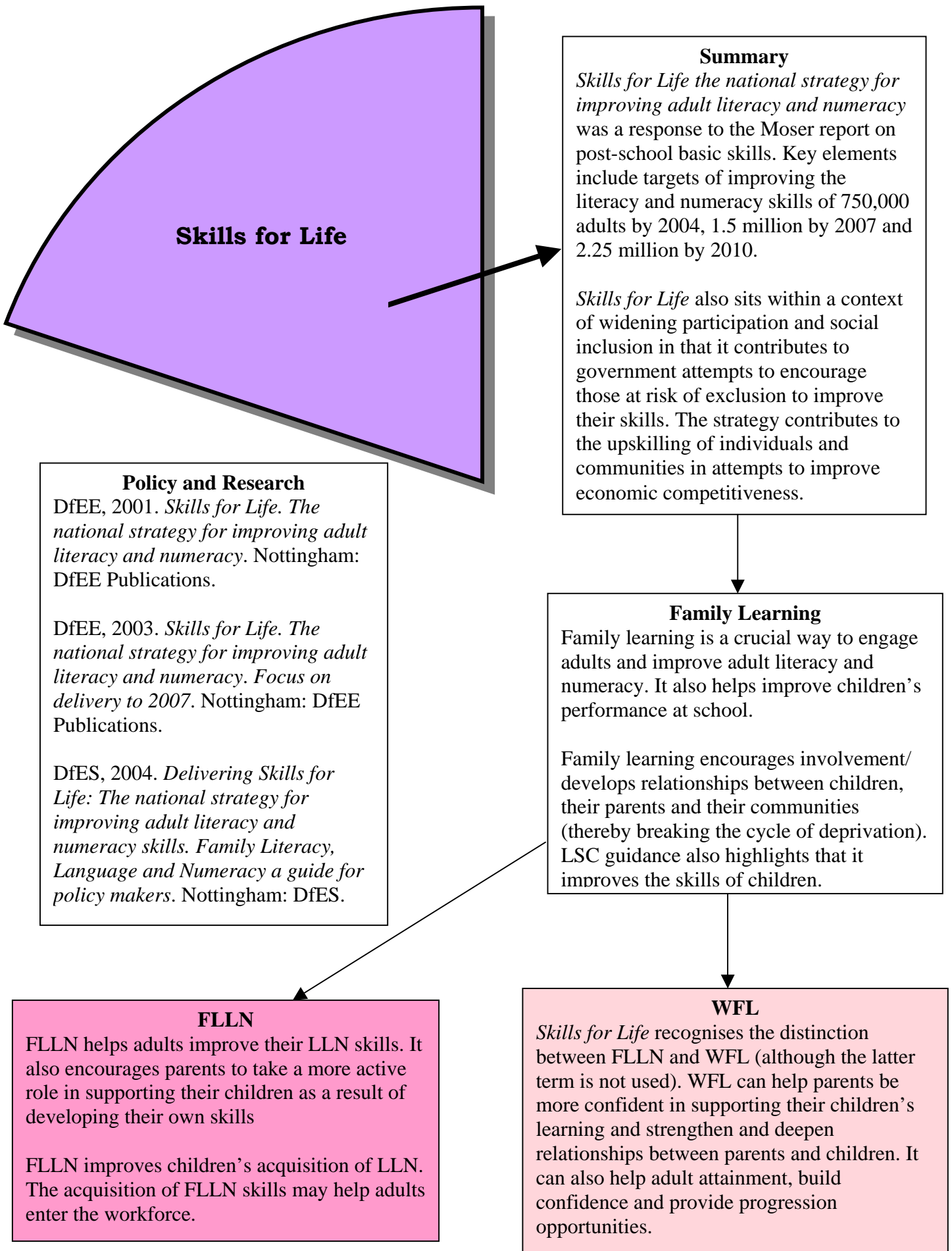
## The Policy Context

Family Learning plays a role in a range of government policies and initiatives. Some of the major policy areas are shown below and analysed in the following pages.



In the following eight sections the key documents analysed for each policy area are presented and summarised. Following on from the summary, the role attributed in the policy to Family Learning generally is analysed. Next, the analysis shows where specific roles are attributed in the policy to Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy and Wider Family Learning. An empty box is illustrative of the lack of an explicit role ascribed to FLLN or WFL within a policy area.

# Skills for Life



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Skills for Life*

#### **Issues**

*Skills for Life* is possibly the most well developed policy area in relation to families and family learning. Within *Skills for Life*, the focus on family learning is on improving parents' literacy, language and numeracy (LLN) skills; improving the ability of parents to help their children with school work and helping children acquire/improve their LLN skills. There is recognition that adult learning is worthwhile in itself and in improving children's skills.

There is also an appreciation of the different groups and types of families to whom *Skills for Life* is applicable. Interestingly, there was a shift in terminology in 2004 in relation to the terms FLLN and Family Learning programmes where the term Family Learning was sometimes used interchangeably. It is clear what the impacts of FLLN are but some clarity is required in relation to the relationship between FLLN and Family Learning Programmes.

## Documents Consulted

DfEE, 2001. *Skills for Life. The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications. Available at: [http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/ABS\\_Strategy\\_Doc\\_Final.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/ABS_Strategy_Doc_Final.pdf)

DfEE, 2003. *Skills for Life. The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy. Focus on delivery to 2007*. Nottingham: DfEE Publications. Available at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/SfL%20Document.pdf>

DfES, 2004. *Skills for Families. Strengthening family literacy, language and numeracy: Extending the reach and scope of programmes*. Nottingham: DfES.

DfES, 2004. *Skills for Families. Strengthening family literacy, language and numeracy: Planning for quality*. Nottingham: DfES.

