

# **Parents, Children and Adult Learning**

## **Family Learning Policy in the 2020s**

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# Introduction

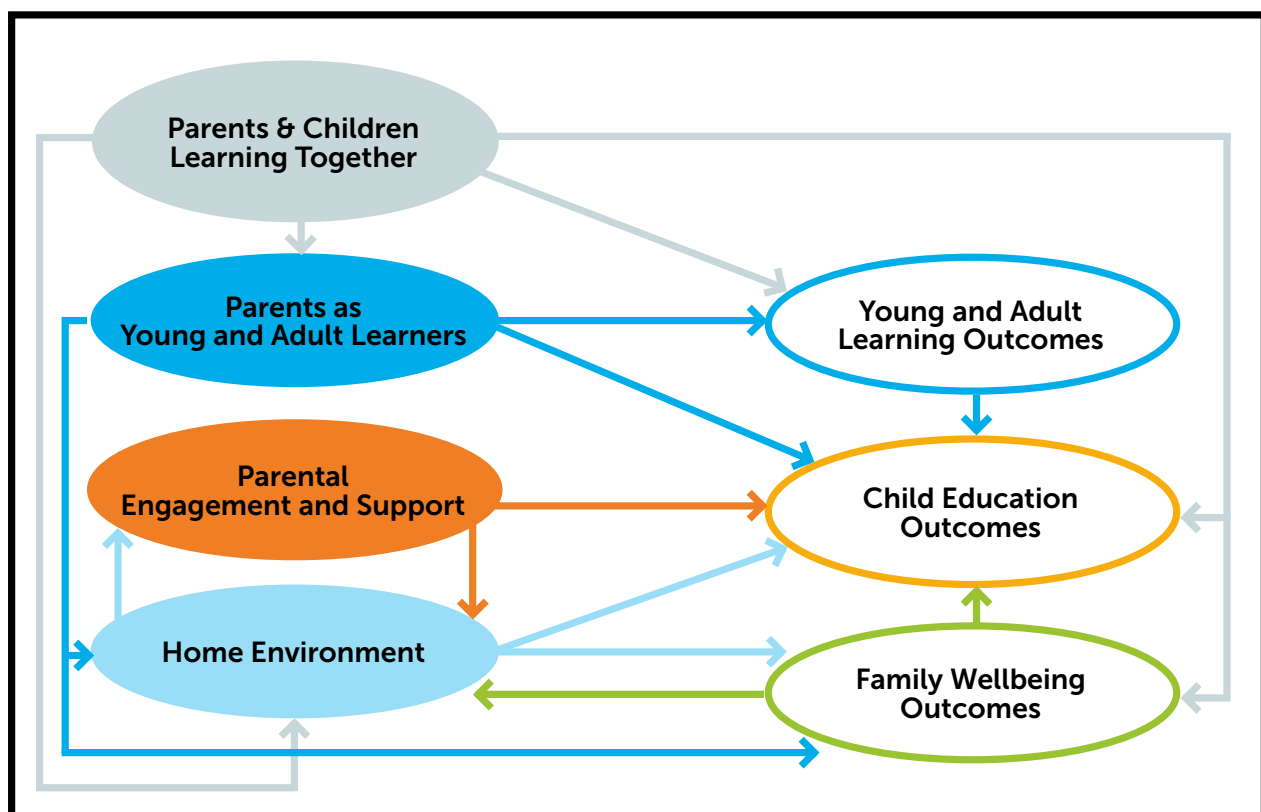
There is a diverse range of policy and practice perspectives with regard to parents, children and adult learning. From an education perspective, the direct links and feedback loops are multivarious and powerful. To fully appreciate the world of families and learning, we need to map these, so that policy makers can understand and maximise the benefits and come to a policy definition of what is meant by family learning.

## Mapping the links

### *Parental Engagement and Support*

The starting point is parental engagement. Parental engagement in the education of children can improve education outcomes and social mobility. All too often, however, it is parents from middle to higher income households who automatically help their children with their education. As a consequence, well designed support is required to enable parents from lower income households to engage in the educational outcomes of their children (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: Families and Learning - Mapping the Links



### *Home Environment, Parental Engagement and Family Wellbeing*

Linked to parental engagement and support is the wider question of the home environment in terms of where children live, which for some is not necessarily the parental home. A bedroom of your own, a quiet place to study and access to online technology, as well as a safe and secure place to live, each assist in making home study happen - with and without parental engagement – and improving educational outcomes of children.

Home study and education at home is clearly dependent on the physical and technological quality of where children live. It is easier to study in a four-bedroom house than bed and breakfast accommodation. And, of course, the size and quality of housing is dependent upon parental income. Improving the home environment from a physical and technological perspective raises wider questions of tackling child poverty and the cost of living crisis on low income families.

Certainly, a safe and secure home environment with physical and technological amenities is an important contributor to family wellbeing. By the same token, parents can enrich their home learning environments in any context through simple home learning activities and discussions. Policy interventions which seek to improve family wellbeing through learning – including parenting classes, joint activities between parents and children, and tackling child poverty – can indirectly improve the motivation of children to do well in compulsory education.

### *Adult Learning, Child Education Outcomes and Family Wellbeing*

Parents can be learners and most will be adult learners. The most direct benefit of adult learning to parents is in terms of their own skills and qualifications. In some instances, this might lead to skills and qualifications which lead to a job including employment in the areas of child education and family wellbeing.

But there are other potential indirect benefits. Parents who enroll on adult numeracy and literacy courses can pass on their new-found confidence to their children, potentially improving child education outcomes and family wellbeing. And if a parent achieves a qualification in numeracy and literacy, parental achievement can also encourage children to do well in these core subjects.

### *Parents and Children Learning Together*

Finally, parents and children can learn together. Parents and their children can learn together at home, in designated facilities such as Family Hubs and Children's Centres, or informal settings e.g. cultural spaces, libraries and outdoor spaces. Again, poorer parents are more likely to need and benefit from accessing non-home learning centres.

By learning with their children, parents might become better at communicating with their children and parenting which in turn improves family wellbeing. Parents can also learn from their children, giving children confidence in their own abilities and giving parents the inspiration that they too can learn for their own benefit. Equally, parents can positively influence their children to improve education motivation and potentially instill a belief in lifelong learning. To support their children, parents can be motivated to take their first steps back into learning, becoming adult learners and going on to improve their own skills and qualifications.

## **Defining Family Learning**

Mapping the links between parents, children and adult learning also helps to define what we mean by family learning. On the one hand, family learning could be defined as everything system-wide, spanning parental engagement, child education outcomes and adult learning (Diagram 2). On the other, family learning refers to specific instances where parents and children learn together in the same space (see Diagram 3).

## **Family Learning Policy**

From a policy perspective, Family Learning however defined is a devolved matter within the UK. As a consequence this pamphlet focuses on Family Learning policy in England, although lessons and best practice from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland sometimes influences policy development in England.

## **Age Definitions**

Equally important are the definitions of children, parents and adults in terms of age.

### *Children and Adults*

We take the definition of child to mean children from birth to the 18th birthday. Of course, parents support the education outcomes of young people aged 18 and over in further education, higher education and apprenticeships. Parents also support the education outcomes of 18-25 year olds with special education needs and those with Education and Health Care Plans. 18-25 year olds, however, are best described as young adults rather than children although the definition to the 18th birthday is not cast-iron given that 16-17 year olds sometimes stay in full-time further education until age 19.

### *Parents as Children and Adults*

The definition of parent by comparison is not determined by age. An individual can become a parent earlier than their 18th birthday.

### *Child and Adult Learners*

In the English system of education and training, funding is determined by age and level of qualification. Pre-16 compulsory education at Level 2 and below is free and fully funded. There is a duty on 16-17 year olds to participate in some form of recognised education and training until their 18th birthday, although the cost of provision is free for qualifications and programmes at Level 3 and below until age 19. A separate system of adult education at Level 3 and below operates from age 19, and a separate system of higher education at Level 4-6 operates from age 17. As a consequence, parents aged 19 and under participating in education and training at Level 3 and below are classified as young learners, whilst parents aged 19 and over participating in Level 3 and below learning are classified as adult learners.

Diagram 2: A Universal Definition of Family Learning

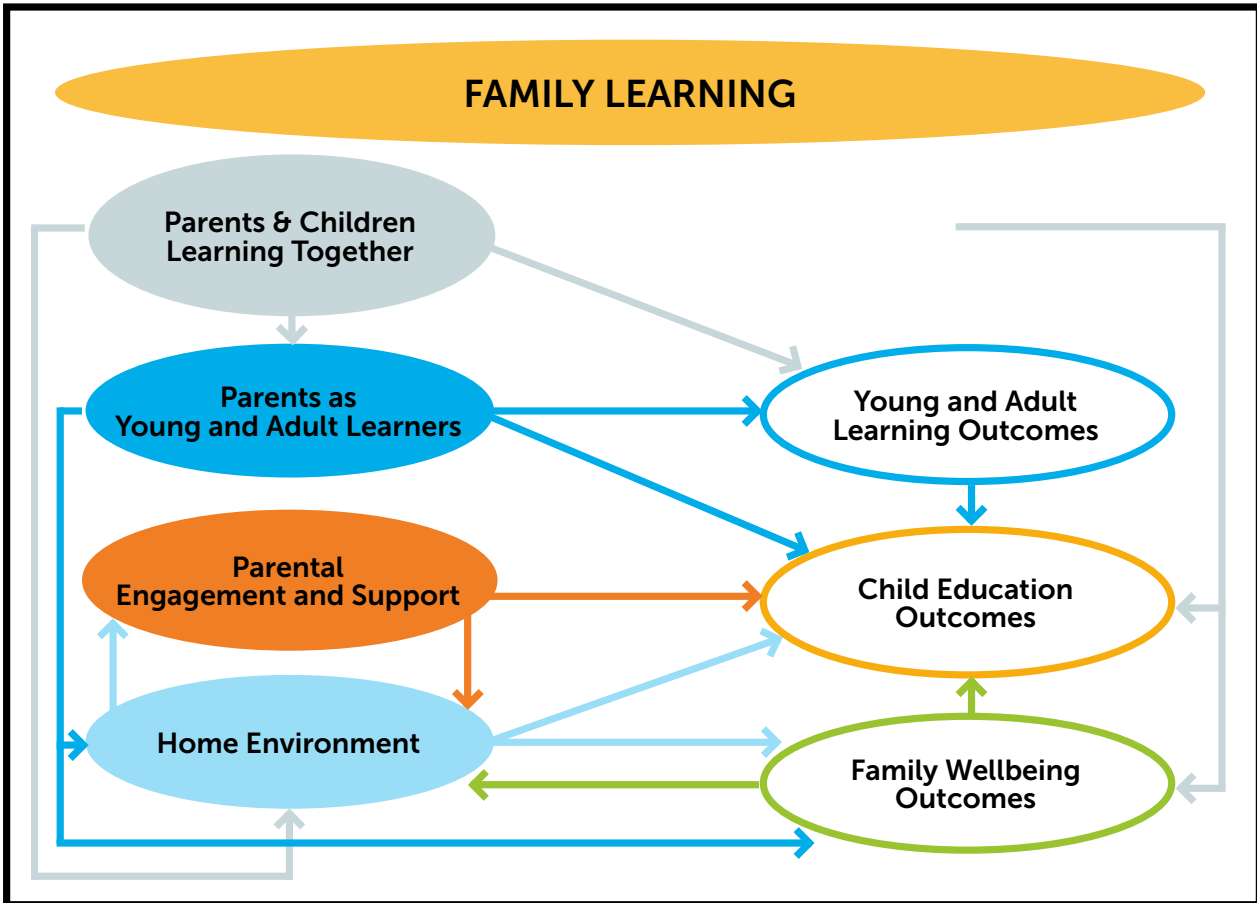
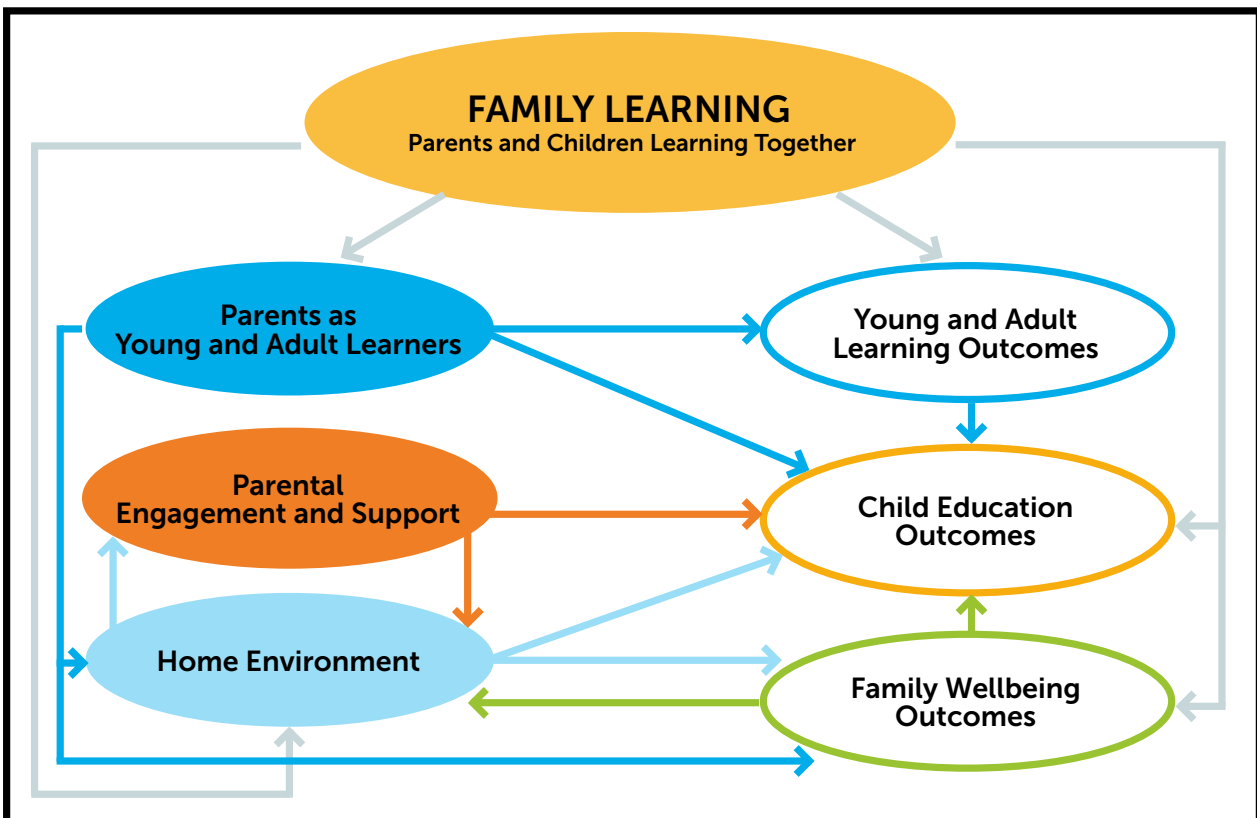


