

NIACE Family Learning Matters

Family learning to employment: raising aspirations and gaining skills

This Topic Paper is aimed at new practitioners and managers working with families to support progression from family literacy, language and numeracy and wider family learning into education, training and employment. The steps to employment and the development of employability skills form part of the rich range of outcomes from family learning programmes. The paper will be particularly useful to those considering providing programmes in new contexts, such as extended services, for the first time.

This paper aims to provide a brief overview of the policy context. It discusses the debate on the types of skills employers are looking for, and those gained through family learning programmes, and provides practical examples of routes into employment. It is intended to encourage debate and discussion regarding the role family learning plays in supporting progression into employment.

Available alongside this topic paper is a learning resource¹ which contains ideas and an activity which can be used in family learning sessions to encourage discussion with learners on different progression and employment possibilities. Family learning providers are in a strong position to raise aspirations and to capitalise on the opportunities for progression for learners.

¹ *Family Learning to Employment: An activity sheet for family learning.* NIACE Family Learning team. www.niace.org.uk/fl2e

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NIACE has recently been approached by the Learning and Skills Council to review the systems currently in use for capturing and measuring progression from Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes and develop accessible tools for this. The Quality Improvement Agency has also recently commissioned the development of pilot programmes to support learners to move from Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy programmes into employment.

THE POLICY AND RESEARCH CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW

The value of family learning programmes is that they build on existing strengths within the family and celebrate diversity whilst developing new skills for both the adults and children involved. Both family literacy, language and numeracy programmes (FLLN) and wider family learning programmes² provide a key stepping stone for developing the skills to move into employment and high priority is given to this in policy documents, such as the Sure Start Guidance,³ Extended Schools Guidance⁴ and *Every Parent Matters*.⁵

These and many other current policy documents highlight the strong links between educational achievement and family background.⁶ Research shows that the economic position of the family and the level of education of the parents affect children's achievement.⁷ In addition, there is an intergenerational impact on aspirations for moving into employment which impinges on social mobility. The impact of gender and the disadvantages in the labour market from taking a break from working, particularly for care responsibilities, are also highlighted in recent research.⁸

The *Every Parent Matters* publication states:

*Parents' influence is important throughout childhood and adolescence. At different times parents guide, encourage and teach. Children learn from the example set by their parents. The support parents give for their children's cognitive development is important, as is instilling of values, **aspirations** and support for the development of wider interpersonal and social skills. (DfES, 2007)*

Every Child Matters (HM Government, 2003) and *Every Child Matters: change for children* (HM Government, 2004b) set out the Government's agenda for change to improve outcomes for all children and young people, and to provide a national framework for all local authorities to lead the change programmes. The key element of the policy is to bring together all services for children in a locality across health, welfare and education, to ensure that no child falls through the net between services. It is a radical outcomes-based framework and, whilst local authorities are given the lead role to enable the change agenda to take place, they are tasked to engage with other statutory, voluntary and community services and to create Children's Trusts to formalise joint working arrangements by 2008.

Extended services bring together professionals with a wide range of skills and expertise to ensure a locally-responsive and flexible approach, working in and with communities to remove barriers to engagement and involvement. This multi-agency approach is key to reaching families, raising aspirations and helping ensure a coherent offer of quality learning for parents/carers and families.

There are nearly three million families in which no one is working and 1.7 million children live in such households.⁹ Powerful arguments are put forward regarding moving into employment as a means of ending poverty and social exclusion in families. However, recent documents have also acknowledged the need for on-going skills development to ensure that a move into employment does not become a poverty trap of low pay.¹⁰ The Leitch Review of Skills highlights the need for skills for economic prosperity and the prize to be gained by enhancing people's skills. It also recognises the links between educational attainment and family background.

In the 21st Century, our natural resource is our people – and their potential is both untapped and vast. Skills will unlock that potential. The prize for our country will be enormous – higher productivity, the creation of wealth and social justice.

It argues:

For innovation to be effectively implemented, businesses must be able to draw on a flexible, skilled workforce.

2 FLLN and wider family learning refer to programmes funded through the Learning and Skills Council. 'Family learning' is used as a generic term to include all programmes.

3 Sure Start, 2003. *Children's Centres – Developing Integrated Services for Young Children and Their Families*; DfES (2004c) *Every Child Matters: next steps*. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.

4 DfES (2005). *Extended Schools: Access to opportunities and services for all. A prospectus*. DfES.

DCSF (2007). *Extended schools: building on experience*. Nottingham: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

5 DfES (2007). *Every Parent Matters*, London. Department for Education and Skills

6 Leitch Review of Skills (2006). *Prosperity for all in the global economy - world class skills*, HM Treasury, London

Cabinet Office, Social Exclusion Team (2007). *Reaching out: think family, Analysis and themes from the families at risk review*. London: Cabinet Office.

7 Feinstein, L., Duckworth, K. and Sabates, R. (2004). *A Model of the Intergenerational Effects of Parental Education*. Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Department for Education and Skills Research Brief.

8 Nunn, A., Johnson, S., Monro, S., Bickerstaffe, T. and Kelsey, S. (2007) *Factors influencing social mobility*, Department of Work and Pensions Report, No 450. Norwich: The Stationery Office.