DfES, 2004. *Delivering Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy a guide for policy makers*. Nottingham: DfES.

DfES, 2004. *Skills for Families. Strengthening family literacy, language and numeracy: Good Practice Guidance for Planning and Delivering Joint Sessions*. Nottingham: DfES.

DfES, 2005. *Skills for Life: The national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy skills. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy a guide for Children's Centres*. Nottingham: DfES.

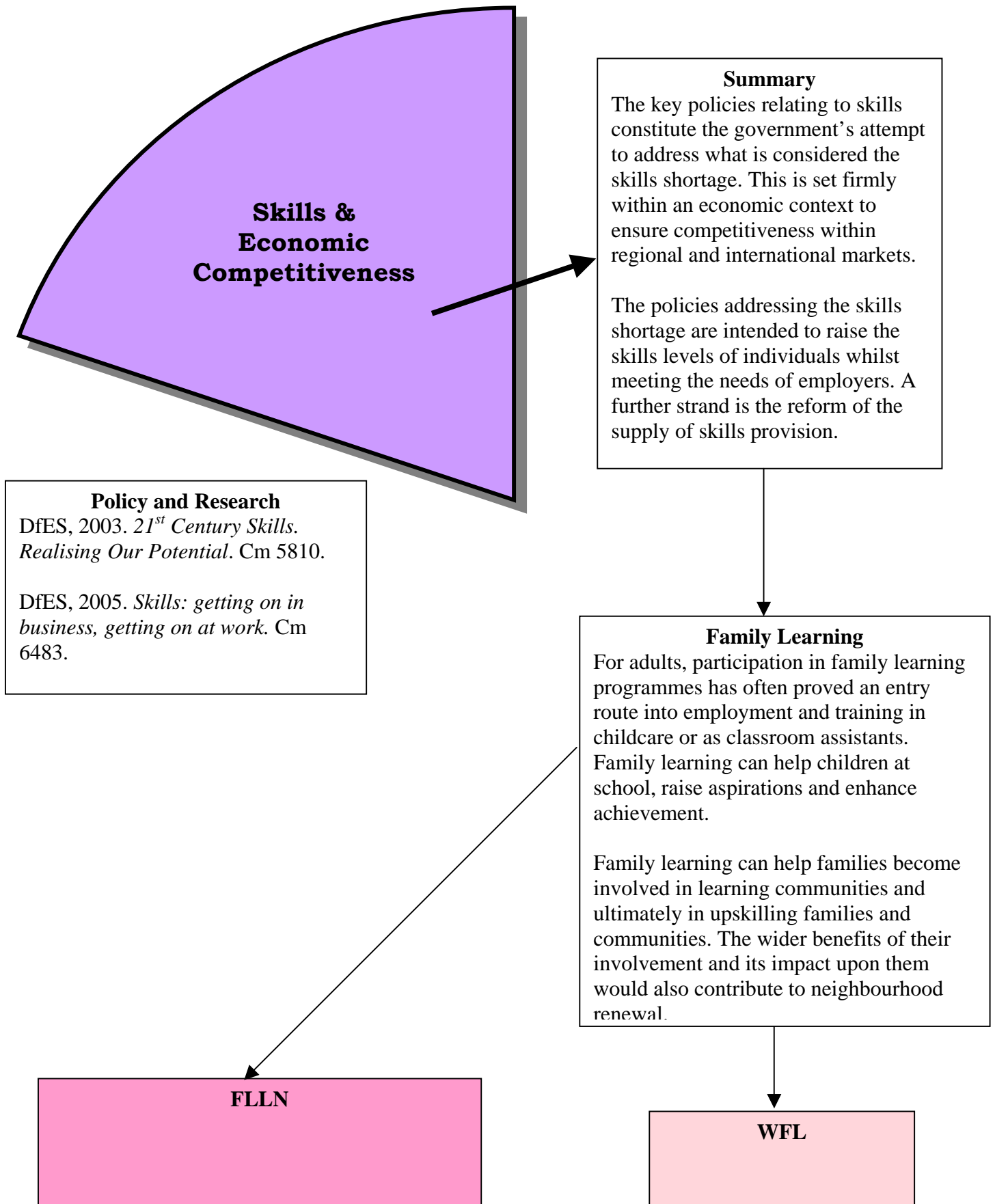
LSC, 2004. *Family Programmes: Guidance for Local Learning and Skills Councils and Local Education Authorities 2004/5*.

NRDC, 2005. *Study of the impact of the Skills for Life learning infrastructure on learners. Interim report on the qualitative strand*. Available at: [http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc\\_630.pdf](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/uploads/documents/doc_630.pdf)

## Questions

1. In the *Skills for Life* context, the generic term for family learning is Family Programmes, divided into two areas: Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Family Learning Programmes. To what extent is the terminology used helpful in promoting understanding of the range of family learning activity?
2. How can Wider Family Learning programmes best offer support to learners with literacy, language and numeracy requirements?
3. What lessons can be learned from the success of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit in embedding FLLN in a wide range of policies for Family Learning programmes as a whole?

## Skills and Economic Competitiveness



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Skills and Economic Competitiveness*

#### **Issues**

In this policy area, the family is conceptualised in relation to ensuring parents are willing and able to enter or re-enter the labour market (through having the appropriate skills). Parents – both men and women – who feel that caring for their children full time before they attend school is an important role, are not considered. Families in this policy area often mean lone parent families and potential women returnees to the labour market.

Families are considered within the wider community and it is asserted that family learning can help families become involved in learning communities and ultimately in upskilling families and communities. The wider benefits would contribute to neighbourhood renewal. However, it is unclear how these benefits are passed on and the links are assumed rather than evidenced.

