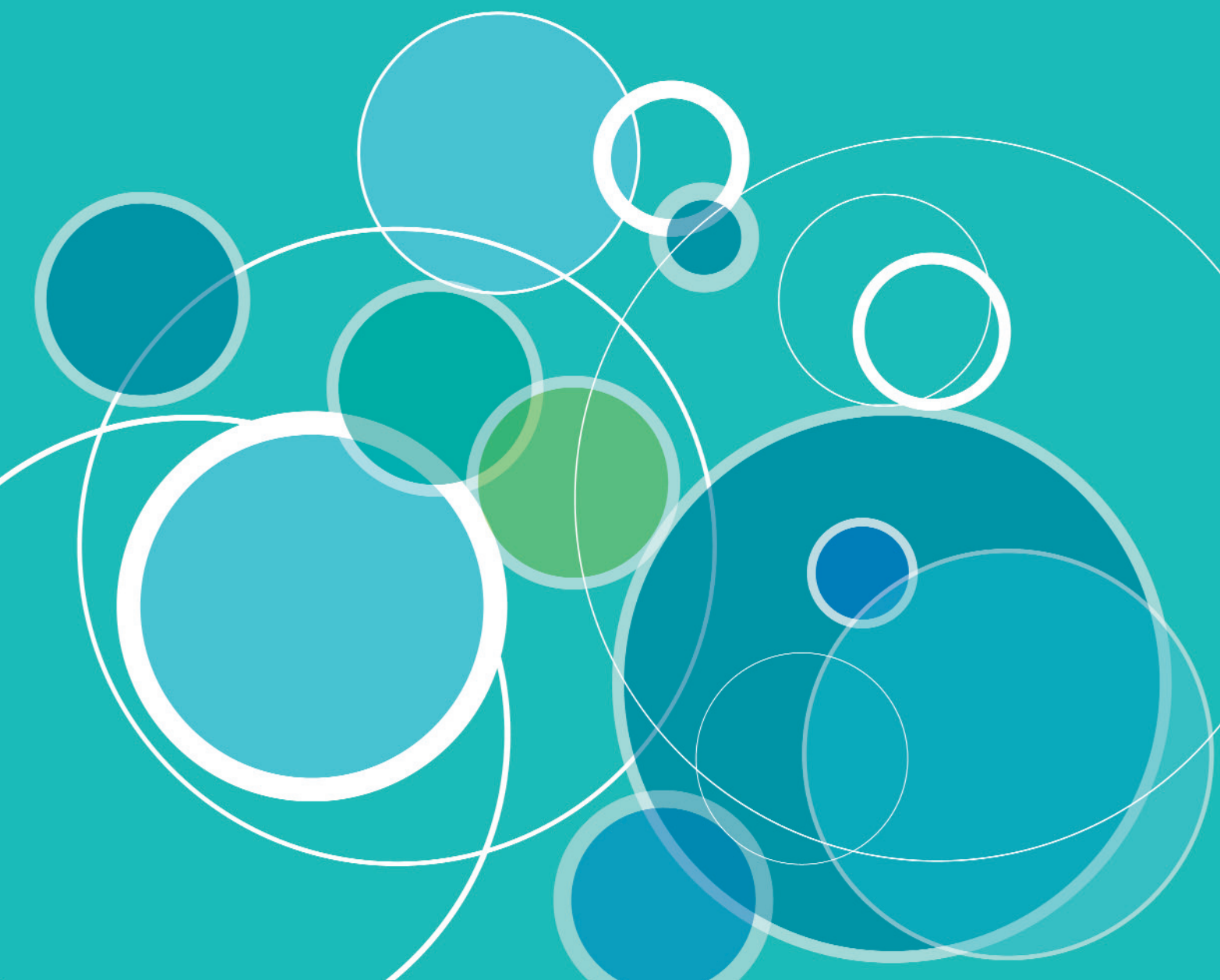


Linking the thinking in family learning

Embedding family learning
across policy areas

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NIACE has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