9 DWP (2007), *In work, better off: next steps to full employment*, Cmd 7130, London, The Stationery Office.

10 Harker, L. (2006) *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take to?* Department of Work and Pensions Report, Cmd 6591. London, The Stationery Office.

Leitch also recognises the wider benefits of learning:¹¹

While the economic and vocational purposes of skills are vital, they are in no sense the whole story. A cultured and civilised society must also sustain a wide range of opportunities to gain skills and acquire knowledge for their own intrinsic value. Investment in personal and community learning secures health and citizenship benefits for individuals and communities.

The transferable and generic skills that are gained through engagement with learning cannot be underestimated. It is these social and broader aspects of learning that contribute to building social and family capital. The recent Social Exclusion Task Force report¹² highlights the positive effects of intergenerational learning and the significant impact that the level of parental interest in a child's education has in raising attainment.

Other policy documents, whilst encouraging skills development and the move into employment, also recommend adequate attention to achieving a healthy work-life balance. There is a call for government and society at large to recognise and value the role of parents¹³ as carers.¹⁴

The HM Treasury Review¹⁵ argues that 'the principle of progressive universalism' is not being met in respect of support for all parents, for example, meeting the needs of parents from ethnic minority backgrounds. Progressive universalism is applied as follows:

Those children and families who need it should receive additional support to address the persistent gap in outcomes between the lowest and the highest socio-economic groups. This means offering a continuum of support according to need, with greater personalisation of services to meet every child's and family's requirements.

The above whistle-stop tour of policy indicates a tension between the different policy areas: between the role of parents in supporting their children, the role of parents in moving into employment to provide for their children economically and the social value of the caring role.

FAMILY LEARNING'S INTERFACE WITH POLICY AREAS

Family learning sits at the interface between learning for adults as parents and carers and learning for children. But it is more than just these two parts: the integration of learning for adults and children in the family setting leads to long-term changes in families and the start of many new learning journeys.¹⁶

All family learning programmes have three key aims:

- to improve the skills of the parents;
- to improve parents' abilities and skills to help their children learn; and
- to improve the children's own acquisition of skills.

In addition, the skills development for FLLN programmes relate to literacy, numeracy and language development in children and adults.

The support which family learning can offer to families in their engagement with education, raising aspirations and gaining skills is vital. It plays a critical role in the new agendas and contributes to the vision for integrated services. The recent NIACE publication, *Connect-Five: Family learning and Every Child Matters*, gives examples of case studies which demonstrate how family learning contributes to meeting the Every Child Matters outcomes working in partnership with other organisations.

The programmes also play an important part in engaging and supporting parents and families on the journey towards employment, recognising and developing some of the important generic skills for the workplace as well as significantly contributing to the Skills for Life targets.¹⁷ This flexibility and adaptability are key to learning as a family and within a family.

Current research (NIACE, 2007) on the links between family learning and parenting skills programmes highlights the trajectory of many learning journeys and how these do not flow along neatly planned progression pathways but rather in "spiky learning journeys" across a number of programme areas.¹⁸

Family learning programmes give excellent opportunities to acknowledge existing strengths and develop further the skills and attitudes needed in the workplace. Many children say, 'when I grow up I want to be ... an astronaut, a footballer, a dancer'. Family learning offers ways to explore the skills and knowledge that are needed to move into a variety of different jobs and can challenge patterns that may be impeding social mobility for both children and adults.

11 HM Government (2005). *Skills: getting on in business, getting on at work*. London: The Stationery Office.

12 Social Exclusion Task Force (2007). *Reaching Out: Think Family*. London, Cabinet Office.

13 The term 'parent' throughout the document refers to mothers, fathers, carers and any other adults with responsibility for caring for a child.

14 Cabinet Office (2007). *Building on Progress: families*. HM Government Policy Review.

15 HM Treasury (2007). *Aiming High for Children: supporting families*.

16 Lamb, P., Meade, C., Spacey, R. and Thomas, M. (editors) (2007) *Connect-Five: Family learning and Every Child Matters*. Leicester, NIACE.

17 DfES Skills for Life Report

18 www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family 'Links between Family Learning and Parenting' a discussion document for local authorities.

WHAT SKILLS DO EMPLOYERS SAY THEY WANT?

Demand for skills in this country is too low, and it is vital that we develop more employable skills – skills in terms of behaviour and a desire to learn as well as in craft or trade.

If Government, employers and training providers join forces to meet employer demand with the right skills and investment, we can tackle the skills famine damaging our economy. (Sir Digby Jones¹⁹)

There have been many different reports²⁰ into the skills needed by employers. Some of these skills are specific to meet the demands of the work, but many of them are generic and transferable across many different sectors.

Several surveys²¹ have asked employers about the skills they are looking for in their employees. In addition to a good level of ICT skills, literacy and numeracy, nominated skills included:

- problem-solving;
- organising;
- communicating effectively;
- working to deadlines;
- management and leadership;
- negotiating;
- motivating people;
- making decisions;
- research skills; and
- managing multiple priorities.