#### **Documents Consulted**

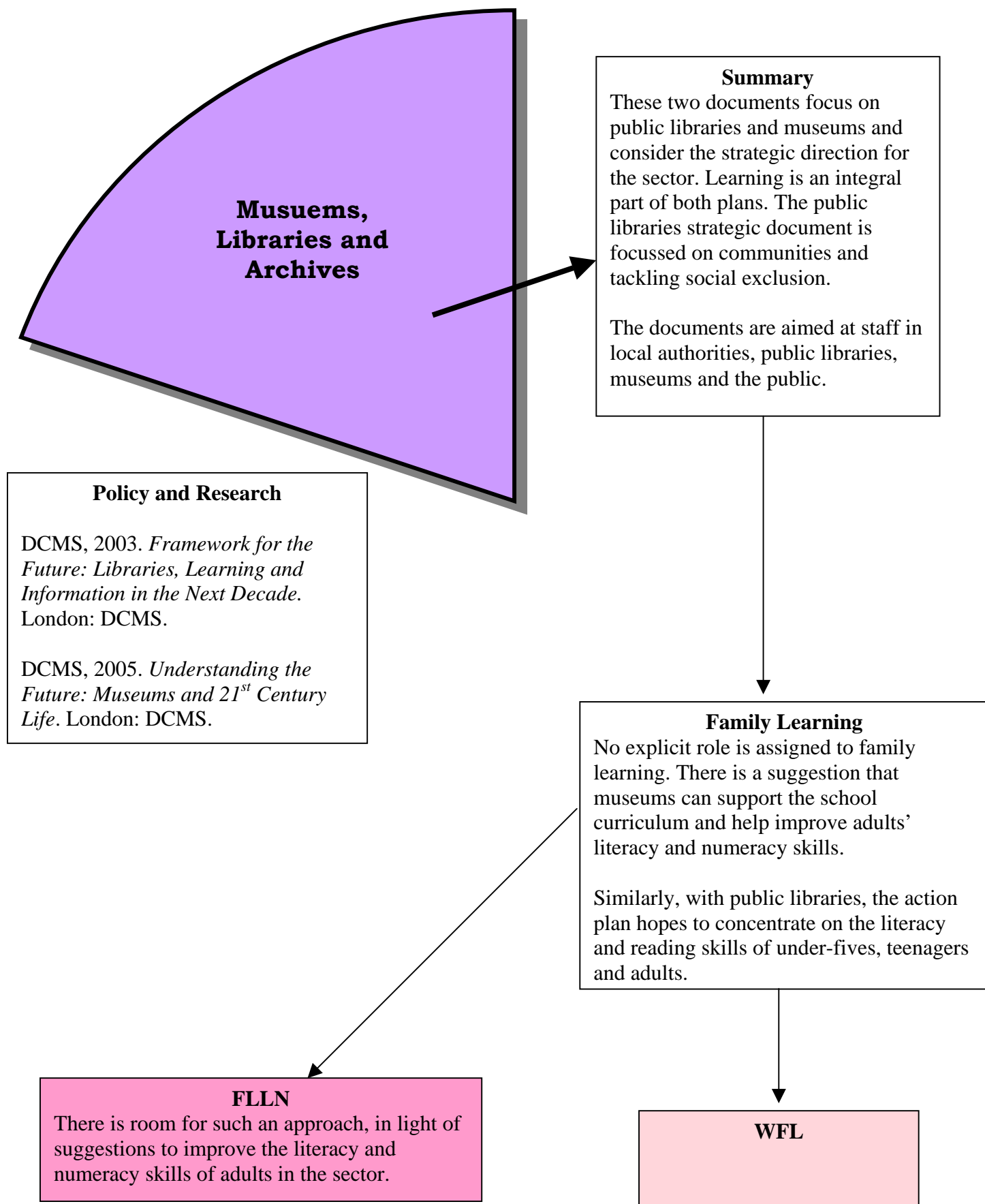
Department for Education and Skills, 2003. *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. Realising Our Potential*. Cm 5810. Available at:  
[http://www.goskills.org/downloads/home/Skills\\_Paper03.pdf](http://www.goskills.org/downloads/home/Skills_Paper03.pdf)

Department for Education and Skills, 2005. *Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work*. Cm 6483. Available at:  
<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/skillsgettingon/>

## Questions

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to the skills agenda?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to the skills agenda?
3. What frequently identified family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. What skills other than vocational skills can be developed through family learning that would be of interest to employers?
5. In the policy area of Children and Families, *Every Child Matters* aims to enhance the status of the children's workforce and see that it represents the diversity of families and family life. How could family learning help?
6. How does family learning enable adults engaged in it to progress into the new children's workforce?
7. In addition to working parents who are the key focus of this area, how can family learning support other family members to acquire skills?

# Museums, Libraries and Archives



# Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

## *Policy Area – Museums, Libraries and Archives*

### **Issues**

Museums, libraries and archives are informed by two key documents, which consider the strategic direction of museums and libraries. Families are perceived in a very limited sense in their focus on children (babies, pre-school and school children). There is only a very superficial conception of family learning with no explicit consideration of how it could contribute to a number of the actions and aims within these two policy documents such as supporting the school curriculum and improving adults' literacy and numeracy skills.

At a strategic level there is no mention of family learning and the contribution it could bring to a number of key government strategies, which the sector are trying to support. This contrasts with what is known to be in place at an operational level, for example, in the *Public Library Service Impact Measures – Proposals for 2005/6*<sup>3</sup> which have been developed to complement the Public Library Service Standards published in October 2004 in the context of *Framework for the Future*. They illustrate the contribution libraries can make to five of the seven shared priorities agreed by the Government and the Local Government Association (LGA) including “improving the quality of life for children, young people, families at risk and older people” and “raising standards across schools”. Family learning is identified as one of the further activities, which contributes to improving quality of life<sup>4</sup>.