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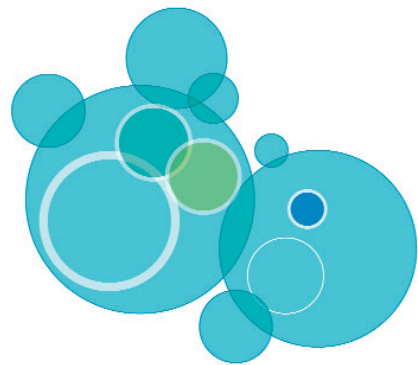


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Project summary

Synopsis

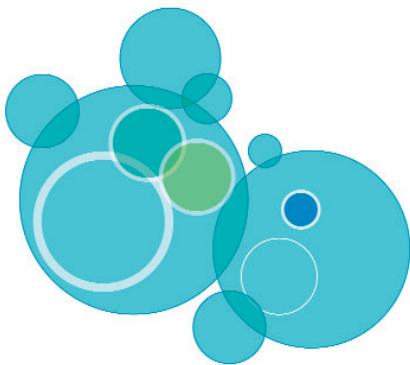
Research commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and carried out by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) examined the role of family learning in government policies across government departments and recommended ways of enhancing the linkages across policy areas.

The research considered 'family learning' to include activities where adults and children are learning together and where there are clear learning outcomes for both. The term used for the purposes of the research was synonymous with the term 'family programmes' as used by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The research, furthermore, adopted the terminology for subsets of family learning from that introduced by the LSC in its guidance for the funding of family programmes. The term 'family literacy, language and numeracy' was used to refer to programmes where the main aim of the programme was the development of literacy, language and numeracy skills, while the term 'wider family learning' was used to refer to programmes where the main aim of the programme was not the development of literacy, language and numeracy, although these skills may have been embedded in other programme activities.

Practitioners and stakeholders were invited to contribute their views at regional events held in late 2005. A report was submitted to the DfES in March 2006 with recommendations with implications for partners and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. Recommendations included actions intended to secure greater understanding, stronger commitment and practical support for family learning. A set of policy briefings in a number of policy areas relating to children, parents and families was developed, summarising the evidence for the contribution of family learning in a number of key policy areas. Finally, this project summary was prepared to provide feedback to managers and practitioners who had contributed their views and stakeholders with an interest in the development of family learning.

Background

Government policies in relation to children, parents and families are part of a vision for a socially inclusive and prosperous society. A large number of policy areas and government initiatives impact upon children, parents and families, including those policies that are explicitly aimed at children and families. Family learning, which today is a varied field of practice developed through a rich history of work in home-school initiatives, parenting, personal development, and community learning, and adult literacy, language and numeracy, has an important role to play in realising the government's vision.



The research built upon an earlier study, *Family learning funding: a scoping study* (NIACE, 2005) which surveyed the range of funding sources for family learning and analysed the impact of existing funding arrangements on delivery.

Following the scoping study, the DfES asked NIACE to undertake further research to analyse further the case for embedding family learning and to determine how best to achieve greater coherence in securing quality family learning across a range of policy areas and priorities, including emerging priorities on parenting, children and families. In commissioning the research, the DfES wished to consult expert practitioners and other stakeholders in family learning to ensure that the research contributed to development in the field and also that the findings represented the views of practitioners.

Aims

The aims of the project were to:

1. demonstrate the contribution of family learning to policy areas across government;
2. identify opportunities for making links across policy areas;
3. identify ways of bringing greater coherence to the provision of family learning.

The research was undertaken by staff with family learning expertise in NIACE's Community Learning Team between August 2005 and February 2006.

Methods

The methods chosen enabled the team to pull together a wide range of material in the public policy domain for consultation with practitioners and stakeholders. Methods included:

1. a comprehensive literature review of family learning across policy areas, providing the material for a discussion document, *A framework for the engagement of family learning with key government strategies*;
2. a series of regional events inviting practitioners to address the discussion document;
3. circulation of the discussion document through professional networks and professional events, inviting feedback;
4. interviews with key personnel in relevant policy areas.