Diagram 3: A Specific Definition of Family Learning



## **Family Definitions**

A parent can be a child and below the age of 18 or an adult and 18 and over. A child may be part of a family unit of one parent or two, or part of an extended blended family. Some children do not live with their parents but with their grandparents, aunts and uncles or adoptive parents. Others live with foster carers and some in children's homes where guardianship belongs to the local authority. An inclusive definition of parent is used when discussing family learning as a specific instance of parents and children learning together or the whole system of parental engagement, child educational outcomes and adult learning.

## **The Pamphlet**

The aim of this pamphlet is three-fold. First, to bring together a diverse range of policy perspectives with regard to parents, children and adult learning. Second, to start the process of developing a national network of policy experts in the area of family learning. And third, to raise the profile of Family Learning Policy in the 2020s.

Campaign for Learning is extremely grateful to the sixteen authors contributing to this policy pamphlet. We encourage readers to consider each of the articles in turn, especially the three recommendations Campaign for Learning has asked each author to make at the end of their contribution.

The pamphlet is concluded with a contribution and recommendations from Juliette Collier, National Director, and John Beattie, Deputy Director (Families) at Campaign for Learning. It discusses how, by working together, we can reset Family Learning Policy in England in the 2020s.

**Julia Wright, National Director, Campaign for Learning**  
**Mark Corney, Policy Adviser, Campaign for Learning**



# **Part One**

# **Engaging Parents to Increase the Education Outcomes of Children**

## **Sam Freedman, Research Fellow, Institute for Government**

### **Driving-Up Parental Engagement in Educational Catch-Up**

The recent Schools White Paper featured a 'Parent Pledge' which sounds promising but is sadly neither about parents nor a pledge. The somewhat vague idea is that schools will have to offer evidence-based catch-up support to pupils who fall behind in English or maths. Schools are already supposed to do this and there is no new enforcement mechanism. Nor is there any requirement to actually communicate with parents about their children's progress.

#### **Benefits of Parental Engagement**

This is a shame as parental engagement has enormous potential to improve outcomes, particularly for pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds. There is very strong evidence that support from parents, particularly around reading at an early age, and later around wider cultural experiences and engagement with school, has a big impact on attainment. It is arguably more significant than the differences between schools. And yet we have focused huge attention on the latter while largely ignoring the policy implications of the former.

#### **From Labour to the Coalition**

Under the last Labour Government there was some interest in this area. SureStart saw a huge amount invested in early parenting support, though with little evidence of long-term impact on education outcomes. At school level, the Children's Plan of 2007 promised a raft of additional engagement opportunities for parents including regular information on learning, a staff contact, information sessions, and investment in family learning programmes. This last recommendation seemed particularly promising as it offered to help adults with their literacy and numeracy as well, with potential benefits for the labour market.

In reality, the fairly prescriptive policy model represented by the Children's Plan was swept away by the Coalition. SureStart lost its funding and was reduced to a rump service. On schools policy autonomy for academy trusts became the dominant philosophy; with pretty much the entire intermediary structure between school trusts and the Secretary of State removed, whether in the form of local authorities or arms-length bodies. If the point wasn't clear enough the Department of Children, Families and Schools became the Department for Education (DfE).

There were certainly advantages to this approach – it freed many excellent school leaders to innovate and focused attention on the core business of academic attainment. But in recent years it has become apparent that good ideas were discarded along with some of the excess bureaucracy that accumulated in the final years of the Labour administration. Parent engagement, family support and family learning was one of these.

### **Current Conservative Government Policy**

That is not to say schools are doing nothing in this space. Primaries typically encourage reading with parents. Most schools do provide some regular communication about how children are doing, and some are making use of technology to provide more detailed information, allowing parents to support homework more effectively. But in general, it is not a priority. In a 2019 survey for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) fewer than half of schools (in a sample of 250) said they had an individual member of staff with overall responsibility for parental engagement, or had policies and procedures specifically aimed at engaging parents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

School closures during the pandemic could have been an opportunity to change this, as parents suddenly had to be much more closely involved. But again, with some exceptions, most schools seem to have just reverted to what they were doing before. This is despite a growing evidence base that school interventions, particularly around regular, bespoke, communication with parents can improve attainment. These need not be expensive. [One study](#) led by Bristol University found regular text messages improved results for a fraction of the cost of most interventions.

The EEF's evidence on more intensive programmes, where parents attended courses with their children, is more mixed, with some indications it can improve performance, but also showing how difficult it is to get regular attendance, especially for those parents who would likely benefit the most. As for the impact on parents themselves, and their employment opportunities, we don't really have any solid evidence from the UK at all, because there haven't been any proper studies.

The "parent pledge", even though it doesn't amount to much, indicates that Government is slowly realising this gap in its policy agenda. Likewise, the re-emergence of SureStart in the form of Family Hubs (albeit with much lower levels of funding).

## **Further Reform is Possible**

There is an opportunity here to draw together the strands into a proper strategy which could really help mitigate the learning loss seen during Covid-19. The question is whether they want to take it.

### **Recommendation 1**

The DfE should turn the “parent pledge” into a proper parental engagement plan for schools focusing on communication with parents.

### **Recommendation 2**

Family Hubs should be used to rebuild local authority capacity around parenting lost over the past decade, with better evaluation of good practice.

### **Recommendation 3**

The new adult numeracy programme ‘Multiply’ should have a strand for family learning and this should be properly evaluated.

## **Focusing on Parents to Improve Social Mobility**

Parenting is the taboo topic in social mobility. Unsurprisingly, how parents interact with their children has a profound impact on their futures. Yet politicians are loathe to do anything to improve parenting when it comes to education. They fear they will be seen as encroaching on people's freedoms to live their lives as they see fit.

### **Silence in the Schools White Paper**

In the run-up to this year's Government white paper on schools, I pleaded with officials to consider ideas to help improve learning in the home. The evidence is clear: unless we enable all parents to support their children in reading and other core learning activities, then many of our children will suffer from low levels of literacy and numeracy. My calls fell on deaf ears. The 2022 paper, I dislike to say, with its focus on trying to improve schools, will be yet another failed attempt to address an issue that has plagued the education system for at least several decades.

In my book [The Good Parent Educator](#) I showed how simple habits can make life-defining differences. Sitting down with a book with a son and daughter each day just for 20 minutes, for example, can transform their children's learning.

### **All About Parents**

The study of social mobility is in some sense all about parents. We study the link between the characteristics of parents and their offspring. We want a society in which children's futures are shaped by their talents and hard work (and a little luck). Instead, we find that home background has a significant impact on future outcomes. The stronger the link between parents and their children, the lower social mobility is. And the bad news is that the Millennial generation are the first generation since the War who are likely to do less well on average than their parents.

### **Families Matter**

Studies reveal that families matter even more than we first thought. This is partly due to extended family effects – children are influenced not just by their parents but other family members as well. Grandparents for example can contribute in many ways; paying for expensive school fees or stepping into help with child rearing duties.

## **Education System is Not Enough**

Teachers can transform young lives. But schools, colleges and universities are not the great social levellers we sometimes imagine. The education system is a necessary but not sufficient driver in levelling the playing field of life. One simple reason for this is that children spend more of their lives outside than inside the school gates, and the divides in society have widened for recent generations.

We observe an increasing family divide in the early 21st century. Children with non-graduate parents are far less likely to grow up in two parent homes and family-owned homes than children with graduate parents. Children of the richest households meanwhile are twice as likely to benefit from private tutoring than children from the poorest households. These stark divides do not bode well for future social mobility.

Tackling the parenting divide is riddled with political sensitivities. It is devilishly hard to do. But if we are serious about improving social mobility it is just too important to ignore. The time has come to tackle social mobility's taboo subject. Here is what we should do:

### **Recommendation 1**

All schools should be incentivised to develop highly targeted, effective parent engagement plans. Schools remain the trusted anchor organisations in local communities. Plans would encourage schools to better understand their parents and children, for example through deep listening exercises. They would ensure they are genuinely inclusive to all parents, and empower parents to take on the habits that help children develop. This would be a win-win strategy for teachers, as children would be better prepared to learn in classrooms.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Government should support a comprehensive early years literacy programme combining public messaging (akin to the 5-a-day health campaign) with on-the-ground support, such as health visitors providing new parents with basic guidance on oracy and literacy and parenting classes as part of Family Hubs.