### **Documents Consulted**

DCMS, 2003. *Framework for the Future: Libraries, Learning and Information in the Next Decade*. London: DCMS.

DCMS, 2005. *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life*. London: DCMS.

Documents to be consulted include:

DCMS, 2005. *Department for Culture, Media and Sport Five Year Plan. Living life to the full*. London: DCMS.

Resource, 2001. *Renaissance in the Regions: a new vision for England's museums*. London: Resource.

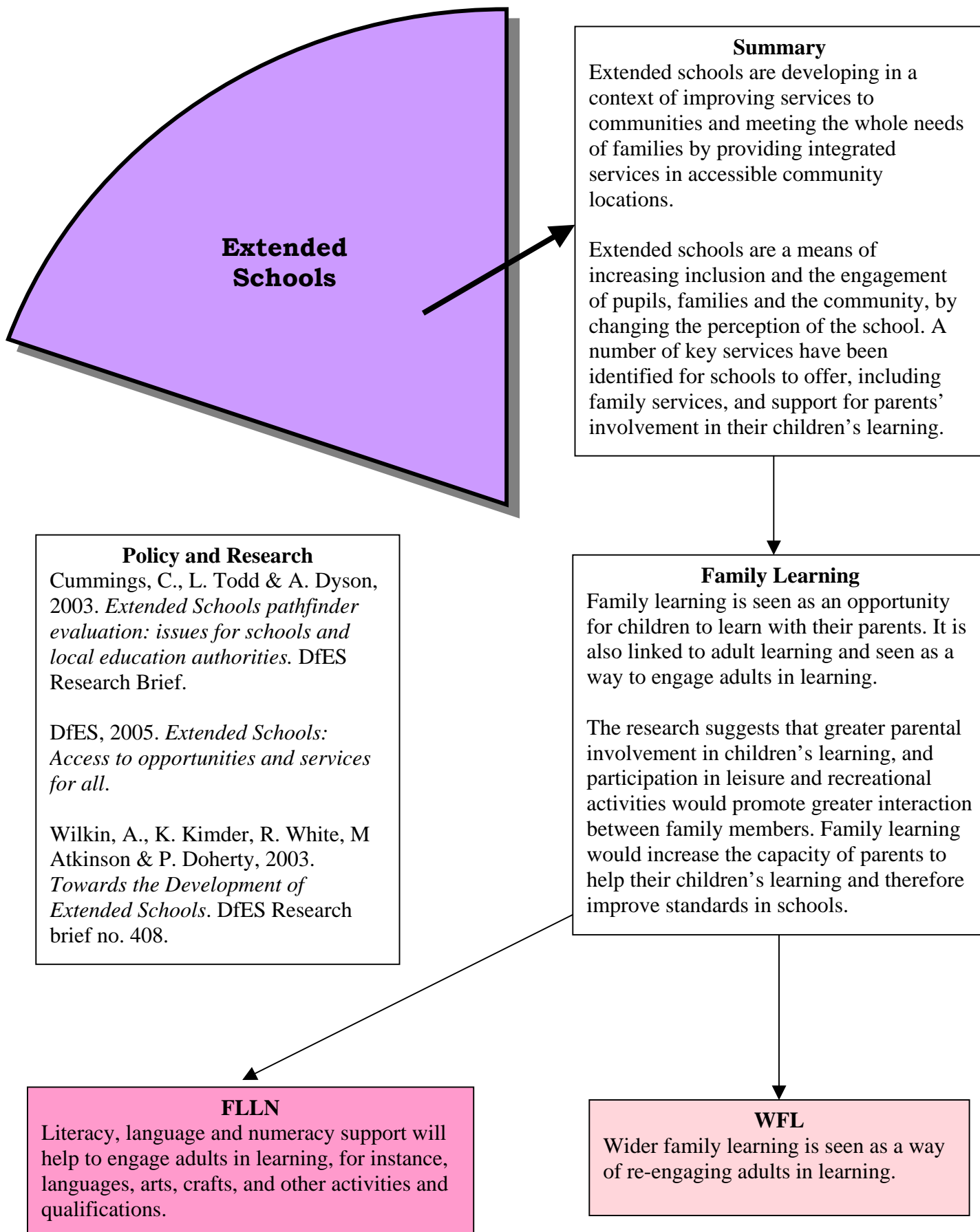
<sup>3</sup> MLA, 2005a. *Public Library Service Impact Measures – Proposals for 2005/2006*. Available at: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/fff\\_impact\\_intro\\_20050309.doc](http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/fff_impact_intro_20050309.doc)

<sup>4</sup> MLA, 2005b. *Shared Priority: Improving the quality of life for children, young people, families at risk and older people*. Available at: [http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/fff\\_sp\\_quality\\_20050309.doc](http://www.mla.gov.uk/documents/fff_sp_quality_20050309.doc)

## **Questions**

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to museums, libraries and archives?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to museums, libraries and archives?
3. How can museums, libraries and archives reach out to other members of the family besides children?
4. In what specific ways could museums, libraries and archives support the school curriculum and adults' literacy and numeracy skills?
5. What family learning outcomes could support work in museums, libraries and archives?

## Extended Schools



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Extended Schools*

#### **Issues**

The analysis of extended schools policy suggests that family learning is seen as a core service to encourage parents to learn with their children and to encourage them to learn in their own right to a lesser extent.

As a predominantly school-based approach the focus is firmly on children and parents with little appreciation of other members of the family.

