

Family learning for every child and every parent

FIVE ASKS FOR GOVERNMENT



February 2024



Family learning matters.

It matters because families need opportunities to learn, to try something different, to ask questions and develop skills, to explore new horizons.

Family learning matters because it engages parents and carers in their children's learning, supporting educational achievement. It matters because it engages parents and carers in their own learning, creating a first step and progression into adult learning and training.

Family learning matters because it supports literacy, language, and numeracy. It promotes health and wellbeing and understanding across the curriculum from science through financial education to parenting.

That's why we need every child and parent to have access to family learning. That's why family learning needs to be free for every parent and child wherever they live.

That's why we need to rebuild family learning in England and elevate it from an invisible funding stream within adult skills to a fully sustainable system, so that every child and parent can benefit everywhere.

These five asks represent an agenda for change and a plan for long term reform to develop family learning.

FIVE ASKS FOR GOVERNMENT

To build a sustainable system where every child and parent can benefit from family learning, we ask the government to:

1

Create a single national ring-fenced family learning budget from the existing funding in the Adult Education Budget and an extra £75m from the Treasury, managed by the Department for Education and devolved to local authorities

2

Introduce a statutory entitlement to 15 hours fully funded family learning for parents and carers of each child aged nine months to four years and subsequently extended to children aged nine months to 10 years

3

Integrate family learning into the work of family support services including Family Hubs, Children Centres, and Family and Health Services

4

Embed the value of family learning into the workforce development of the education sector in England including early learning, childcare, teaching, adult education and family support

5

Allow parents to become eligible for 30 hours of state funded childcare when they participate in family learning, and/or training and retraining

What is family learning?

Family learning is learning activity that involves both children and adult family members and where learning and development outcomes are intended for both the child and the adult.

In practice, family learning can be specifically designed to enable parents, carers and children to learn together, or parents and carers to learn how to support learning within their family, including how to support their children's learning and development from early years through to further education.

Family learning courses and activities take place in community settings including schools, nurseries, libraries and local adult education centres, and online. Presently, it is funded from multiple funding streams.



Why family learning?

Family learning courses and activities deliver a wide range of positive outcomes.¹ They support family literacy, language and numeracy. They support wider learning outcomes including family health and wellbeing, science learning, financial education, and parenting skills.

Family learning builds parents' and carers' capacity, opportunity and skills to better support their children's learning and development.

The early years are critical in shaping children's life chances based on evidence of brain formation, communication and language development, and the impact of relationships on children's social and emotional development and subsequent mental health. It is a golden moment for parents when they understand that their child is developing and when they themselves can be motivated to consider their own personal development.

Parental engagement approaches such as family learning have a positive impact on children's learning. It can add about four more months' progress to children's education over a year and higher impacts for pupils with low prior attainment.²

Family learning can enhance school-home communication and increase parental engagement and participation with school.³ It has also been shown to improve school attendance and reduce persistent absenteeism.⁴

The desire to have the best outcomes for their children, means that parents and carers will often overcome their own barriers to learning to take part in family learning courses and activities. By taking part, family learning can build parents' and carers' own confidence, providing a vital first step back into learning and skills development for adults and ultimately progression into work, especially for those who are under-resourced, economically inactive and who may be far from the labour market.

Family learning also promotes improved family communication and wellbeing. By building a learning culture in the family, family learning can help families overcome intergenerational barriers and provide a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

1. [Learning and Work Institute](#)

2. [Education Endowment Foundation](#)

3. [Mackenzie \(2010\)](#)

4. [Education Scotland](#)

Decline of a great service

In 2008/09, around 130,000 adults were benefiting from publicly funded family learning in England through the former Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Learning and Skills Council. The cost was £47m.

Today, just under 50,000 people participate in family learning - 'Wider family learning' and 'Family learning English, Maths and language' - funded through the Adult Education Budget (AEB) administered by the Department for Education (DfE). Although the amount spent on family learning through this budget stream is uncertain, it is likely to be less than £47m.

Of course, whilst the delivery of family learning has changed and what might be termed family learning has evolved, we need to address this decline and restore the position of family learning in family and education policy.

But the challenge is to go beyond where family learning had reached nearly two decades ago to a situation where every child and every parent can benefit.

Our vision

Our vision is a simple one: we want every child and every parent in England to have an opportunity to take part in short and engaging family learning activities as well as longer and more substantial family learning courses that improve educational and wellbeing outcomes.