The public campaign could, for example, focus on the benefits of reading (book sharing with children), regular routines (regular meal, bath, bedtime) and readiness (making sure children get enough food and sleep to learn when they are at school).

### **Recommendation 3**

A dedicated programme should be initiated to develop evidence-informed approaches to help parents change habits in the home environment to support learning. Recent trials outside the UK have produced promising results using low-cost behavioural tools to help motivate disadvantaged parents to read with younger children. We desperately need more research in this area.

## **Adrian Burt, Founder, MarvellousMe**

# **Encouraging Parental Involvement in Children's Learning Through School Communication**

Everyone agrees, children do better when their parents show an interest in their school activities, help their learning and praise their achievements. The [Education Endowment Foundation](#) (EEF) suggests that effective parental engagement can lead to learning gains of +3 months over the course of a year.

Whilst parent engagement interventions take multiple forms, a base-level requirement is for schools to encourage more regular and positive family conversations about learning. This is simple and inexpensive to achieve, and without risking teacher workload or wellbeing.

### **Impact of Positive Parent-Child Dialogue**

The impact of this positive dialogue between a child and their parents is significant. Children are more motivated, well-behaved and do better at school because they see that their parents are interested in their learning and value education. It inspires families to practise topics covered in class and for parents to reinforce their child's achievements. Teachers and parents build a stronger relationship, which can also be helpful should the need for any difficult conversations arise. Parents don't feel like they are 'missing out.'

### **More than Organisational Matters from the School Office**

The problem is, however, that most school communications originate from the school office, focus on organisational matters and can often worry parents. How often do parents receive a positive message from their child's teacher telling them about their child's success, compared to PE kit and book reminders, payment requests, diary dates, bumped heads and the like?

As a result, most school communications, notwithstanding their importance, don't engage parents in their child's education, but instead can create anxiety and discord. This is also one of the reasons why inspection reports and parents' surveys often verify that 'parents still want more information.' In other words, they want the right kind of information, in the right way.

### **Personal, Positive and Progress-Led News From the Teacher**

The solution to effective communications that truly engage parents, as the EEF suggests, is to ensure that messages are 'personalised, linked to learning and promote positive interactions, e.g. celebrate success'.

Telling people positive news and making them smile is proven to spark feel-good neurotransmitters such as endorphins, dopamine and serotonin. It's the ideal way to inspire families to say "well done" to their child, and to break down barriers with even the hardest-to-reach parents.

Delivering this impact means training, encouraging, equipping and supporting teachers to communicate better with all the parents of their class, as each child is the focal point. It's not about general school-office messaging.

Teachers also need to inform and involve parents more regularly, ideally a couple of times each week, and consistently through the school. This means that parents with more than one child are fully accommodated, and that engagement is sustained as children transition through the Years.

Communicating with parents at a bi-annual meeting or through a semi-automated school report clearly isn't enough to build a great teacher-parent relationship or continuous partnership.

The challenge has been made harder due to social distancing, and as teachers need to reach everyone - mums, dads, grandparents and carers. They need to involve families from differing demographics; with varied language, reading and technical skills; those who are working or separated; those who are disillusioned about school; those who might perceive teachers negatively or who are just disinterested in education.

## **Technology Helps**

Schools have a wide choice of communication channels, but most are chosen by, and still managed by, the school office. There needs to be more consideration about the content and tone of each communication, plus a shift to move communication readily into the classroom and teachers' hands.

Modern technology can help here too. Classroom tools can put home communication onto the smartboard and into plenary (summary) sessions, involving children in the positive communication with their parents. What better way to fortify the all-important teacher-child-parent triangle whilst reinforcing the day's learning, and without creating extra work for teachers outside of lessons?

Furthermore, technology can control/restrict parent replies and feedback, so that teachers feel protected from out-of-hour contact and unnecessary or inappropriate messages. Otherwise, teachers might feel hesitant to keep things going.



### **Recommendation 1**

Training school staff on the many benefits of positively engaged parents is the starting point. Unless all staff appreciate that more effective communication delivers better parent engagement, there will be shortcomings. Parent engagement and parent communication should be de facto in initial teacher training, ongoing CPD and importantly staff meetings and appraisals.

### **Recommendation 2**

With parent engagement fundamental to children's happiness and outcomes, there needs to be deeper assessment of it in school inspections. Assessing, for instance, how schools foster a positive teacher-parent relationship, and how they do this consistently and sustainably. Schools should be able to track and evidence how they communicate effectively with parents about their child's learning topics and character skills development on a regular basis.

### **Recommendation 3**

Linked to better internal and external management of parent engagement and school communications, coupled with parent feedback, it's possible to rate and rank schools by a parent engagement metric. This will help to identify improvement areas and motivate schools to continually better themselves.

## **Noni Csogor, Research and Policy Manager, Sixth Form Colleges Association**

### **Balancing Parental Support and Independence of 16-18 Year Olds in Further Education**

The active involvement of parents and guardians in education and school life is highly correlated with academic achievement – moreover, according to long-running research, than school quality itself. ([e.g. Becher, 1989](#)).

The challenge educationalists and researchers have been grappling with, however, is that it is difficult to find a robust link between interventions that increase parental involvement and improved achievement for children. The reality is that high parental involvement and high achievement seem to simply be found together.

This doesn't mean that increasing parental involvement is impossible or undesirable, but that the causality is more complicated; there are factors which mediate the effects of parental involvement. Most obviously, these include class and social capital, which are generally outside a sixth form's remit to change.

However, they also include parental beliefs and attitudes about education and the quality of communication between educational institutions and parents, which are more malleable.

#### **Parental Support for the Transition at 16**

Acting on the knowledge that parental involvement is powerful is made even more difficult by the transition to post-16 education, particularly where that means students attending a new institution like a sixth form or further education college. As the difficulty and specificity of the material studied increases, it becomes much less likely that parents will understand what their child is working on day-to-day – whether that is analysis of English literature or practical approaches to delivering health and social care.

#### **16-18 Year Olds are More Independent**

The subjects their child is learning are now often far removed from their own experiences of work or schooling, and so directly supporting education through help with homework or discussion of content becomes harder. There is also the simple fact that 16-18 year olds are rightly expected to be more independent, and their parents accordingly less involved.

It is rare for a sixth form college or 16-19 school to have a PTA/'Friends of' group. Two years is a short time for most parents to invest in getting involved in a college community when their children are, at least in theory, old enough to manage their own learning and activities. That doesn't mean, however, that they can't add value to that learning at all. We just need to be extra intentional in the ways we choose to engage parents.

## Parental Communication by College Leaders

While many parents may be unable to enrich their children's knowledge of sixth form content, they can have a major positive effect by helping them entrench effective habits related to learning. For example, a whole college might decide, based on research evidence and some recent feedback from Ofsted, to institute a stricter policy on mobile phone use in lessons or on campus. Or the head of history might decide, after being inspired by other institutions in their MAT or their college group, that their A level students will receive more feedback through group discussion and less from written marking.

Chris Atherton, principal at Sir John Deane's College in Cheshire and co-author of [What Every Parent Should Know about Education](#), discusses implementing the latter policy across all subjects, and communicating it to parents. As he writes, too much communication across disparate topics, from homework deadlines to trip payments, can cause parents to zone out. While there are educational benefits to texting parents with regular reminders of this kind in primary schools, as the Education Endowment Foundation has [found](#), similar American research with 18 year-olds has found no effect ([Castleman and Page, 2017](#)).

So while colleges should have effective systems for reaching parents with urgent and welfare-related messages, it makes sense to be focused and specific with educational communications to parents. Changes, especially those students may not agree with or fully understand, are more important than individual deadlines – and enabling parents to back up the college's choices and explain them to students allows the college's learning culture to extend into the home.

Chris Atherton has found that it is key to explain both the 'why' and the 'how' of a practice like reducing marking, making it concrete to parents, tying it to the college's values, and repeating it in a large variety of settings through simple statements. Most importantly, parents must see the change happening; make sure it is enacted in all classrooms and that it is having the positive effect you hoped for, and then communicate that back to parents so that they can strengthen the message at home.

## When Not to Use Parental Engagement

The areas in which parents can – or should – help will vary by setting and student. For students with high needs, or simply those who procrastinate, tried and tested methods like texting parents and carers about deadlines coming up can be very powerful. This support can gradually be removed as students become more confident in planning their assignments in good time. Part of benefiting from parental involvement and engagement at post-16 is about knowing when not to use it!

### **Recommendation 1**

Post-16 college and school leaders should be selective, identifying the most important area of 16-18 learning in their setting where parents can have the greatest impact.

### **Recommendation 2**

Post-16 college and school leaders should be sensitive to their parent population. If many parents do not read English well, text-based communications are likely to be less effective than in-person conversations where leaders can gauge understanding. Digital poverty is a similar factor.

### **Recommendation 3**

Post-16 college and school leaders and teachers should consider how best to balance building autonomy and self-regulation of their students with engaging the power of parental persuasion, which can undermine that independence.

## **Lesley Thain, Head of Career Programmes, Gatsby Foundation**

### **Involving Parents and Guardians in Careers Support for 11-18 Year-Olds**

With a new system of technical education being rolled out in England, young people have a choice of high-quality routes and qualifications to pursue post-16, including apprenticeships, T levels and A levels. It is more important than ever that they can make informed choices about which route to follow, based not on misconceptions but on accurate information about the careers available from these qualifications.

We know that young people most frequently turn to their parents as a source of career guidance. Providing parents with accurate and independent information about the full range of education and career options available to their children is therefore critical to enabling all young people to make informed decisions about their future.

#### **What the Research Tells Us**

Research commissioned by Gatsby earlier this year reported that nearly 3 in 4 (71%) parents feel overwhelmed by the number of career and education choices available to their children. Nearly two thirds (67%) said that their child had expressed an interest in exploring a future career that they know nothing about, and nearly as many (62%) admitting to relying predominantly on their own experiences when advising their children on what their potential future options could be.

The survey of 2,000 parents of secondary school pupils in England was carried out for [Talking Futures](#) – Gatsby’s national campaign which helps parents, carers, and guardians of 11–18 year olds have constructive and informed conversations with their child about education choices and careers. The survey explores parents’ views on the current job market, and how and to what extent they are able to support their child to find the right pathway for them.

Compounding this sense of confusion, parents are also feeling pressure to have vast knowledge of the education and career landscape in order to provide useful advice. The majority (83%) of parents admit to feeling worried that they don’t take into account all the options that exist, including those they know nothing about, when having these conversations with their children.

#### **Where Parents Can Access Support**

The Talking Futures campaign is designed to improve parents’ confidence and give them the information they need to have more informed conversations with their children about education and careers.

This May, Talking Futures launched a [new interactive online tool](#), 'Conversation Cards', which is designed to break this information down into manageable chunks and give parents the information and signposting they need to guide their child through the decision making process and discover the careers that might interest them.

Schools and colleges are also key sources of information for parents. Following a successful pilot project in 2019, through which Gatsby tested different approaches to parental engagement through the school and college system, Gatsby is collaborating with the Careers & Enterprise Company to ensure national rollout of Talking Futures to support educators to connect parents into career programmes at school and college. The Careers & Enterprise Company have developed a [toolkit](#) to support Careers Leaders to amplify the role of parents in careers decision-making and increase their participation.

The toolkit is based on [research](#) exploring how institutions can best support parents to help young people make informed careers and education decisions. The Careers & Enterprise Company have a range of resources for schools and colleges to use including: (i) parent-facing activities for events such as parents' evenings and tailored family learning sessions; (ii) student-facing activities to reinforce parents' role in decision-making; (iii) support for Careers Leaders to identify activities that will complement existing provision; (iv) practical tips and guidance on how to deliver each type of activity, and (v) a range of preparation activities to help you and parents get the most out of each session.