*Skills for Life guidance on Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy in extended schools* (DfES 2005a) offers detailed advice on embedding FLLN in extended schools but there is no similar guidance available which addresses embedding wider family learning.

#### **Documents Consulted**

Cummings, C., L. Todd & A. Dyson, 2003. *Extended Schools pathfinder evaluation: issues for schools and local education authorities*. DfES Research Brief.

Department for Education and Skills, 2005.a *Skills for life. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy a guide for Extended Schools*. Nottingham: DfES.

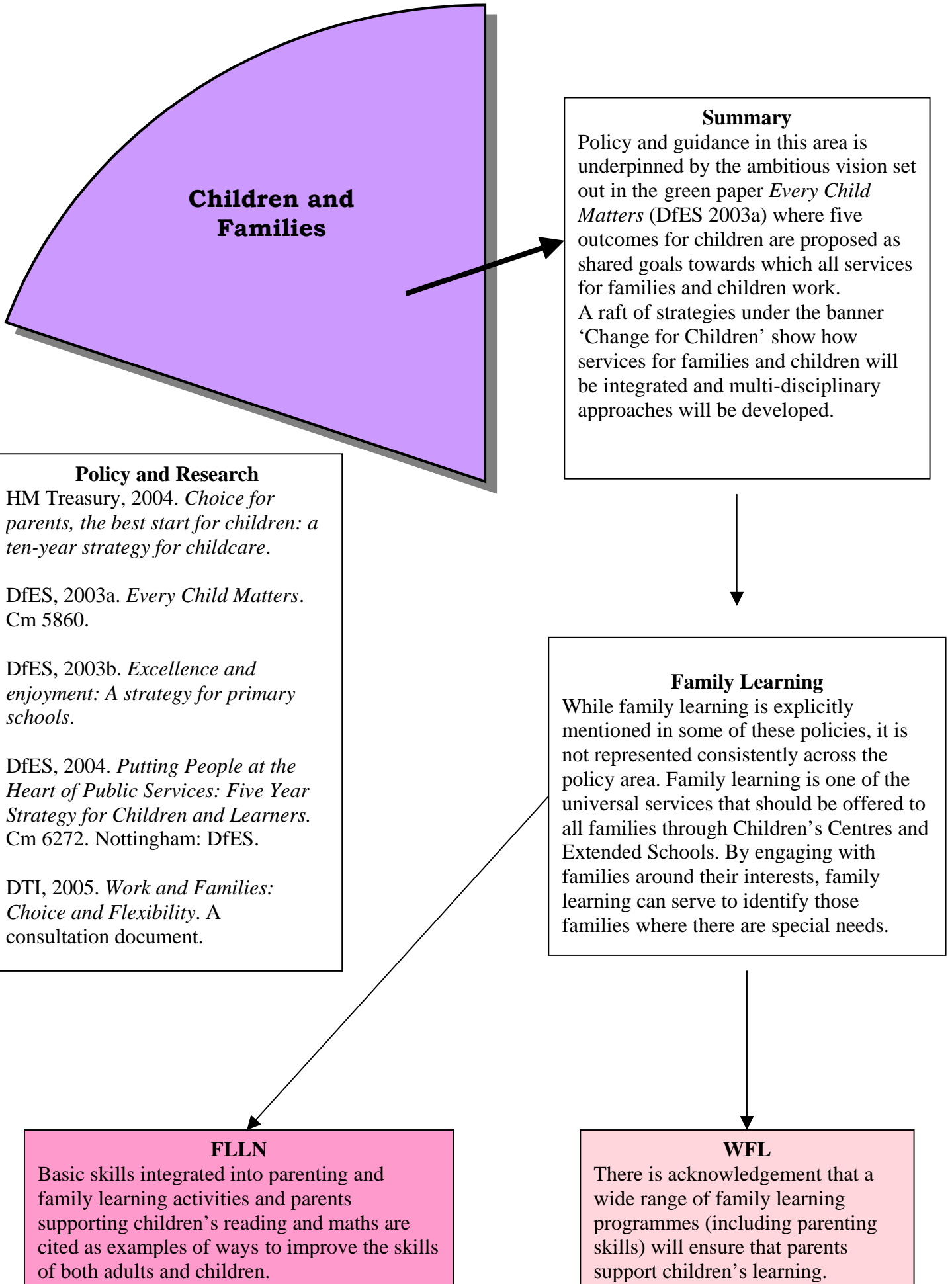
Department for Education and Schools, 2005b. *Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all*. Available at: [http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/8509/Extended-schools%20prospectus.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/8509/Extended-schools%20prospectus.pdf)

Wilkin, A., K. Kimder, R. White, M Atkinson, P. Doherty, 2003. *Towards the Development of Extended Schools*. DfES Research brief no. 408. Available at: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RB408.doc>

## **Questions**

1. Acknowledging the work of the DfES (2005a), what could FLLN contribute to extended schools?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to extended schools?
3. What family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. How will extended schools identify their target groups for family learning? How will they target families?
5. Given that parenting support is identified as a key service what do you see as the relationship between parenting support, family support and family learning?

# Children and Families



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Children and Families*

#### **Issues**

In this area, the focus often appears to be on parents requiring support as opposed to families. Family learning programmes are perceived as a means to ensure that parents support their children's learning and there is little sense that there is a place for adults to learn in their own right. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) is recognised as a powerful way for parents to support their children's learning but there is less recognition of Wider Family Learning (WFL).

While there is a detailed guide from the DfES showing the contribution of FLLN to Children's Centres, there is no similar guidance for WFL.

With moves towards integrated children's services it is not yet clear where family learning services fit in. A range of other services including health visitors is considered but not family learning.

