

# NIACE Research and Development



## Key Findings



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## Towards a Strategic Framework for Family Learning

### Abstract

This project examined the role of family learning in government policies across government departments and recommended ways of enhancing the linkages across policy areas.

Practitioners and stakeholders were invited to contribute their views at regional events held in late 2005, responding to a consultation document entitled, *A Framework for the Engagement of Family Learning with Key Government Policies* (NIACE 2005).

A resource for practitioners and managers was subsequently produced which included Policy Briefings organised by government department which set out the contribution of family learning in achieving a number of Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. There are presently 110 PSA targets across government. The *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* agenda's five outcomes for children and families are reflected in the newer PSAs of 2004.

### Research methodology:

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:

- ❖ A comprehensive literature review of family learning across policy areas, providing the material for the discussion document;
- ❖ A series of regional events inviting practitioners to address the discussion document;
- ❖ Circulation of the discussion document through professional networks and professional events, inviting feedback;
- ❖ Interviews with key personnel in relevant policy areas.

### Key Findings

#### The main conclusions of the project are:

- ❖ 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 varied historical development, it does leave the terms open to interpretation unless the meaning and the context is made clear.

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ While many family learning managers are mapping their provision to 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.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ 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.

## Recommendations

- ❖ 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.

## Output

- ❖ NIACE (2006) *Linking the Thinking in Family Learning: Embedding Family Learning Across Policy Areas*. Leicester: NIACE.

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