### **Recommendation 1**

Education leaders should ensure that within their whole school/college parental engagement strategy there is a strand for careers education

### **Recommendation 2**

Education leaders should ensure that their careers leaders, careers advisers and teaching staff are aware of the [Talking Futures educator resources](#) and are actively using these to engage parents in the school or college careers programme.

### **Recommendation 3**

Providers of technical education routes should ensure that they provide information which is accessible and available to parents at key decision points to enable them to understand the changing landscape of technical education.

## **Part Two**

# **Supporting Parents to Improve the Educational Outcomes of Children**

## **Kerry-Jane Packman, Executive Director, Parentkind**

### **Enabling Parents to Get What They Need to Support Children to Learn**

Since the pandemic, parents have played an increasing role in their child's education and it is welcome that the valiant contribution they have made is being recognised by policymakers. The Government's 'Parent Pledge', which forms part of its Schools Bill, formalises schools' accountability to parents if their child falls behind in English or maths. Whether or not the pledge is enough on its own to ensure that outcomes improve for children who are left behind or struggling, it is vital that the link between home and school is encouraged and strengthened.

#### **The Impact of Lockdowns on Parental Participation**

When many children switched to remote learning at home during the lockdowns as part of the national response to Covid-19, parents assumed a more pivotal role in their child's learning. Parentkind research found that many parents grew in confidence supporting their child's learning, took positives from it and became more involved in their education. Over half said that they felt more engaged in their child's learning compared to before the lockdowns. What's more, they wanted it to stay that way.

Parentkind polls during the pandemic asked what additional resources parents needed to support their child's learning at home. They identified 'more live lessons', 'better explanations of work being set' and 'more feedback' as areas they wanted more of to further improve their confidence.

#### **Supporting Learning Beyond The Pandemic**

While children are now almost entirely back in the classroom, parents still have lots of ways to support their child's learning. Reading with children is a great way to improve their literacy and oracy skills, as well as expand their knowledge – and it's also great for opening up bigger conversations.

Age-appropriate discussions about events in the news can dramatically help to clarify and broaden children's understanding of the world they live in, which is knowledge they can apply to different areas of schoolwork. Not every household will have a large collection of books, but libraries, including pop-ups and mobiles, are a cost-effective alternative and trips out often have their own educational rewards.

Sitting with young people while they complete homework is another essential way in which parents contribute to their child's education. For parents who lack confidence in specific subjects, many schools run adult learning sessions that cover aspects of the curriculum that their child is learning. Even simple things like parents talking positively about education can keep children approaching their school experience confidently.



## **The Role of Parent-Teacher Associations**

Whatever a parent's background, skills or level of learning, joining their school's PTA is a great way to support children to learn. It provides local knowledge and helps to make connections, including with teachers and other parents. The evidence shows that when parents are encouraged to participate at school, their children's attainment improves.

Parents tend to cite lack of time and not having been approached as the most common barriers to becoming more involved in the life of the school. As PTAs are run entirely by volunteers, any additional help is likely to be appreciated. PTAs' achievements benefit the educational experience of all of the children at the school, often supplying invaluable extras such as additional learning resources, school trips and playground equipment.

The closest possible home and school relationship will forge a route to the best outcomes for every child. In order to achieve that goal, Parentkind has come up with three policy solutions along with the Centre for Education Youth (CfEY).

### **Recommendation 1**

Parent participation must be embedded in every school. This over-riding principle is ideally embedded in the school system using Parentkind's Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools. The five key drivers powering it are: leadership, ethos and resources; effective two-way communication; supporting learning at home; involvement in school life; and community engagement.

### **Recommendation 2**

Parents should be consulted about their children in schools. This should be achieved effectively, enabling parents to discuss, make decisions about and offer feedback on their child's education.

### **Recommendation 3**

Parent consultation should take place at local, regional and national levels. Local authorities and Multi-Academy Trusts should consult with parents, ensuring that consultations on issues affecting parents or family life are accessible.

## **Louise Bazalgette, Deputy Director, Nesta**

### **Working with Parents in the Early Years to Get More Children School Ready**

Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, disadvantaged children starting school were on average 4.5 months behind their peers ([EPI, 2020](#)). At the end of their reception year, children are furthest behind in mathematics, followed by literacy and language and communication skills.

In England, around 43% of children who claim free school meals are not reaching a good level of development in their reception year, compared with only 26% of their peers ([DfE, 2019](#)).

Since the pandemic, it is anticipated that this gap will have widened further, due to the impact of nursery and school closures on children's early education, as well as the financial and emotional impact of the pandemic on families, which is expected to have hit poorer families harder ([EPI, 2020](#)).

#### **What Causes the School Readiness Gap?**

Children growing up in poverty are at greater risk of poor outcomes compared to their peers ([Batcheler et. al., 2022](#)). Research suggests that the impacts of low family income on children's early development may be both direct (by reducing the resources parents have to buy things their children need) and indirect, by causing stress to parents, which can impact negatively on their parenting capacity ([Batcheler et. al., 2022](#)). However, while poverty puts additional stress on families, a negative impact on children's outcomes is not inevitable; parenting can have a protective effect even in challenging circumstances ([Kiernan and Mensah, 2011](#)).

#### **Challenges with Supporting Families**

Recent increases in rates of relative child poverty present significant challenges for families with young children ([Stewart & Reader, 2021](#)). There is also less capacity in local services to support parenting and the home learning environment, due to a reduction in funding for children's centres since 2010 ([Batcheler et. al., 2022](#)). A larger proportion of early years funding is now being channelled towards free entitlements for early childhood education, which begin at age 2 for disadvantaged children ([Hobbs & Bernard, 2021](#)).

In this context of limited public resources, the support that local areas can provide for parenting and the home learning environment needs to either be highly targeted, or able to be delivered at low cost. This presents challenges for efforts to impact on the school readiness gap at scale. Effective models of parenting support are needed, but low-cost models are in short supply. Most well-evidenced models to support children's cognitive development through the home environment have involved intensive home visiting ([Asmussen et al., 2016](#)).

For example, one of the most well-evidenced models is the [Family Nurse Partnership](#), which offers young mothers 64 home visits between early pregnancy until their child turns 2. At this level of intensity, it is only possible to offer targeted support to those families who need it most. While wider access to support would be beneficial, there is currently not enough evidence that lighter-touch parenting programmes can make a lasting impact on children's cognitive outcomes ([Batchelor et. al, 2022](#)).

## Opportunities for Innovation

While the school readiness gap presents significant challenges for the early years sector in the current financial climate, there are reasons to be hopeful. Evidence and practice in this space is continually evolving and there are opportunities to innovate and adapt existing models to lower the cost of delivery, with the aim of reaching more parents. One such example is the parenting programme [Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities](#), which trains peer facilitators (local parents) to run group sessions with parents to help improve the quality of interactions with their children and boost their confidence. This programme has promising evidence for its effect on children's behavioural outcomes, and can be delivered at low cost ([EIF, 2016](#)). This peer-led model for supporting parents is a promising approach to build on.

There is also growing evidence that online parenting programmes can be as effective as those delivered in person ([Spencer et al., 2020](#)). Digitally-enabled support for parents, such as [Triple P Online](#), can offer parents increased flexibility in when they access support, as well as lowering the cost of delivery. There are opportunities to explore how peer-led and digital approaches could be combined to create flexible support models that enable more parents to access support.

There is also an opportunity to explore how digital tools used by children (e.g. apps and other digital media) can support children's development in the home environment by building up their literacy and numeracy skills. A recent review of educational apps found that they can have a positive effect on children's literacy and numeracy outcomes ([Kim et al., 2021](#)). However, many of these studies took place in early education environments, therefore more research is needed to test whether similar effects can be achieved when they are used at home.

### **Recommendation 1**

Funders and researchers focused on the early years need to build the evidence base for lower cost interventions that can increase access to support targeting children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

### **Recommendation 2**

Existing delivery models of parenting support should be adapted to harness the power of peer groups and increase access via digital channels.

### **Recommendation 3**

Government, local early years service providers and family networks should explore the opportunity of digital tools including mobile phone apps that can be used directly by children in the home environment to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

## **Tom Harbour, Chief Executive, Learning with Parents**

### **Using Technology to Help Parents Bridge the Gap in Child Learning**

In the UK, not all children have a fair shot at education. Despite being a focus for all schools, the Education Policy Institute recently found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are on average nine months behind their peers by the time they leave primary school ([EPI, 2020](#)). This has been exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 and school closures.

#### **Schools Need Help from Parents**

We cannot leave it to schools alone to break this link between family income and educational achievement. Only 14% of the disadvantage gap at age 11 is related to what happens at school ([IFS, 2010](#)). This is compared to 49% explained by parents' own education, and the attitudes and behaviours they exhibit with their child. Parents, therefore, have a critical role to play in learning and bridging the attainment gap.

#### **Parents Need to be Engaged in Learning Not in School**

When thinking about parental engagement, the focus needs to be on parental engagement in learning, not in the school, as this holds the greatest chance of benefit for the child ([Goodall & Montgomery, 2014](#)).

The 'Learning with Parents' programme focuses on parental engagement in children's learning in the home. We support all families to have frequent, positive, meaningful interactions, and for these to be sustained over time.

#### **Focusing on the Most Disadvantaged Children**

If we design programmes and products without considering the barriers faced by the most disadvantaged families, we will create solutions that only work for the parents who are already engaging. This risks widening the attainment gap. We need to focus on how we support the most disadvantaged families to engage in their children's learning.

All parents want the best for their children, but some struggle to convert good intentions into daily habits and routines of how they interact with their children ([Kalil, 2020](#)). We need to ensure that parents from the most disadvantaged families are motivated, empowered and able to reflect.

## Motivating Parents

Parent motivation to engage in their children's learning is influenced by a complex variety of factors. One factor is the influence of their peers ([Curry, 2015](#)). Another is the attitude of their child, their relationship with practitioners and their awareness of their own impact ([Harris and Goodall, 2008](#)).

Our programme includes 'parent champions', a child reward scheme, practitioner CPD and careful messaging to target each of these factors respectively.

We also help to ensure that parents are motivated through text messages, which builds on research about the effectiveness of texting parents, including the EEF's study ([EEF, 2016](#)), and Chicago University's PACT experiment, in which texts increased reading frequency by 2.5 times ([Mayer, 2015](#)).

## Empowering Parents

For many parents, low confidence and weak academic skills make it difficult for them to support their children's literacy ([Kalil, 2015](#)). We provide child-led, informative videos to upskill parents with the key concepts required to support their children. We ensure our content is as inclusive as possible. For example, we adopted best practice for parents with English as an additional language such as using visual aids and highlighting key vocabulary (e.g. [Premier, 2019](#)). Our research showed child enjoyment was a key indicator of parents' likelihood to engage, so we ensure our games are genuinely fun.

## Use of Technology

Teachers are encouraged to reflect on practices in the classroom, but they do not know what goes on at home. Surveys which are frequently used to gather additional information do not address this gap, as it tends to be the parents with the most social capital and high literacy skills who respond. Technology gives us the opportunity to capture real time insights into what is happening at home.

Our programme collects significant user interaction data and feedback such as timings, ratings, comments and photos from the families we work with. As we focus on supporting disadvantaged children, we link this data to the children's Free School Meal (FSM) status. This allows us to provide insights into how the interactions between parents and children vary between FSM and non-FSM children. For instance, we know that most teachers set homework on Monday and Friday, but most parents do it on Sunday afternoon. Initial findings also showed that children on FSM do homework 30 minutes later in the day.