#### **Documents Consulted**

Department for Education and Skills, 2003. *Every Child Matters*. Cm 5860. Nottingham: DfES.

Department for Education and Skills, 2003. *Excellence and enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools*.

Department for Education and Skills, 2004. *Putting People at the Heart of Public Services: Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*. Cm 6272. Nottingham: DfES. Available at:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/opsr/documents/pdf/educ.pdf>

DTI, 2005. *Work and Families: Choice and Flexibility*. A consultation document. Available at:

[http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/choice\\_flexibility\\_consultation.pdf](http://www.dti.gov.uk/er/choice_flexibility_consultation.pdf)

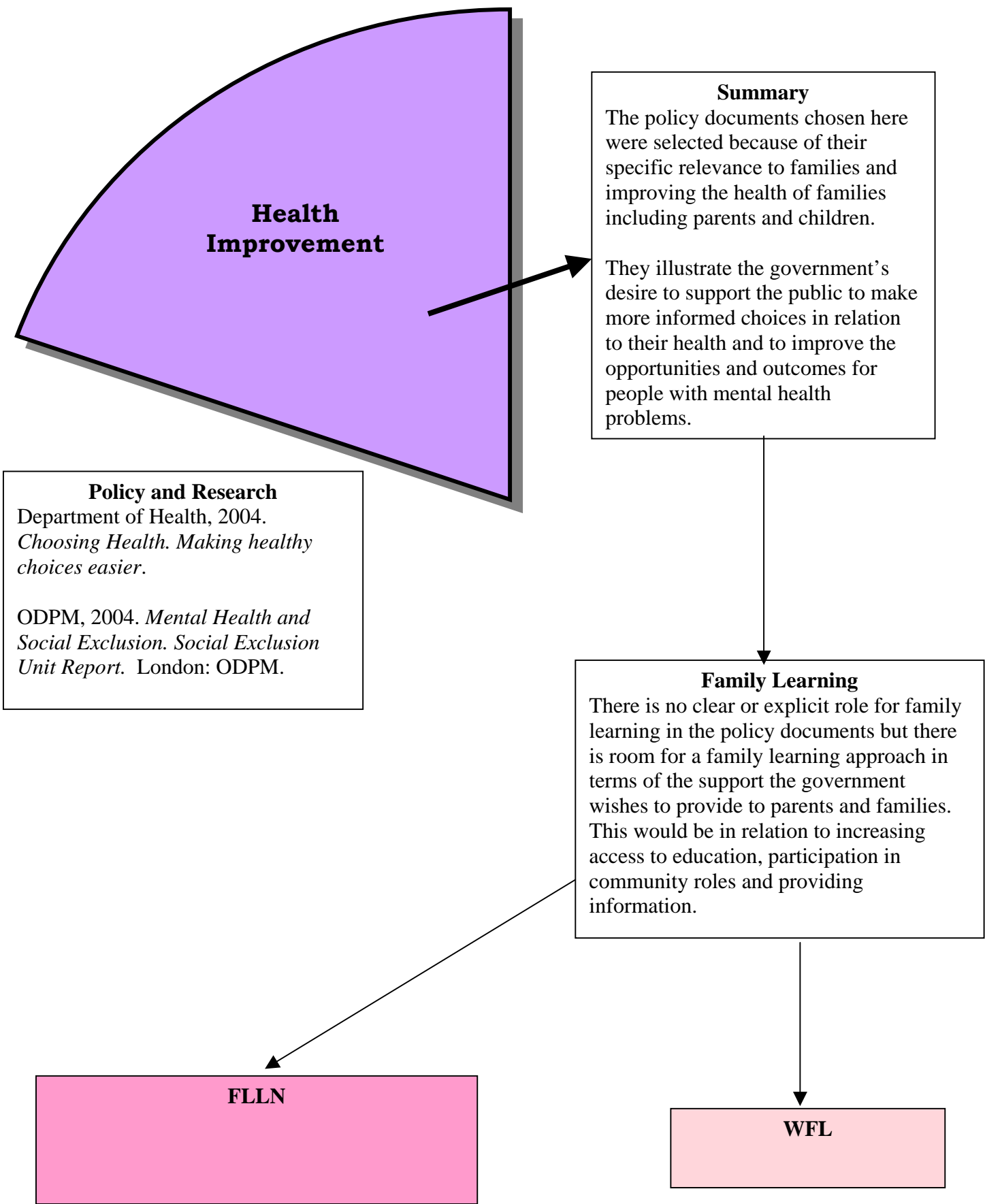
HM Treasury, 2004. *Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten-year strategy for childcare*. Available at:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare\\_480upd050105.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/426/F1/pbr04childcare_480upd050105.pdf)

## **Questions**

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to this policy area?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to this area?
3. What family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. How do we raise awareness of adult learning in its own right as a worthwhile outcome?
5. How can family learning services ensure that they are incorporated into the development of integrated services for children and families?

# Health Improvement



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Health Improvement*

#### **Issues**

Within the health policy area, families are viewed both as the context for children who require proactive intervention in relationship to their health and as a support mechanism for individuals experiencing mental health problems. The role of family learning as a useful way to engage adults on important issues relating to health is not discussed. Different types and forms of families are not therefore considered. Family members prioritised in this context are children and parents including lone parents. Other family members are not mentioned.

Family learning is not conceived of as an activity, which might support parents and children in making healthier choices or in supporting adults with mental health problems, yet there is a strong emphasis on parental and family support.

For adults with mental health problems it is acknowledged that there is sometimes a gulf between support for adults and support for children.