Creating a system change for family learning

So that every child and every parent can benefit from family learning, we need a systems change. Our five asks:

- raise the visibility of family learning as a valuable public policy;
- bring together parental engagement and adult education into a unified and simplified policy approach to family learning;
- mutually reinforce each other;
- deliver long-term reform, and
- seek to be affordable in these fiscally constrained times.

Funding a system change

We appreciate that the cost of ensuring family learning is available to every parent and child across England must be achieved through sensible levels of extra public spending and the bringing together of existing funding for this provision.

There are two elements to the required increase in public spending.

The first is the restoration in real terms of ring-fenced public spending on family learning to 2008/09 levels to extend the funding of 'Wider family learning' and 'Family English, Maths and language'. This is equivalent to an **extra £75m** per year for family learning.

The second is a statutory entitlement to family learning initially for children aged from nine months to four years. Our best estimate is that this might cost an **extra £300m** in today's terms if introduced in 2029.

Together, the funding package required could be an extra £375m per year.

Overall, however, the scale of public investment would be in excess of £375m per year. This is because our asks assume the transfer of existing funding for family learning within the Adult Education Budget into a Combined Family Learning Budget (CLB). At the same time, sources of funding for family learning from other government departments would also be transferred into the CLB.

This level of support represents a step-change in resources devoted to the critical area of family learning compared to where we are today.

Ask 1

Create a single national ring-fenced family learning budget from the existing funding in the Adult Education Budget and an extra £75m from the Treasury, managed by the Department for Education and devolved to local authorities

To move to a system where family learning is available to every parent and child in England will require a simplified and unified funding approach, with appropriate national and local levels of accountability and coordination. By pooling and increasing resources for family learning, we can support the learning of children and adults, including improving the literacy and numeracy of children, parents and carers.

We ask for the creation of a single national ring-fenced family learning budget. It would be made up of the existing funding for family learning on 'Wider family learning' and 'Family English, Maths and language' within the Adult Education Budget, and additional funding of £75m per year (rising annually in line with inflation). In 2008/09, spending on family learning was £47m. To restore spending in line with CPI inflation funding would need to be around £75m (although potentially slightly less if GDP deflators are used). The extra £75m from the Treasury and the transfer of funding within the AEB would more than restore funding at levels of a decade and a half ago.

This budget should be devolved to local authorities responsible for pre-16 education and childcare from nine months to 14 years. In areas with combined authorities and borough councils, responsibility for the budget would be determined by elected regional and local leaders.

Local authorities would use this funding for longer family courses, and under-resourced and low-income parents, carers and children who might need additional help above the statutory entitlement.

Designated authorities should be responsible for family learning strategies that map and coordinate different types of educational institutions, providers and family learning provision. Authorities would provide parents and carers with information, advice and guidance about careers, including in the childcare and education sector, and training opportunities to gain relevant qualifications.

A duty should be placed on local authorities to report each year on how much they are spending on family learning. Longer term, existing resources for family learning in other departments, including the Department for Housing and Levelling Up and the Department for Health and Social Care, should be pooled into the Combined Family Learning Budget.

These reforms would give local authorities an opportunity to co-ordinate more closely pre-16 education and pre-14 childcare, family support and family learning in their local area. Local authorities would be expected to fund flexible accredited and non-accredited family learning that supports the learning of children and adults, and any central guidelines would allow for this.

Ask 2

Introduce a statutory entitlement to 15 hours fully funded family learning for parents and carers of each child aged nine months to four years and subsequently extended to children aged nine months to 10 years

To enable the maximum number of children, parents and carers to benefit from family learning requires the next government to introduce a statutory entitlement.

We ask for a new statutory entitlement to 15 hours of funded family learning so that every child and every parent can benefit from short activities and courses. This entitlement would place family learning on par with entitlements to fully funded adult education and entitlements to state funded childcare. It represents a radical and long-term reform of family learning. The statutory entitlement will take two full parliaments to implement to age 10 and three full parliaments to implement to age 14.

We propose that each child has an entitlement to a total of 15 hours of family learning from age nine months until they reach the age of four. Parents with two children would have an entitlement to 30 hours of free family learning.

If the statutory entitlement were to be introduced for all children aged nine months to age four in 2029, around 2.7m children in England would be eligible. For illustrative purposes, we estimate the maximum cost of the entitlement would be around £302m. This is based on 15 hours for each child at an hourly rate of £7.47 (equivalent to the AEB funding rate for small provision including 'low' programme rating but excluding area cost and disadvantage uplift). *However, a new system of family learning will require its own funding rate and should be consulted on with the sector by the government.*

At the same time, the Treasury would want to model the likely take-up of the statutory entitlement and work with the DfE to assess the benefits of its introduction by starting with children aged nine months to one year old in 2026 and extending to two-year-olds in 2027 and so on. Funding for the statutory entitlement would be devolved to local authorities to their Combined Family Learning Budget.