We share these insights at class and school levels. The feedback helps teachers to track home learning, giving them an insight into their children's understanding and informing their in-class practice. We also use comments and site data to reflect and drive iterative programme improvement. By doing this, we ensure that the most disadvantaged parents are motivated and empowered to support their children's learning.

Parents have a critical role to play in promoting learning. However, inclusive parental engagement is not easy. It is essential to continue to generate evidence-based strategies for promoting parental engagement in learning and technology can support this.

### **Recommendation 1**

When looking at parental engagement, the focus must be on parental engagement in learning, not school.

### **Recommendation 2**

When looking at parental engagement, we have to explicitly focus on the most disadvantaged parents and carers, to avoid further widening the attainment gap.

### **Recommendation 3**

Using technology allows us to get an insight into the reality of parental engagement at home and what strategies ensure that parents are motivated and empowered to engage in their children's learning.

## **Aoife O’Higgins , Director of Research, What Works for Children’s Social Care**

### **Targeting Support at Carers to Improve the Educational Outcomes of Children in Care**

Academic success acts as a strong protective factor for well-being and social inclusion in childhood and later life. Yet for many of the 80,000 children currently in care, this might seem out of reach.

#### **Children in Care Have Lower Education Outcomes**

Indeed, data shows that on average, children in care fare far worse in education than their peers with no experience of care throughout childhood, and beyond (Berridge et al., 2020; Viner & Taylor, 2005). Many children who go into care grow up with parents who have mental health or substance misuse problems often living in chronic poverty (DfE, 2019). Unsurprisingly, development and school readiness are delayed by early childhood adversity, neglect and maltreatment and for many, disruptive journeys through care compound children’s problems in education (Harden & Whittaker, 2011).

These challenges are reflected in data on educational outcomes at age 11 and 16, and beyond. For example, in 2021, children in care scored less than half the points in KS4 exams (age 16) that their peers in the general population (DfE, 2021). The task of supporting the education of children in care is therefore an urgent one.

#### **Exceptions to the Rule**

This experience is not universal, however. Some children in care find refuge in learning and in their school routines. Some children speak of being like every other child among large groups of peers with their own preoccupations about school, friendships and family.

Some children in care also perform well in school; because they are academically inclined and determined, because they have stability or because they have significant support, usually from a trusted adult. Many go on to have brilliant careers, like the poet Lemn Sissay, the actress Samantha Morton or the current Lord Mayor of Manchester, Donna Ludford. Academic success should not be out of reach for any child; so how do we support those who face so many challenges and hurdles to succeed?

#### **Interventions Targeted at the Carer**

A systematic review of protective factors for the education of children in care identified carer attitudes, aspirations and support for children’s education as a strong protective factor for children in care (O’Higgins et al., 2017). This suggested that the interventions should target carers, yet reviews on the impact of educational interventions identified few such programmes (Evans et al., 2017).



Against this backdrop of scant evidence, in 2019 What Works for Children's Social Care (WWCSC) reanalysed data from the National Pupil Database and randomised controlled trials of educational interventions conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation (Sanders et al., 2020). [These analyses](#) examined the impact of educational interventions on a subset of children with a social worker included in these trials.

Findings highlighted ten interventions which showed signs of potential. These interventions looked like good bets to improve the educational outcomes of children with a social worker. In addition, interventions that target parents and carers appear from our analysis to be particularly encouraging. WWCSC went on to fund the implementation of four of these interventions for children with a social worker and an independent evaluation, and findings are anticipated in early 2023.

### **No Easy Task**

But supporting children in care with their learning is no easy task. In addition to gaps in knowledge, many children also have psychosocial problems or behavioural problems and special educational needs which must be addressed if children are to be school ready and able to engage with learning. Children in care also exist in a complex web of bureaucracy which gives them various rights and entitlements, including financial and practical.

They are entitled to an enhanced Pupil Premium fund and receive support from the Virtual School of their local authority (a team dedicated to supporting the education of children with a social worker). Carers need up-to-date knowledge and expert skills to navigate this system, advocate for children in their care and ensure they receive all the support they are entitled to.

Where carers and children are well supported by interventions that meet their multiple needs, children in care will be in a better position to succeed and become the next big poet, actor or politician.

### **Recommendation 1**

Local authorities should provide effective training to help carers support the education of children in their care.

### **Recommendation 2**

Local authorities should develop new complex interventions targeting the low attainment of children in care.

### **Recommendation 3**

DfE and local authorities should conduct robust impact evaluations of new interventions to expand the evidence base and toolkit available to support children in care.

## **Sarah Porretta, Insights Director, Money and Pensions Service**

### **Supporting Parents to Build Children's Financial Capability**

Money is an integral part of our daily lives and a key driver for wellbeing, but managing money is not a topic we receive training for or are given a manual on how to navigate. Cost of living pressures are front of mind for many families right now, but people still find it tricky to start a conversation about money; in 2020, we found that 40% of people are [keeping money secrets from loved ones](#). As a nation, we really don't talk about money enough.

#### **The Scale of the Issue**

Financial wellbeing is about feeling secure and in control. It is knowing that you can pay the bills today, can deal with the unexpected, and are on track for a healthy financial future. But one in two adults (45%) in the UK don't feel confident managing their money day to day and 11.5m have less than £100 in savings ([The Financial Wellbeing Survey 2021](#)).

These financial challenges are evident amongst young adults who have the lowest levels of financial confidence compared to other age groups. 58% do not feel confident managing their money; and that increases to 67% when it comes to not feeling confident planning for their financial future. Too many young people are entering adulthood without essential financial life skills.

#### **Two Million More Children to Receive Meaningful Financial Education**

Development of good financial capability requires financial education within the home, in the community and in school. However, only 48% of 7 to 17 year olds in the UK receive a meaningful financial education at home or in school. This means 5.3 million children and young people are not getting the vital learning they need. Here the measure of 'meaningful' financial education is a child/young person recalling learning about money at school and/or receiving key elements of financial education at home. This is the national measure associated with the UK Strategy national goal to ensure 2 million more children receive a meaningful financial education by 2030.

#### **The Role of Parents and the Home**

Our insights show that the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that help people to manage money and achieve good financial wellbeing begin to develop from an early age, between the ages of three and seven ([Money Advice Service; Whitebread and Bingham, 2013](#)).

The home is an important place to develop children's financial capability but the role that parents and carers play often goes unrecognised. Parents and carers have a huge influence on children's money skills, knowledge and habits as they provide the environment for children to observe, talk about and experience the use of money on a regular basis. Children are more likely to have stronger money skills when their parents talk about money, role-model financially capable behaviours and give their children responsibility for saving and spending decisions. What is more, talking with children about money not only helps children build healthy financial habits for later life, it can also help parents improve their own financial wellbeing.

### **Building Parental Confidence**

Although parents have an important role, fewer than 3 in 5 (58%) feel confident talking to their children about money (Analysis of the 2019 UJ Children and Young People's Financial Capability Survey). The challenge for many is not being aware that they should start early, and not knowing what to do or when to start these conversations, especially when they are not confident or in control of their own finances. They often have to deal with conflicting priorities, are time poor and, in many circumstances, reticent to approach the subject due to fear or guilt of doing so. This is exacerbated by a lack of existing provision aimed at supporting parents to help their children learn about money.

Our evidence-based financial capability programme for parents, [Talk Learn Do](#), has demonstrated that embedding support within parenting services to help parents talk to their children about money can be effective in improving financial capability-related outcomes for children and parents.

There is a suite of evidence and interventions – developed by the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) and stakeholders across the financial services, education and voluntary and community sectors - that tells us what works and provides tools to support parents to undertake this role. It is clear that action is needed to support parents to improve the financial wellbeing of children and young people across the UK, building the money skills and confidence that will last a lifetime.

### **Recommendation 1**

Policymakers shaping parenting support, and funders and commissioners of parenting programmes, should include financial capability as a core outcome of their interventions. This should include helping parents talk to and teach their children about money and providing opportunities for families to learn together to strengthen their money skills. This could include embedding financial capability programmes such as [Talk Learn Do](#) as a module in existing provision and supporting practitioners to develop the skills to deliver it.

### **Recommendation 2**

Organisations working with families should highlight parents' role in supporting children to develop strong money skills for the future and signpost them to tips and tools that can help, including [How to teach kids about money | MoneyHelper](#).

### **Recommendation 3**

Where appropriate, all financial education programmes for children and young people should include activity that supports parents and carers to get involved and reinforce children's learning.

## Christine Myhill, National Chair, ASCEL

# Using Libraries to Support Literacy and Personal Development in Children and Young People

Public libraries welcome children from the very earliest months of life, helping parents and carers to support them as they grow and learn. Working with schools and other partners, libraries provide a range of activities, programmes and initiatives which introduce, extend and refresh the library experience for children.

At the Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (ASCEL), our mission is to ensure excellence in library services for children and young people in public libraries and School Library Services. Our members are the staff working on the ground to manage and deliver the best support for children and young people in these services.

### Supporting Children

As our joint report '[Children's Library Journeys](#)' shows 'one of the major strength of libraries is their ability to support the development of children's literacy skills and to encourage them to acquire a love of reading from an early age. By engaging with children when they are very young, and parents-to-be before a child is born, libraries can become rooted in family life' (Children's Library Journeys. Laura Crossley, 2015). As free and accessible spaces, offering a range of opportunities for family engagement, libraries can support early speech and language development in children. Encouraging parent/child interactions with books can have a positive impact on the home learning environment.

### A Universal Offer and Children's Promise

The [Universal Library Offers](#) demonstrate the power of public libraries to connect communities, improve wellbeing and promote equality through learning, literacy and cultural activity. They focus on Culture and Creativity, Health and Wellbeing, Information and Digital and Reading.

These universal offers are underpinned by [The Children's Promise](#) (Box 1), developed by ASCEL in partnership to ensure that children are actively involved in decisions about the services that affect them, are offered opportunities to volunteer and can experience exciting inspirational activities through their library.

The promise follows children and young people throughout their library journey, from pre-birth, through early years and primary, transition to secondary school and onto young adulthood.

## Box 1

### **The Children's Promise: Aims**

- Every child and young person visiting a public library is inspired by an exciting accessible environment which makes reading for pleasure irresistible.
- They have the opportunity to engage with imaginative digital opportunities through public libraries, building their skills, knowledge and creativity.
- They will find a range of inclusive and diverse fiction and non-fiction books and other information resources to support growing confidence in literacy and formal and informal learning.
- They are able to take part in a wide range of literacy and cultural experiences including reading and book-based activities.
- They are actively involved in decisions about service developments and are offered opportunities to volunteer.

That journey can include pre and post-natal sessions to support new and expectant parents; 'Rhymetimes' and storytimes to encourage parent/child engagement; inspiring book collections to encourage reading for pleasure; exciting digital activities to inspire ambition; and creative teen activities to promote a sense of belonging and inclusion for young people.

### **Delivering the Children's Promise**

By embedding the Children's Promise in library services, we can ensure an inspirational and aspirational offer for children and young people, and help parents, carers and families to benefit from our library services. To do this we need to consider some key influencing factors.

### **Engaging and Supporting Children and Families**

We need to identify and break down barriers to engagement with libraries and reach out to those most disadvantaged in our communities.

This can be supported by engaging and consulting with children, young people and families at all key points of the Children's Library Journey. We also need to develop staff training policies that focus on upskilling the library workforce to work with diverse communities. The development of a children's stock selection policy which reflects the diverse world children live in is also crucial so that children see themselves in the books on the library shelves.

The Children's Promise aims to give children the opportunity to engage with imaginative digital opportunities and build their skills, knowledge and creativity. Continuing to develop the digital skills of the library workforce will inspire confidence and ambition in children through exciting digital activities.