#### **Documents Consulted**

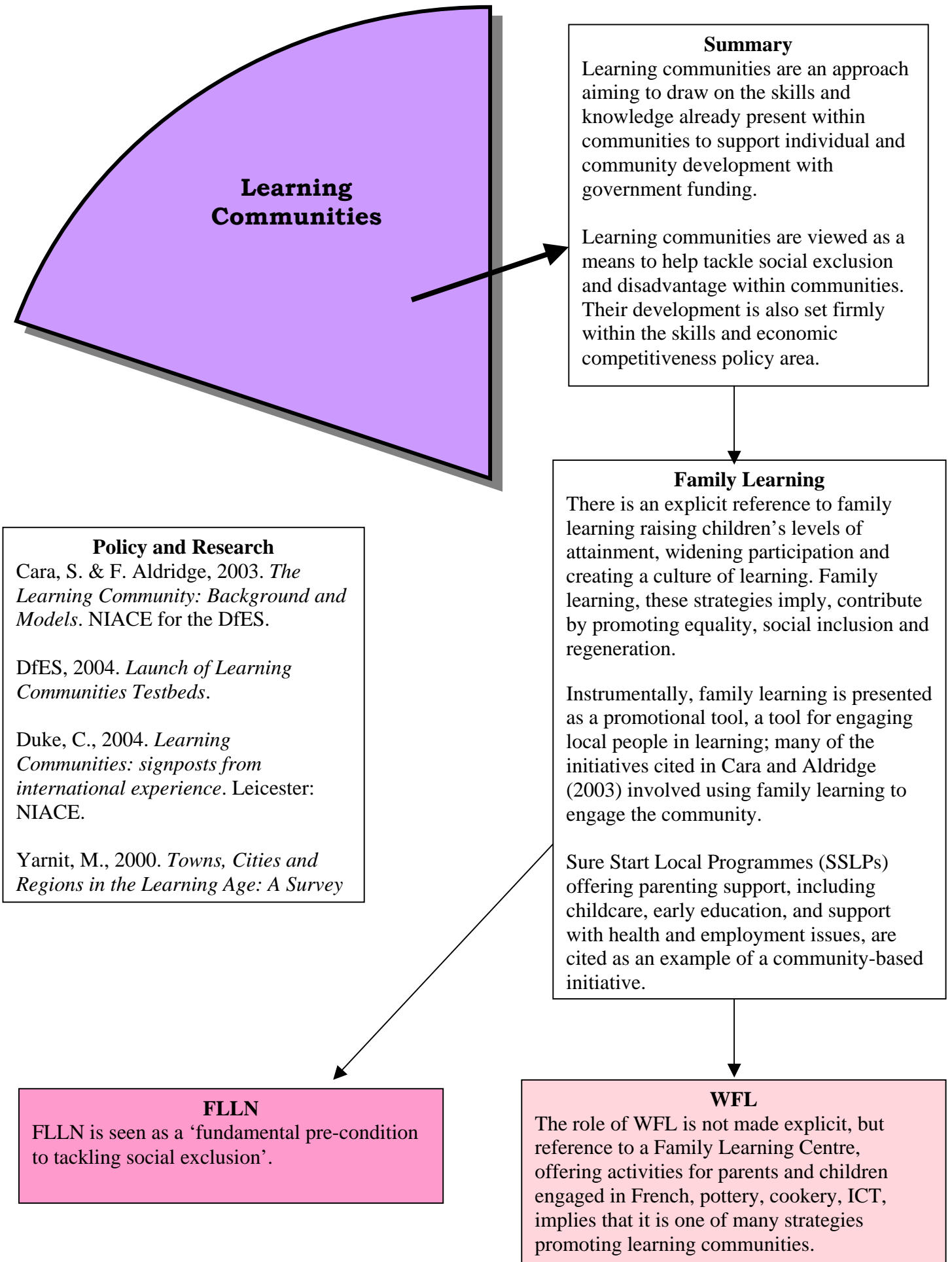
Department of Health, 2004. *Choosing Health. Making healthy choices easier*. DOH.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004. *Mental Health and Social Exclusion. Social Exclusion Unit Report*. London: ODPM.

## **Questions**

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to health improvement?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to health improvement?
3. What family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. How could a family learning approach bridge the gap between support for adults and support for children?

# Learning Communities



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Learning Communities*

#### **Issues**

There is a suggestion of a cyclical relationship between family learning and learning communities: learning communities stimulate family learning and vice versa. In this way, family learning can be seen to contribute to neighbourhood renewal objectives as learning communities are one approach designed to tackle social exclusion by drawing on the skills and knowledge within communities to support individual and community development.

In this area there is a perception that family learning is primarily a promotional tool, that is, a way to engage parents/carers in learning and community involvement in a non-threatening way.

#### **Documents Consulted**

Cara, S. & F. Aldridge, 2003. *The Learning Community: Background and Models*. NIACE for the DfES. Available at:

<http://www.gnlp.org.uk/area-learning/information/learning-communities>

Department for Education and Skills, 2004. *Launch of Learning Communities Testbeds*.

Duke, C., 2004. *Learning Communities: signposts from international experience*. Leicester: NIACE.