Findings

1. The diversity of funding sources and family learning initiatives is a product of the long and innovative tradition of work with families in a wide range of social policy areas, including literacy, language and numeracy, adult education, schooling, early years, youth justice, and social inclusion. While the multiplicity of terms linked to learning for families is the inevitable consequence of this



6 Linking the thinking in family learning

varied historical development, it does leave the terms open to interpretation unless the meaning and the content are made clear.

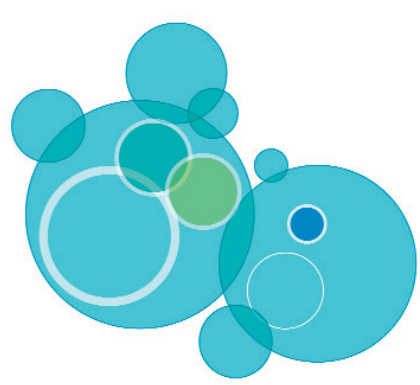
2. The rationale for developing a national family learning strategy to sit alongside and support existing strategies for children, parents and families is that it would articulate the value of family learning as an end in itself and not merely as a vehicle for achieving other policy objectives. Further, a national family learning strategy would show the links that could be made between family learning approaches across policy areas.
3. While many family learning managers are mapping their provision for the five outcomes for children, and related outcomes for families and parents, there is scope for extending this approach to include outcomes in other policy areas, thereby creating an inclusive framework of family learning outcomes.
4. There is scope for building further on the achievements of the Skills for Life Strategy Unit and the Skills for Families initiative (2003–05) in embedding family learning. The status of wider family learning provision, in particular, could be enhanced by linking it explicitly to, for example, health, financial education citizenship and parenting policies.
5. While the growth of family learning provision in new settings and with a range of new partners is welcomed, practitioners feel that an accessible set of guidelines for effective practice, to support existing quality frameworks, would be useful in promoting quality improvement irrespective of setting, provider or programme.
6. The evidence base for the impact of family learning is strong, with benefits for the learning of adults and children, as well as other benefits including, for example, health, well-being, civic engagement and employability.
7. The evidence base for the contribution of family learning to the achievement of the government's Public Service Agreement targets is getting stronger, drawing upon academic research, reports from the inspectorates and practitioner accounts.
8. Areas where the evidence is thin are: research that looks at children's and adults' learning outcomes in one piece, and research on the contribution of family learning to tackling obesity and to increasing the uptake of opportunities in sports and cultural activities.

The policy briefings

The evidence on the contribution of family learning to the government's Public Service Agreement targets was felt to warrant publication for a wider audience. This material has been drawn together into a set of policy briefings for use by managers and practitioners in family learning and policy makers in areas relating to children, parents and families. These briefings are included in a pack with this summary.

Policy makers will find the evidence on family learning in their particular policy area useful in understanding the role that family learning plays. They may also welcome the opportunity to see family learning in their policy area in relation to other provision in other policy areas, encouraging links across areas.

Family learning managers and practitioners will find the policy briefings on the contribution of family learning to government policy areas useful in making a strong case for family learning services to elected members, local LSCs and



partners. The comprehensive range of policy briefings included will provide a useful tool in scanning the policy environment and making links between policy areas.

The way forward

Based on the research findings, NIACE has separately made a number of recommendations for consideration by the DfES intended to make links where possible and to improve the coherence of family learning across government policy areas. The recommendations were aimed at partners and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels. Recommendations included actions that would secure greater understanding, stronger commitment and practical support for family learning.

Further reading

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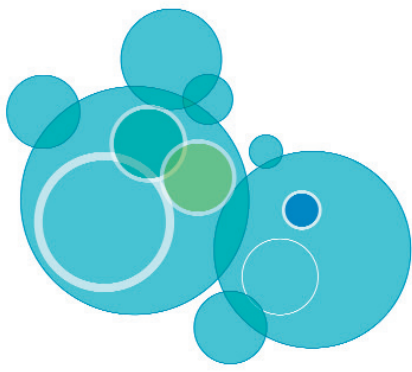
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8 Linking the thinking in family learning

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Further information

For further information on the project, contact the Community Learning Team at NIACE, 0116 204 2400.