Understanding the key benefits of the comprehensive activity programmes that libraries deliver, such as Rhymetimes and the Summer Reading Challenge, can help further embed activities that support children and families.

Libraries can also support parents, carers and young people more widely with reading and information on key issues, such as those reflected in the Reading Well collections developed to support mental health and wellbeing.

## **Partnership Work**

Public libraries and School Library Services understand the importance of working with key partners to help deliver the Children's Promise and have a history of developing strong and productive relationships and strategies with The Reading Agency, Booktrust, National Literacy Trust, Children & Young Peoples Mental Health Coalition and others.

To help deliver the best results for children's physical and mental health and wellbeing, libraries should continue to develop strong relationships with partners in health.

Libraries and School Library Services hold considerable resources – working pro-actively with schools can ensure these are used most effectively to inspire and support children and young people.

Libraries have a committed and enthusiastic workforce with real passion for books, reading and creativity. It is the can-do attitude of the library workforce combined with strong partnerships, brilliant resources and a desire to reach out to those who need support most which will make a real difference to the lives of children and young people going forward.

## **Recommendation 1**

Libraries, School Library Services and organisations across the cultural, health and education sectors should continue to build strong relationships – there is real strength in working together towards mutual aims.

## **Recommendation 2**

Libraries should recognise and try to understand the real barriers to engagement and develop their practice accordingly, underpinned by consultation and supported by workforce development focused on working with diverse communities.

## **Recommendation 3**

We should never forget the power of reading for pleasure. Let children read what they want to read and give them the opportunity to see and hear adults experiencing joy in reading. Libraries have the power to support this through their services, activities and programmes. Organisations working with children, young people and families can support this by including library referrals in their work.

# **Part Three**

## **Delivering Learning Outcomes for Parents and Children**



## **Katie Easey, Director of Education: Community Learning, WEA**

### **Enabling Parents and Children to Learn Together as Families**

Family Learning – where parents and children learn together – is a very specific branch of adult education. Arguably all adult learning has the potential to be family learning. The ripple effect of parents taking part in community courses is that they often take their enthusiasm in new skills and knowledge home.

#### **Helping their Children Learn**

Children, of course, are expected to take part in learning and for most parents their child's education is an important consideration. Parents who choose to take part in family learning may be doing so with their child's education in mind; familiarising them with learning settings and instilling an enthusiasm by making learning enjoyable.

That motivation to improve their child's chances may, for some parents, be the entry point for adults to return to learning. They may not feel sufficiently compelled or feel the need to take the plunge entirely for their own benefit, but if signing up also allows for spending quality time with their children then it may be the tipping point.

#### **Parents Bringing Learning Home**

Community adult learning, however, can have a positive effect for parents and children even where they are not learning in the same room. The power of bringing them together to share the experience can be huge. The WEA's Impact report found that 70% of learners have encouraged their children to learn more while 47% felt their relationship with their children improved as a result of their courses.

#### **Overcoming Barriers Facing Adults to Learn Through Family Learning**

We know how few adults across the population take part in adult education. The Learning & Work Institute's participation survey shows that only a quarter of the adult population are learning currently while well over a half have not studied at all in the last three years. There are many barriers and many things which put adults off returning to learning, especially if they have had a bad experience previously.

But we should never underestimate how many adults lack confidence in their abilities and equally, we should always acknowledge the power of adult learning to give people the space to find their own way and thrive. Learning alongside a child can encourage a parent to step outside themselves and see a wider benefit in taking part in learning – often finding as they go that their own confidence and familiarity with learning settings and outcomes also grows.

## **Familiar and Accessible Venues**

It helps of course that most adult education – especially family learning – takes place in familiar, accessible and welcoming community venues and alongside other supportive parents and high-quality trusted tutors. That level of support is a key strength of community adult learning and family learning could really only be feasible as a model in such a safe and trusted environment.

Family learning also relies on a level of logistical practicality, which is also a characteristic of community learning more generally. Most WEA students travel less than three miles to attend their course and courses can take place at times of the day and week which suit busy lives.

All adult students benefit from this but it's doubly important to parents taking part in family learning. Fitting the course around parenting duties (perhaps also with other children not taking part in the course), the challenges of travelling with children, accessing other support needs, perhaps also fitting around work - all of these things need to be understood and community learning is better than most at organising in a flexible way to enable access.

## **Childcare**

Childcare – or lack of it – is one of the most cited barriers to parents' participation in many activities, sometimes learning included. Better investment in childcare facilities in and around learning settings would increase participation across the board.

Adults would have the option to leave children in childcare facilities while they take courses and family learning courses would also benefit by the additional flexibility to travel with children. Better childcare settings would also, of course, have a considerable benefit to many other areas of life, not least employment, offering parents the additional flexibility to spend time elsewhere knowing their children are being well looked after.

The Education Select Committee has called for a learning centre in every town – and including childcare facilities (perhaps utilising some of the capital funds available through Levelling Up programmes) could be the answer.

## **Tackling Adult Literacy and Numeracy**

Another of the greatest challenges in adult education is the worryingly low levels of adult literacy, numeracy and digital skills. By its very nature, family learning is enjoyable, relatively light touch and accessible. That doesn't mean it cannot also embed valuable content which supports adults to gain confidence in those essential skills.

Indeed, it is arguably a more effective way of getting adults into those subjects than offering straight-up maths or English classes. Those subjects often come with embarrassment and resistance, so adult learners will often avoid them or find ways of working round. Learning alongside your child, and picking up skills and knowledge without the focus or any pressure being on you is a helpful entry point.

## **Financial Barriers**

As well as time pressures, financial barriers often hold adult learners back. Promoting where family learning courses are available on a fully funded basis and expanding the offer by supporting providers to put on more of these type of courses would increase participation greatly.

Welfare is already a complicated system and is made more so once children are involved as well. Support for a national system of Information, Advice and Guidance that is agile enough to direct parent learners to the financial support which could be available to them, as well as to the variety of courses, is needed.

## **Entry into Jobs**

Finally, although family learning courses will rarely be employment related, they could lead to an employment destination. Parents seeking to return to work after a break or parents looking to find more secure or stable work to support their family could use family learning as a stepping stone to more employment-focused pathways.

## **Recommendation 1**

DfE and local authorities should work together to incorporate childcare facilities in and around learning venues, taking advantage of Levelling Up capital programmes to fund this infrastructure.

## **Recommendation 2**

DfE should invest more in Information, Advice and Guidance to raise the profile of the availability of family learning courses and also the financial support which can be offered to low-income adult learners, especially parents.

## **Recommendation 3**

Employers and providers should work together to support co-designed family learning courses as an entry point for adult learners looking to gain essential skills and/or get on to employment pathways.

## **Susannah Chambers, Independent Consultant**

# **Reminding Policy Makers of the Benefits of Parents and Children Learning Together**

Family Learning is any activity where there are learning outcomes for both the children/young people and parents/carers. This might be 'synchronous' learning between parents/carers and children/young people. Or it may be 'asynchronous' learning where, for example, parents/carers learn strategies from teachers about techniques their children are taught in school, in order to better support learning in the home environment.

### **Benefits of Family Learning**

A decade ago, the education department stated that "research shows that parental involvement in children's learning is a key factor in improving children's academic attainment and achievements, as well as their overall behaviour and attendance. The role of parents during a child's earliest years is the single biggest influence on their development" ([accessed March 2013.](#))

Similarly, Ofsted in 2009 found that wider benefits of Family Learning included "increased parental involvement in school life... improved parenting skills and... increased ability to manage their children's behaviour, communicate with them and support their learning at home effectively" (Family Learning: An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community).

### **Covid-19 and Family Learning**

The value of investing in strengthening the home learning environment (HLE) has never been more evident than during the Covid-19 pandemic with school closures resulting in a requirement for children to learn at home.

Family Learning can help futureproof our education system by providing an infrastructure ensuring continuity of engagement in education at home in the event of future school closures. This extends well beyond materials created through Oak Academy during the pandemic and is richer pedagogically through empowering parents/carers to be their children's learning guides.

An [article on the UK Parliament website](#) describes a decrease in demand for Early Childhood Education & Care places since the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside the greater prevalence of homeworking since the pandemic, this means children from infancy are having more contact in the home for longer with their parents/carers. This creates greater opportunities for families to enjoy positive experiences of learning at home together.

## **An Underutilised Dimension of Adult Learning**

Family Learning is a hugely underutilised dimension of adult learning. It provides high-impact and low-cost return on investment through providing tandem benefit for parents/carers and children intergenerationally as they both achieve learning outcomes.

Investment in Family Learning systemically also supports parents'/carers' employability skills and the economy as it has a successful track record of creating progression pathways to other types of learning provision, helping them develop their Skills for Life and build confidence to access employment.

This is why it is especially important in the current times where families face an increase in the cost of living, a range of careers that are as yet unknown and huge skills gaps in essential sectors for novel learning pathways to be created enabling agile progression through unconventional routes.

## **Skills and Employment Benefits to Adults of Family Learning**

There are opportunities for parents/carers and their children to follow programmes of learning together that enable them to re/train and gain employment in new sectors they have previously not explored, assisting with the national effort to address skills gaps in key sectors such as health and construction.

Parents/carers are uniquely positioned in the vast majority of families to support their children's education and lifelong learning. Through modelling behaviours from as early as infancy, parents/carers can demonstrate a love of learning that can shape a child's engagement on their own learning pathway.

Family Learning is particularly powerful in supporting those families facing disadvantage where research evidence shows Family Learning is particularly effective in helping to close the education gap and enable pupils to 'level up'. This model of skills development also motivates parents/carers to progress in their own learning and skills development through the learning journey they share with their children.

The research indicates that Family Learning is more important than any purely child-focused support/intervention that schools, academies or nurseries might offer. It offers great potential for improved home-school communication and better outcomes for children and young people. A parent/carer is their child's first and most important educator.

However, for some parents/carers, developing their confidence to support their child can be challenging, particularly if they struggle with their own numeracy, language and literacy skills. Family Learning is at the heart of unlocking this potential.

Creating future generations of lifelong learners who feel equipped with Skills for Life, enabling them to feel socially included and thriving irrespective of disadvantage, will require systemic investment in Family Learning provision.

This also requires collaboration between adult learning providers and school settings to leverage existing Family Learning provision and expertise and reimagine its application and audience reach.

Family Learning must be made available to all school-aged pupils and parents/carers, irrespective of the postcode they live in and their income.

### **Recommendation 1**

The Government must ensure investment in Family Learning provision is ringfenced in a single identified government department so that the unique value of Family Learning can be clearly communicated and not deprioritised in the broader adult learning funding.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Government must require all school settings from nursery through to secondary to actively engage with their local adult learning providers to offer Family Learning to their pupils and their families.

### **Recommendation 3**

The Government must broaden the eligibility criteria for those who can access Family Learning provision free of charge as disadvantage is not always directly related to financial prosperity and this provision supports building social cohesion.

## **Professor Alison Clark-Wilson, Chair, and Lucy Davis, Chief Executive, Maths on Toast - the family maths charity**

### **Building Maths Confidence Through Family Learning**

Most people hold strong or polarised views about maths – they love it or hate it. For most, that attitude has been shaped by their experience of maths learning within their school education, which can be closely associated to high-stakes testing and gate-keeping qualifications. Irrespective of your view of maths, it can be still hard to broaden perception beyond one of a rigid set of rules and procedures taught through didactic teaching or tutoring.

#### **Maths Anxiety**

Have you ever felt anxious when faced with checking figures or sheer panic when asked for the answer to a calculation on the spot? What about when your child asks you for help with their maths homework and you freeze? Maths anxiety may be a phrase you have only heard about recently – or perhaps not at all – but it is an emotion that many people can identify with, and is experienced across the UK by young children and adults alike.