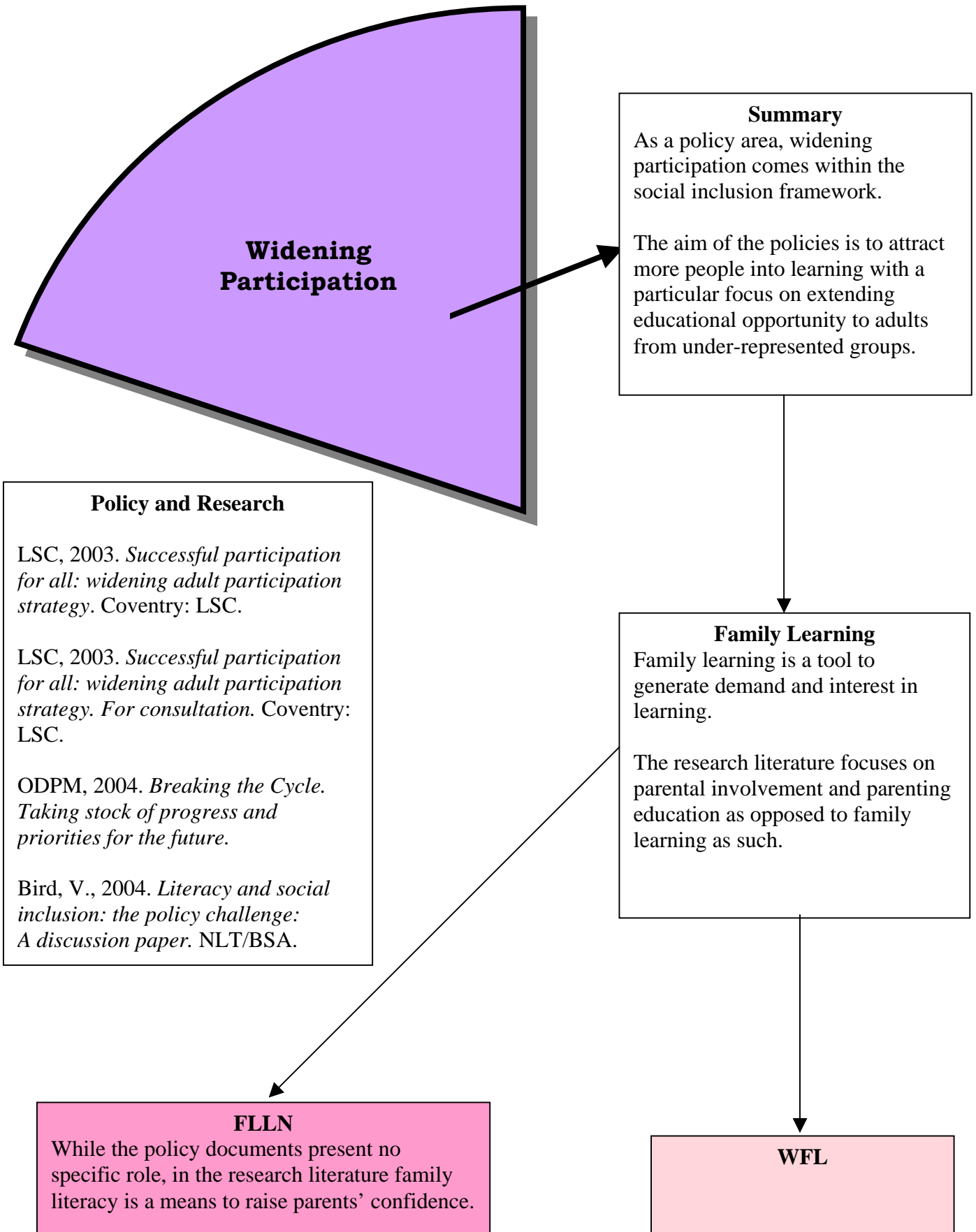
Flude, R. & A. Selby, 2003. *Learning Partnerships: Maximising the contribution of learning to local regeneration*. DfES and NIACE.

Yarnit, M., 2000. *Towns, Cities and Regions in the Learning Age: A Survey of Learning Communities*. London: LGA for DfEE. Available at: <http://www.ala.asn.au/learningcities/LGALearningLayout.pdf>

## **Questions**

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to learning communities?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to learning communities?
3. What family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. How can family learning have a more integral role in the development and success of learning communities?
5. How does family learning impact upon communities as a whole?

# Widening Participation



## Strategic Framework – Issues and Questions

### *Policy Area – Widening Participation*

#### **Issues**

The focus in widening participation is on those groups in society the government perceives are at risk of exclusion – in this instance, lone parents, which is expected since this strategy sits under a wider social inclusion umbrella. However, beyond this there is no conceptualisation of families. It is interesting that a contradictory vision of families emerges here as both distracting people from learning (in terms of the time and expenditure required when raising a family) and stimulating interest in learning.

Family learning is seen as a hook to engage adults in learning but is not really considered beyond this. The research claims that family literacy raises the confidence of adults and the Social Exclusion Unit sees FLLN as a driver.

The language and definition of terms present some confusion. There is a focus on parenting skills and positive parenting by the Social Exclusion Unit – how does this relate to family learning?

There are no learning outcomes for families within widening participation other than a general aim of engaging under-represented groups in learning.

#### **Documents Consulted**

Bird, V., 2004. *Literacy and social inclusion: the policy challenge: A discussion paper*. NLT/BSA. Available at:  
<http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/socialinclusion/policychallenge.doc>

Learning and Skills Council, 2003a. *Successful participation for all: widening adult participation strategy. For consultation*. Coventry: LSC.

Learning and Skills Council, 2003b. *Successful participation for all: widening adult participation strategy*. Coventry: LSC.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004. *Breaking the Cycle. Taking stock of progress and priorities for the future*. A report by the Social Exclusion Unit.  
<http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/downloaddoc.asp?id=262>

## **Questions**

1. Based upon your experiences, what could FLLN contribute to widening participation?
2. Based upon your experiences, what could WFL contribute to widening participation?
3. What family learning outcomes will support work in this area?
4. Once family learning engages families, what is it they are actually learning which is of benefit to widening participation?
5. How do parenting and parenting skills relate to FLLN and WFL?