

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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The Building Blocks of Quality in Family Learning

Abstract

In 2005 the Learning and Skills Council asked NIACE to consult with stakeholders and practitioners to develop a consensus about 'the building blocks of quality' in family learning. Family learning involves learning activities where children and parents, including all those people who act in a parenting role, learn jointly, and where there are clear learning outcomes for both children and parents. The challenge of improving quality is important, to ensure that the learning and teaching for both adults and children are quality experiences. Government policies and initiatives have encouraged the growth of family learning in a wider range of settings, for example, extended schools, children's centres, workplaces and prisons.

The Building Blocks of Quality initiative sought, through research and consultation, to stimulate debate and create a consensus as to what constitutes good quality in family learning. The objectives were to:

- ❖ Stimulate a national discussion, drawing upon practitioner expertise.
- ❖ Identify the features of good practice irrespective of setting, programme and provider.
- ❖ Develop a model and materials flexible enough to be used by a range of users and in a wide range of settings.
- ❖ Ensure a good fit with existing quality frameworks and guidance, while placing no additional burden on practitioners in using the materials

Research methodology:

NIACE was guided by a Steering Group that included representatives from the LSC, DfES and ALI (Adult Learning Inspectorate). From the DfES, both the Skills for Life Strategy Unit and the Skills and Social Inclusion Unit were involved in the project. NIACE was also advised by the Family Education Service of Cheshire County Council, whose approach to developing a set of standards and kitemark was well advanced and respected by colleagues in other services.

After an initial survey of quality frameworks and guidance in specific settings, NIACE developed a consultation document entitled *The Building Blocks of Quality in Family Learning*. During October and November 2005, a number of regional events for practitioners were held to discuss good practice and comment on the materials. At the same time, we disseminated the document through e-networks, inviting responses. In all, we received over 160 individual responses, and a small number of group responses, to the document. Following an analysis of comments from the consultation, the materials were significantly revised taking into account the views of practitioners, the Steering Group and other interested stakeholders.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

The Building Blocks of Quality materials were developed to support existing frameworks. The LSC does not require providers to take account of the materials, but rather, wishes to see the guidelines incorporated voluntarily into existing quality-improvement strategies. In particular, the LSC hopes that they will support new partners or provision in new settings. The materials are deliberately kept simple so that they do not create an additional burden on organisations, service managers or practitioners. In addition, Part 4, 'Interpreting the building blocks for your setting' and Part 5, 'Embedding the building blocks in practice' show how to use the materials alongside existing quality improvement strategies.

The Building Blocks of Quality can be used to:

- ❖ Review practice against commonly recognised criteria;
- ❖ Underpin staff development and training;
- ❖ Use with partners who are new to family learning;
- ❖ Use in discussions with the ALI, OFSTED and local LSC;
- ❖ Demonstrate commitment to good practice and continuous improvement.

The building blocks describe the essential elements of good practice wherever family learning is offered, irrespective of setting, programme or provider. They are grouped in five sets of descriptors, covering:

- ❖ Learning and teaching;
- ❖ Curriculum development and planning;
- ❖ Working in partnership;
- ❖ Leadership, management and organisation;
- ❖ Continuous improvement.

The building blocks apply to all types of family learning. Where there are additional guidelines, standards or criteria relating to family literacy, language and numeracy, they are shown.

Recommendations

- ❖ The five building blocks, with their descriptors, in *The Building Blocks of Good Practice in Family Learning* drew on the work of Cheshire's Family Education Service. Cheshire's good practice in the development of local standards and a kitemark is described in the case study.

Output

- ❖ Haggart, J. & R. Spacey, 2006. *The Building Blocks of Quality in Family Learning: Guidance for planners, managers and practitioners*. Leicester: NIACE.
- ❖ Also available at: <http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family/buildingblocks.pdf>

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