Maths anxiety can be defined as ‘a debilitating emotional reaction to maths’ (Nuffield Foundation, 2013). For some, ‘the anticipation of doing maths prompts a similar brain reaction as when they experience pain’ ([Sian Beilock, 2015 Cambridge Mathematics – Maths Anxiety](#)).

It is important to recognise the importance of exploring the emotional relationship with maths, and how early negative experiences can have a huge impact on people’s attitude and confidence with maths for life. According to research from [National Numeracy in 2015](#), 30% of adults wrongly assumed that maths is a skill you are born with rather than a skill that can be learned ([National Numeracy – What is the issue?](#)) and recent research from the University of Cambridge highlights that maths anxiety is causing children as young as six to feel fear, rage and despair.

This research also shows that maths anxiety can cause poor performance, which in turn increases the anxiety; and that the attitude of adults towards maths highly affects children, and early intervention is key to breaking the vicious circle. ([Understanding Mathematics Anxiety, University of Cambridge 2019, Carey, Devine, Hill, Dowker, McLellan, Szucs](#)).

## Problems and Solutions

The most recent primary maths curriculum requires children to tackle maths concepts at younger ages than previous curricular with a strong emphasis on rote learning that, perhaps inadvertently, values speed.

Whilst memorising times tables is undoubtedly valuable, an over-emphasis on speed may come at the expense of a deeper understanding of both the relationship between the numbers and how, with more exploration time, there are many approaches to a correct solution. Recalling an answer quickly is less useful if children cannot also make these broader mathematical connections, which develops the important concept of 'equivalence'. Instant recall of maths facts can be incredibly stressful to children and adults alike and time-pressures and being put on the spot can both cause and exacerbate anxiety.

Providing opportunities for families to playfully experience the maths that is all around us helps us all to make better sense of the purpose of "school maths". The maths becomes something real, physical and tangible, something we can make, do, use and touch. By learning through guided discovery and exploration in a less high-pressured environment, adults and children alike can build their confidence to try things out without fear of getting it wrong. This type of active learning is not just for young children!

## Exploring Alternative Maths Journeys

At [Maths on Toast](#), our mission is to show children and their families that maths can be creative family fun. We do this by offering opportunities for them to actively explore a range of hands-on activities, all related to maths. This broadens perceptions of maths, helps parents to rethink their own school experiences and encourages us all to appreciate that there is more to maths than times tables and tests!

## Recommendation 1

We need a system which enables parents and children to explore maths as a family in creative, active, hands-on ways, and to learn to play with mathematical ideas. This will build skills that help everyone in both early and later stages of maths learning and at all ages. Enjoyment shapes a positive mindset and attitude that enables and increases readiness for future learning. The new government Multiply programme will provide local areas the opportunity to develop and deliver new maths provision to support adult numeracy - family maths should be considered in this mix as part of a family learning offer.



## **Recommendation 2**

Everyone should have the space to explore maths in their own way, at their own pace. There is no need for speed or competition - removing those dual pressures can liberate people's attitudes to maths. There may be one correct answer to many maths problems but there is no one single right way to get to that answer.

## **Recommendation 3**

Maths really is everywhere – there is little we can look at that does not have an underlying mathematical story. Ratio, proportion, measures, scale, symmetry, patterns, perspective are all ideas that we are biologically programmed to try to make sense of – but sometimes our mathematical glasses are blurred. Putting on some imaginary “mathematical glasses” and looking hard together at everyday life through them can lead to many interesting questions and some thought-provoking mathematical conversations for all.

## **Nancy Hey, Chief Executive, What Works Centre for Wellbeing**

### **Promoting Family Wellbeing Through Adult Learning**

At the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, we are interested in supporting and researching family wellbeing for a number of reasons.

First, we need to build more evidence on family wellbeing as a unit. Typically, research and practice has looked at wellbeing at the level of individuals, communities and the nation. But we don't yet look at the unit of the family in terms of wellbeing and policy to a great enough extent. The Department for Work and Pensions leads the Family Test, but this is focused on one specific aspect of family.

Second, much activity is focused on the outcomes for children rather than parents, adults or the family as a whole. Supporting young people's wellbeing is crucial, but we also know that adults are the most miserable and that personal relationships are vital for our wellbeing.

#### **What Works to Improve Wellbeing in Families**

[Family wellbeing is a developing part of community wellbeing](#). Families are the practical and very human experience of wellbeing, and are at the micro-level of 'bonding social capital' – something that [policy typically struggles to engage with](#).

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing hasn't yet looked comprehensively at families, but we have found that two areas have potential for promoting family wellbeing: learning throughout our lifetimes and participating in outdoor activities as a family.

#### **Adult Learning and Wellbeing**

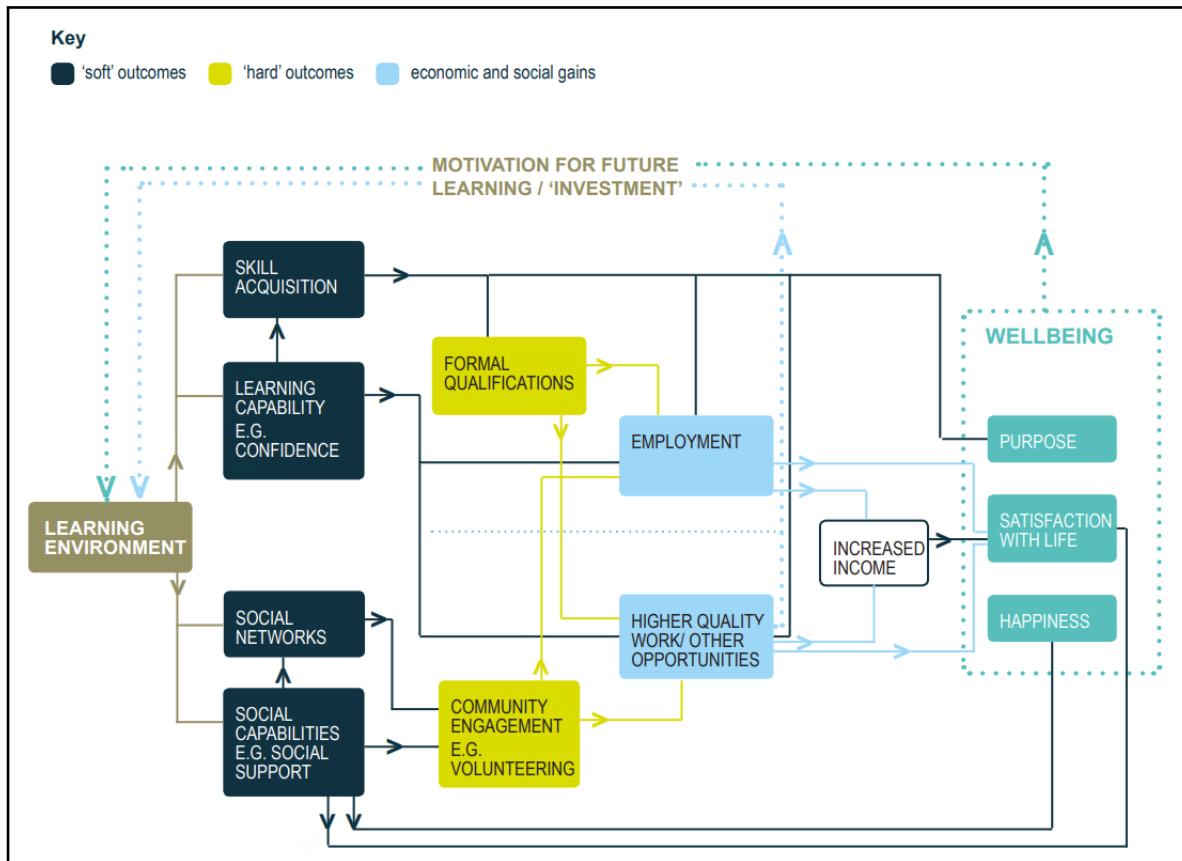
Our [adult learning and wellbeing review](#) supports existing evidence that learning throughout our lives is positive for wellbeing. It also found that adult learning can have a range of wellbeing benefits. These include facilitating social contact, developing a sense of purpose and enabling progression into employment (Box 1).

Learning at any age can help build soft skills such as social connections, social and emotional health, and life skills which include problem-solving, metacognition, or being aware of one's thoughts processes, and delivering and receiving feedback.

Our review shows that both 'hard' and 'soft' learning outcomes matter for wellbeing. Tangible outcomes such as a formal qualification, and intangible outcomes such as improved self-confidence and social relations, are both important for improving wellbeing.

We also found that the learning environment, the psychological safety of the learning group and teaching is key to learners achieving positive outcomes, but also as a source of support and to foster the social benefits of learning which contribute to wellbeing.

**Box 1**



Source: [Adult learning and life satisfaction](#), What Works Centre for Wellbeing

**Learning and Activities as a Family**

In our [adult learning and life satisfaction briefing](#), we found that hobby and leisure-related learning had a large positive impact and was surprisingly good for overall wellbeing for those living in more deprived areas. Alongside this, we also saw that culture, heritage and sporting activities were happening more and more through families rather than schools.

Whilst existing evidence showed that doing activities outdoors can be good for our wellbeing – making us feel happier and more satisfied with life, or less anxious and depressed – there was very little evidence about adults and children together in families.

Through our [outdoor recreation and the family review](#), we found that [people’s enjoyment of the outdoors](#) is enhanced when they spend time with family and friends and in particular with partners. Taking part in outdoor recreation with families improves self-competence learning and identity through family connection to nature. It also improves wellbeing via escapism, relaxation and sensory experience and strengthens social bonding as a family.

Participating in [arts, culture and community engagement](#) is good for your wellbeing, regardless of where you live.

## **What Can Be Done to Support Wellbeing in Families?**

While all these findings are important and provide much needed insight, more research is needed to understand how learning together and within the family unit could work to improve wellbeing for each individual family member, and for the family unit as a whole.

### **Recommendation 1**

Government and local authorities need to support and promote family outdoor activities. There is a case for promoting outdoor recreation, especially as a family-orientated activity at a national level. This could include cultural, heritage and arts engagement, physical activity, and time in green spaces as a family. However, more research is needed to help us understand the causal links and effects of different activities on different family members - for example, siblings, grandparents, and so on. This will help policymakers and practitioners understand what works and in what conditions.

### **Recommendation 2**

Stakeholders need to build an evidence base on what works for improving wellbeing for the family unit as a whole, as well as for individuals, adults and children. This includes understanding the wellbeing benefits of learning together as a family, and how we can best support families to thrive.

### **Recommendation 3**

Government and local authorities must use robust wellbeing evidence to inform policy, programmes and levelling up. We have produced an evaluation guide for [Measuring Wellbeing](#), which can help show the wider impact that policies and programmes have on the people and communities they support. We have also developed a [bank of wellbeing measures](#) designed to measure the wellbeing of children and young people.

## **Susan Pember, Policy Director, HOLEX**

# **Placing Family Learning in the Context of a Wider Intergenerational Learning Strategy**

Family learning is supported through the Department for Education (DfE) adult education budget and is a widely understood concept in the adult education world. It is a wonderful initiative that brings real joy and learning to family members. Family learning provides a range of opportunities for families in the widest sense (children, parents, carers, grandparents) to learn together and raise skills across generations.

