

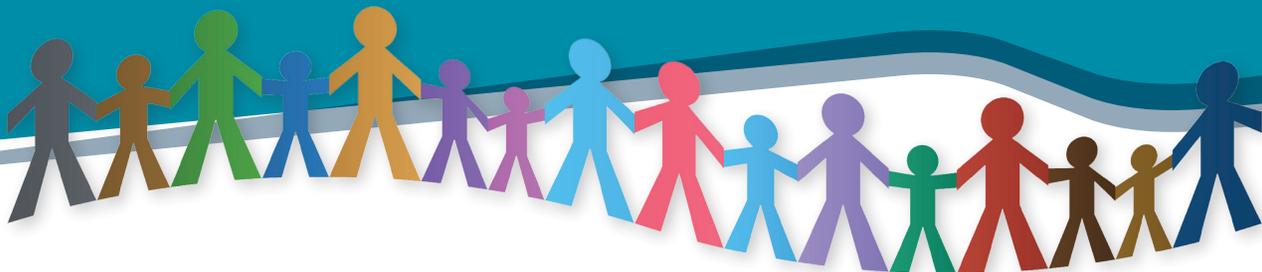
Family Learning Works

The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales

Chaired by Baroness Howarth of Breckland, OBE

October 2013

SUMMARY



‘Family learning’ refers to any learning activity that involves both children and adult family members, where learning outcomes are intended for both, and that contributes to a culture of learning in the family. Family learning improves the life chances of all families.

Family learning works. It works because parental engagement in family learning has a large and positive impact on children’s learning, giving children greater confidence and self-belief, with measurable benefits to their literacy, language and numeracy skills. It works because, for parents – especially those parents considered ‘hardest to reach’ – the wish to better support their children is often the key motive in overcoming any practical, financial or dispositional barriers to learning.

For many children, family learning is an intrinsic part of their upbringing. However, some families lack the resources or

knowledge to help their children. The absence of family learning in this most informal sense is a major barrier to achievement.

We know there is a persistent gap in the attainment of children from poorer backgrounds compared with their more privileged peers. The gap begins to emerge early in children’s lives, continues throughout schooling and results in a considerable gap at age 16 and beyond.

Government intervention is there to ensure that all children have the chance to see learning as positive and fulfilling. Family learning programmes enable parents to develop the skills, knowledge and enjoyment in learning to support their children.

Research shows that family learning could increase the overall level of children’s development by as much as 15 percentage points for those from disadvantaged groups¹ and provide an average reading improvement equivalent to six months of reading age.²

1 Sheffield City Council, analysis of foundation stage pupil data, 2011–2012.

2 NRDC/NIACE (2012) *Family learning: a review of the research literature*, www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/family_learning_research_review_final_-_8_june_2012.pdf

We want to see more families having the opportunities to experience family learning so that all children and parents can benefit from learning throughout their lives.

To achieve this we need more schools and early intervention programmes across government departments to adopt family learning approaches, and we need continued investment in community-based family learning programmes.

Recommendations for England



1. Family learning should be integral to school strategies to raise children's attainment and to narrow the gap between the lowest and highest achievers. In particular:

- Schools should utilise funding, such as the Pupil Premium, to ensure that the parents and carers of children, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are offered high-quality family learning programmes.
- Governing bodies should ensure the environment in schools is welcoming to parents and carers and that schools promote learning in the family.
- The Department for Education should research the impact of family English and maths interventions on the achievement and attainment of children at the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and 2 to influence schools and autonomous providers, e.g. supplementary schools, of the cost-effectiveness of the model.
- Initial teacher training and professional development should include evidence and training on the significance of parental involvement and learning as a family.
- Ofsted should carry out regular thematic survey inspections on family learning delivery across the range of providers, including schools and colleges.

2. Family learning should be a key element of adult learning and skills strategies to engage those furthest from the labour market and improve employability, especially through family English and maths provision. In particular:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships should capitalise on the ability of family learning

programmes, for example through ESF funding, to reach out to those furthest from the labour market and, with adult providers, ensure its inclusion in partnership plans.