Between the end of the first full parliament - sometime around 2029 - and the end of a second full parliament - sometime around 2034 - the entitlement should be extended to children aged 5-10. Extension of the entitlement would be subject to decisions in subsequent spending reviews.

Access to family learning should mirror access to childcare. And so, the long-term aim should be to have in place a statutory entitlement to family learning for children aged nine months to 14 years by the end of the 2030s.

Ask 3

Integrate family learning into the work of family support services including Family Hubs, Children Centres, and Family and Health Services

To promote, encourage and facilitate access to family learning as part of a bigger and better family learning system, all family support services should include family learning in their strategies and activities including Family Hubs, existing Children Centres, Mother and Baby Units, perinatal mental health and parent infant services.

We ask DfE to work with local authorities to foster strong collaboration between early years providers, family and health service units, family learning providers and adult education providers, FE colleges and independent training providers.

This collaboration will be critical for promoting family learning to parents and the efficient delivery of the family learning entitlement, and fostering links that support the progression of parents and carers into adult learning. Local authorities should work closely with adult education centres to meet the anticipated extra demand for family learning.

Local authorities should conduct an audit of current and future family learning providers in their areas. Given fiscal constraints on capital spending, it will be imperative to utilise existing physical centres to deliver family learning. With a fall in the number of 5-9 year olds forecasted between 2024 and 2029, school classrooms should be considered as centres to deliver family learning, alongside other delivery modes such as online learning.

Ask 4

Embed the value of family learning into the workforce development of the education sector in England including early learning, childcare, teaching, adult education and family support

To create a sustainable and comprehensive system of family learning in England, the value of family learning needs to be embedded across the education and family support workforce so that professionals understand its dual role in driving parental engagement in children's learning and the development of parents and carers' own learning and skills.

We ask national and local government to promote family learning to all professionals involved directly or indirectly with children and families.

The Department for Education and local authorities should promote family learning to early learning practitioners and teachers as a way of engaging parents and carers in their children's learning. They should be supported to work in equal partnership with parents and carers.

The DfE and local authorities should also promote family learning to lecturers and tutors in adult education as a way of engaging parents and carers to develop their own learning.

Modules on parental partnership in children's learning and parental development should be incorporated into the training of professionals who are involved directly or indirectly in family learning including and especially teachers.

To embed and promote family learning further, it should be incorporated within the current and future inspection and assessment frameworks applied to schools, colleges, independent training providers, and childcare and family support providers.

Critically, DfE and local authorities need to plan to expand the family learning workforce to meet an expected demand from a statutory entitlement and an increase in core funding.

Ask 5

Allow parents to become eligible for 30 hours of state funded childcare when they participate in family learning and/or training and retraining

To ensure parents have time to benefit from family learning and move into training and retraining, a closer link between family learning and childcare needs to be established. This would allow parents to use the time when their children are in childcare to strengthen their families – including through family learning – and find employment, including in the early education and childcare workforce.

We ask for the 30 hours of funded childcare for working parents to be extended to out of work and low paid parents who participate in family learning, training and retraining.

Participation in family learning, training and retraining can help parents find good jobs and progress into work. By counting this activity as equivalent to employment, out of work and low paid parents would become eligible for 30 hours of free childcare per week and continue to receive out-of-work and in-work benefits whilst learning.

Family learning would continue to be fully funded and supported from the proposed Combined Family Learning Budget that is devolved to local authorities.

Parents participating in family learning – for example, parenting classes, tasters, and family literacy, numeracy and IT courses – should be entitled to 30 hours childcare per week and also when they progress into adult further education. When progressing into further and higher education, the funding of this provision and access to financial support would be from mainstream funding.

The policy would need to be designed so that training is linked to learning progression or finding employment, and is not used to only secure childcare.

Supporters



The working group

The overall aims for family learning policy in England and each of the five asks for the next government were developed by a working group meeting between December 2023 and February 2024. The group was facilitated and coordinated by Campaign for Learning. Members of the working group would wish of course to work with ministers and officials on the detail for building a sustainable family learning system throughout the rest of the 2020s and the 2030s.

Coordinated by Campaign for Learning

Campaign for Learning works for social and economic inclusion through learning. In 2020, it became an independently managed organisation in the NCFE charity.