### **Local Delivery of Family Learning**

There is a long history of delivery by local authorities and Adult Community Education services, Institutes for Adult Learning and colleges. They were given a formal remit in 2012 to include family learning in their commissioning plans and so they still in 2022 continue to provide family learning programmes. These programmes take place in partnership with schools and other organisations such as libraries, children’s centres and youth clubs. They enable families to learn in a relaxed and ‘fun’ atmosphere, picking up ideas to reinforce learning at home. For many adults, a family learning course can be the first step to taking up further adult learning and training opportunities or gaining a job.

Although the pandemic had and still is having an impact on family learning participation, anecdotal evidence from the Covid lockdown suggests those involved in family learning schemes were more confident with home learning. This is another reason why we need to continue to develop the programme and the value it is to improved learning.

### **Family Learning in a Wider Context**

However, if we are to become a lifelong learning nation then for family learning to achieve its full potential it should be considered as part of an intergenerational learning policy.

### **Intergenerational Learning**

The most widely recognised definition of intergenerational learning is where the practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities. This could be grandparents helping their grandchildren learn to read, or a retired employer mentoring university business students to create a start-up business, or a response to the cry of the baby boomer “I need a teenager to help me with my IT.”

Intergenerational learning also helps build social capital which generates a greater sense of community spirit, encourages shared values and builds confidence, which in turn improves productivity of the workforce. The most successful schemes are organised locally or at city level with all major institutions in education, business and voluntary sector taking part.

### **Towards 'Local' Intergenerational Learning Strategies**

With all the emphasis on localism, collaboration and development of the Mayoral Combined Authorities, it seems opportune to start a debate about how we grow and redesign the concept of intergenerational learning in our local communities.

For projects to be successful and have longevity, they should be visible and sustainable with a lead role for the Mayor. They should be purposeful, and partners - whether they be a university or business working in the community, youth clubs partnering with care for elderly, or schools opening up weekends for carers and families to learn to support each other - should all understand the potential personal gain as well as the collective good will.

To get the full benefit from intergenerational projects, they should be planned to include learning outcomes which will have a direct impact or benefit for all those involved.

### **Transferable Skills**

Key transferable skills arising from local intergenerational learning projects include improved communication and interpersonal skills; increased knowledge of practical skills; greater interaction between the work environment and the learning environment to increase knowledge and understanding; a better understanding and awareness of the local environment; and participation in political, social, economic and cultural life while being responsible citizens.

### **Activities**

Activities offered through local intergenerational learning projects include learning how to articulate a personal experience and social observation in oral and written forms; learning about history as a living, ongoing process; learning how to develop and document the results of an intergenerational exchange; learning to talk freely and pleasantly about solidarity between generations; and breaking down intergenerational stereotypes and bring different generations closer together.

## **Levelling Up and Local intergenerational Learning Strategies**

These outcomes would help achieve many government objectives, whether it be the Levelling Up agenda, the need for social justice or building local communities. It makes both economic and social sense for government, in particular the Mayors of Combined Authorities, to spearhead the development of local intergenerational learning programmes and use their powers to bring partners such as universities, adult education services, colleges, schools, local industry and voluntary services together to commit to taking forward an intergenerational learning programme.

### **Recommendation 1**

Family learning should become part of a wider intergenerational learning strategy to create a learning nation.

### **Recommendation 2**

Mayoral Combined Authorities and local authorities with County Deals should take the lead in establishing intergenerational partnerships.

### **Recommendation 3**

Adult Education Services, Institutions, Colleges, Schools and Industry Partnerships should continue to offer family learning in partnership with schools.

# **Next Steps for Family Learning Policy in England in the 2020s**



# Campaign for Learning Recommendations

## Prioritising Family Learning

Families are the foundation for learning. They shape our aspirations and our ability to value and engage with learning. We know that the home learning environment has a significant impact on children's achievement and that parents, carers and schools want to support their children's learning, yet there is currently no formal infrastructure or coherent Government policies that support learning in families. If we are serious about social mobility, improving children's achievement and developing adult skills then family learning must be prioritised.

## Policy Development in England

For Family Learning Policy to climb the political agenda in England during the 2020s, Campaign for Learning proposes six recommendations.

### Recommendation 1

Both national and local organisations working with families to support learning in England should come together to agree a definition of family learning to support the policy developments which are so urgently required.

One definition of family learning is as a parental engagement policy intervention. Another is a more specific definition as part of adult learning that includes dedicated family learning provision and parenting programmes. It can also be defined holistically to include informal learning opportunities, and intergenerational approaches which includes members of the extended or wider family. While elements of Family Learning are instinctually understood by most as learning that delivers learning outcomes for both the adult and the child, there is no agreed definition. We at Campaign for Learning believe in a unifying definition of Family Learning which covers these three elements - parental engagement, adult learning, and informal intergenerational learning. A unifying Family Learning definition will help bring together those working with or for families into a co-ordinated Family Learning sector, aiding campaigning for policy change and raising the profile of family learning policy and practice.

### **Recommendation 2**

The full range of local stakeholders involved in family and learning policy must come together to create and facilitate sustainable Local Strategic Family Learning Networks in England.

Family learning takes place in multiple settings to varying degrees in every local community of England. Many, if not all, strategic Local Authorities in England will have some form of family learning provision, delivered through early years settings, schools, colleges and community education, as well as a range of family support services. There are also Children's Centres, the newly formed Family Hubs, community groups, libraries, galleries, museums, heritage sites and multiple charities dedicated to engaging and supporting learning in families. All provide opportunities for families to learn. Local family facing organisations delivering family learning are diverse and will often have different priorities and outcome measures to achieve their goals. It is crucial that local strategic family learning networks are sufficiently resourced so that family learning can contribute to the levelling up agenda.

### **Recommendation 3**

A National Strategic Family Learning Network in England should bring together key stakeholders to develop family learning policy recommendations to influence Government policy.

A truly comprehensive strategic network at national level will have the necessary capability to influence policy makers to ensure the strengthening of family learning policy in England to contribute to societal change. By developing a national and local engagement strategy, the National Strategic Family Learning Network will drive partnerships, cross-sector collaboration and innovative delivery. In this way, the engagement strategies of national and local networks will unlock the true potential of family learning. We call upon the Cabinet Office to nominate the Department for Education as the lead department for Family Learning in England and facilitator in terms of liaising with other relevant departments in Whitehall including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and the Department for Health and Social Care.

#### **Recommendation 4**

Researchers, stakeholders and funders need to work together to develop a strong research base of evidence-informed approaches in family learning.

While there is strong research guiding learning for children, young people and adults, and opportunities for parental engagement, there is no significant up to date research base underpinning Family Learning pedagogy, impact on parents, or their employment opportunities. A strong research base of evidence-informed approaches will allow for development and implementation of effective Family Learning methodologies and interventions. The Department for Education should convene a research symposium to discuss priorities for evidence-based family learning from 2023 onwards.

#### **Recommendation 5**

Every school with pre-16 pupils should have an effective parental engagement strategy to enable them to engage parents as equal and valued partners in learning, supported by local family learning providers. At the same time, school sixth forms, FE Colleges and work based learning providers should balance the growing independence of 16-18 year olds with parental engagement to improve post-16 outcomes.

Schools are the experts in teaching and learning and delivering the school curriculum and parents are experts in understanding their children's needs and circumstances. Both want the best outcomes for children and this shared motivation should create the context for effective partnerships around learning.

In practice, the pressures on schools and parents often lead to poor communication and tension; schools lack capacity and often do not prioritise building effective partnerships with parents despite the clear evidence base on parents' influence on attendance, behaviour and achievement. The parents who could most benefit from support to create rich home learning environments for their children are also least likely to engage with schools, often due to their own negative associations with school, anxiety about their own skills, a lack of understanding of the importance of their role in supporting learning and pressures on time.

Family learning providers can create the bridge between school and the home learning environment. Schools do not need to deliver this themselves, but they must be able to create a context and a culture that welcomes parents as equal and valued partners in learning by developing an effective parental engagement strategy to promote inclusive family learning environments.

### **Recommendation 6**

Family learning stakeholders should work with the Department for Education and strategic Local Authorities to ensure that Family Hubs in England have a central and significant role in the development and delivery of family learning, as well as national initiatives such as the new numeracy programme, Multiply.

It is imperative that the Department for Education harnesses the potential of Family Hubs in every area of England. In this way, Family Hubs can contribute to the delivery of national learning programmes to the benefit of every local community. Family Hubs represent the most positive development for the delivery of early interventions in over a decade. As Family Hubs become up and running, they should embrace and embed Family Learning as a pedagogical approach to delivering improved outcomes for families.

### **Policy Development in the Devolved Nations**

Campaign for Learning believes that there is so much each of the devolved nations - Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England - can learn from each other with respect to family learning policy and practice. We would want the National Strategic Family Learning Network in England to work closely with existing national partnerships in each of the devolved nations to put family learning where it belongs, which is at the top of the policy agenda.

**Juliette Collier, National Director, Campaign for Learning**  
**John Beattie, Deputy Director (Families), Campaign for Learning**

## Past Publications

### Campaign for Learning Policy Pamphlets

- No.1 Earn or Learn for 18-21 year olds: New Age Group, New Policies, November 2015, Mark Corney
- No.2 University or Apprenticeships at 18: Context, Challenges and Concerns, April 2016, Mark Corney
- No.3 Reforming Technical and Professional Education: Why should it work this time? February 2017, Mick Fletcher
- No.4 Mending the Gap: Are the needs of 16-18 year olds being met? January 2018, John Widdowson
- No.5 Shaping the new National Retraining Scheme, March 2018, Susan Pember
- No.6 T levels for 19-23 Year Olds – The value of maintenance loans, August 2018, Mark Corney
- No.7 The Post-18 Review of Education and Funding – A Review of a Lifetime, December 2018, Editors Michael Lemin, Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.8 Post-16 Education and Apprenticeship Levy Funding – Next Steps for English Devolution, April 2019, Editors Michael Lemin, Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.9 Future Proofing Apprenticeship Funding in England for the 2020s, October 2019, Editors Michael Lemin and Julia Wright
- No.10 No 16-18 Left Behind – as the cohort grows, February 2020, Editor, Michael Lemin and Julia Wright
- No.11 Making a Success of the National Skills Fund – Adult Training and Retraining for All in the 2020s, March 2020, Editor Julia Wright
- No.12 Revolutionary Forces – Shaping the Post-16 White Paper, July 2020, Editor Julia Wright
- No.13 Revolutionary Forces – Reforms for a 'Revolutionary' Post-16 White Paper, September 2020, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.14 Understanding and Overcoming a Mental Health Crisis in 2021: Issues for post-16 education, employment, the world of work & retirement, February 2021, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.15 Racing to Net Zero: The role of post-16 education and skills, June 2021, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.16 Reforming Adult Social Care: Integrating Funding, Pay, Employment and Skills Policies in England, November 2021, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney
- No.17 Post-16 Education and Skills: Levelling Up Everyone, Everywhere, March 2022, Editors Julia Wright and Mark Corney

### Campaign for Learning Discussion Papers

- No.1 COVID-19 and Post-16 Education: Planning for a Different September, April 2020, Contributors - Susan Pember and Mark Corney
- No.2 Growing Level 4 and 5 Technical Education – A Segmented Policy Approach, November 2020, Contributor - Mark Corney

### Campaign for Learning Working Papers

- No.1 The Lifetime Skills Guarantee – Exploring the Lifelong Loan Entitlement and Incorporating Lifelong Grant Entitlements, April 2021, Mark Corney

## **Campaign for Learning**

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

**[www.campaignforlearning.org.uk](http://www.campaignforlearning.org.uk)**

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The Campaign for Learning works for social and economic inclusion through learning. The Campaign is a specialist in engaging people in learning. We work with partners to research, design and deliver innovative programmes and approaches that support people wherever they are to access life-changing learning opportunities.