- The Education and Training Foundation should develop capacity and expertise in the family learning workforce.
- Local authorities and other commissioners of family learning should ensure providers work within an appropriate quality assurance framework, which includes trained teachers, accessible and family friendly venues, available childcare, clear progression routes, accreditation opportunities, and the use of mentors or champions for recruitment and support.
- Providers of family learning programmes, including colleges, libraries, museums, and voluntary sector organisations, should ensure staff are appropriately qualified to deliver high quality learning opportunities in accordance with the National Occupational Standards for family learning.

3. Every child should have the right to be part of a learning family. Many children grow up in families that can support their learning but some do not. Public bodies should target support to help these families. In particular:



- Local authorities should work with Health and Wellbeing Boards and Community Learning Partnerships to identify ways to target resources on families that would benefit from family learning programmes. This would require a co-ordinated strategic approach.
- Local authorities and commissioners of adult and children's services should ensure that family learning is a central and funded



1 in 3 children leave school without a good GCSE in English



1 in 4 adults have maths skills at or below those expected of a 9 year old





80% of participants in family learning programmes progress in learning and/or life and work

Family learning improves health, employability, and increases involvement in community, culture and sport.

Family learning must be...

-  **Part of early years' provision at every school.**
-  **Funded to cut the costs of spending on vulnerable families.**
-  **An integral part of any adult learning and skills strategy.**

For more detail on the Family Learning Inquiry in England and Wales see www.niace.org.uk

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promoting adult learning

part of the core offer of children's centres and other community provision.

- Local authorities in England should ensure that their Troubled Families programmes include the provision of family English and maths interventions, particularly in light of the additional £200 million spending review commitment to this programme.

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4. Key government departments should include family learning in their policies and strategies in order to achieve cross-departmental outcomes. In particular:

- The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) should promote family learning as a key element of adult and community skills.
- The Department for Education (DfE) should use its influence and leadership role to promote family learning as an effective tool in raising achievement and reducing the attainment gap.
- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should actively build family learning

into relevant programmes to tackle worklessness and potential worklessness in future generations.

- Building on the findings of this inquiry, BIS, the DfE, the DWP, the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Ministry of Justice should invest in research, development and impact measures to understand better how supporting parents and carers and family English and maths can contribute to their agendas.

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5. The governments of England and Wales should regularly review the funding for and supply of family learning against potential demand. In particular:



- A baseline assessment should be carried out into current investment in family learning across all government departments. The Skills Funding Agency should assess the incentives and disincentives in its funding systems for providers in delivering family learning.

- The Skills Funding Agency should carry out an impact assessment of its new funding system on the delivery of family learning, particularly ensuring that the dual outputs and outcomes of family learning can be recognised.
- The Skills Funding Agency should 'inflation-proof' the community learning budget and, over a period of time, restore the budget to its original level.
- The Skills Funding Agency should ensure that all local authority areas invest community learning monies in targeted family learning programmes to meet and stimulate demand.
- be a centre for best practice and a 'go to' point for resources, training and access to new ways for delivering, including through the use of new technologies;
- celebrate and promote the value of family learning;
- ensure there is a focus on outcomes for children, adolescents and adults;
- lead and disseminate research into family learning;
- be a focus for the development of quality standards;
- ensure regular contact with key ministers to ensure family learning's contribution to a range of policy agendas is understood; and
- be an inclusive partnership of civil society organisations, government departments and networks which have an interest and stake in advancing family learning.

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6. There should be a joint national forum for family learning in England and Wales to support high quality, innovative practice, appropriate policy and advocacy, research and development. In particular:

The national forum should:

- advocate with government and other bodies for more understanding and investment in family learning;

For further information on the Inquiry into Family Learning and NIACE's work, please visit www.niace.org.uk/current-work/family-learning-inquiry

The full version of the report 'Family Learning Works: The Inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales' can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/19C1jfr>



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