These skills are easily recognisable as being integral to managing family life and to building and maintaining successful relationships within a family.

THE JOURNEY TO EMPLOYMENT

Evaluations and research²² show that family learning engages learners who would not necessarily take up learning opportunities. Many take qualifications for the first time, and many go on to other learning opportunities, training or work.

For some of these learners there is a loss of confidence in operating and contributing to wider networks outside the home or the immediate neighbourhood during these

intensive years of caring for children. The workplace can seem like a long way off.

'I was beginning to lose my confidence and self-belief that I could do things. The course encouraged us to take the lead. I found I was able to do it and something sparked inside. I really enjoyed that aspect'²³

'I loved working with the whole group, sharing ideas and setting up challenges'

For parents and carers of young children, it is often training and work which fits around family routines that is the initial step. Many start by progressing onto working in the childcare sector, working in schools as teaching assistants, perhaps, while their children are still at school. The opportunities for wider employment opportunities become greater as the need to fit work and home life around family commitments and school term dates reduces.

Family learning has proved to be a very good starting point back into learning and work. Some of the jobs that people have progressed onto include:

- working in a pharmacy
- bar manager in a pub
- Support Assistant in a special school
- Teaching Assistants in schools
- swimming instructor
- Family Learning Tutor
- plumber
- travel agent
- childcare worker
- administrative assistant
- nursing.

Participants gain a range of skills from family learning:

- 'It gave me confidence, more tools and skills.'
- 'That again helped the children. I said, "I'll sit and do my homework" and we often sit three of us at the table.'
- 'General coping strategies, a way of getting back into society.'
- 'They actually did say to me that I was a different person. I went in with so much enthusiasm.'
- 'Having a clear goal – I know I'm going back to work. I want to get a proper job.'
- 'I think it was having people behind me saying, "you can do it."'
- 'I'm going to prove to you and myself that I can do it.'

Longer family learning programmes also give opportunities for learners to study for external accreditation including national literacy, numeracy and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) qualifications, as appropriate to the learners' skills levels.

19 www.ssda.org.uk

20 For example: www.learndirect-advice.co.uk

21 For example: www.careers4graduates.org; www.quintcareers.com

22 <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research>; www.lsc.gov.uk; www.literacytrust.org.uk; www.niace.org.uk

23 Case studies from learners on family learning programmes see NIACE-www.niace.org.uk/fl2e

For learners, attending a course involves balancing all the demands of home life, whilst returning to study. Understanding and learning how to take on regular commitments outside the home is an essential step towards sustaining work.

CASE STUDIES

Case study one

As a lone parent with two primary school boys, S restarted her learning journey when she attended 'Keeping Up with the Children' numeracy and literacy programmes in order to help and support her children's learning. Further family learning led to S gaining key skills accreditation and a place at De Montfort University on a year's Access course to study Maths and ICT. Unable to draw on financial assistance, yet undaunted, she travelled to Leicester every day by public transport and graduated in the summer of 2003.

Further family learning at her children's school led S to decide to become a plumber. She was accepted, being the only female in a group of 15 men. She qualified in 2005, was accepted as a trainee with a local plumber and thus achieved her target: 'to get off benefits and have a full-time career'.

...and last words from S... 'Going back to learning has completely changed my life for the better, not only because I am working but that I have something to offer now. I also feel that I know a lot more about me as a person than I did before. I feel complete'.

Case study two

E attended one of our Family Swimming wider family learning programmes called 'Teach Your Child To Swim' at the school.

E was a full-time mum and looking for something different to do with her son. She said, 'I always enjoyed swimming and wanted to build my child's confidence to let him learn to go into the water without fear. It was a fantastic opportunity. I wasn't working, and "Teach Your Child to Swim" was something we could both benefit from. I was beginning to lose my confidence and self-belief that I could do things. The course encouraged us to take the lead. I found I was able to do it and something sparked inside. I really enjoyed that aspect.'

E enjoyed the course so much that she decided to develop her experience and competence further as a voluntary swimming teacher at the school. She volunteered to help teach young children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with profound mental health problems to swim. Initially she assisted and reinforced the work of the qualified staff but later that year, she attended a week-long intensive ASA Level 1 Certificate for the Teaching of Swimming course and became a fully-fledged swimming teacher.

Case study three

L has two children and had been out of the workplace for five years. She attended a 'Keeping Up with the Children' literacy course, which gave her the confidence to start looking for work. She now works four days a week at a travel agent and has done further training relating to her job.

KEY POINTS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

This section picks out key points to ensure that family learning sessions optimise opportunities to raise aspirations and progression into employment:

- Programmes are personalised and reflect individual needs.
- There is recognition and celebration of the value of the role of caring for children, and an acknowledgement that a parent or carer can have other roles too.
- Learners are supported to recognise and record their own skills and how these are transferable to other settings.
- Tutors are well-informed about local opportunities for training and employment.
- Opportunities for discussion about the world of work are built in to sessions for both children and adults.²⁴
- Discussions and activities highlight a broad range of options for progression.
- Discussions challenge stereotypical concepts of employment.
- Links are made with partner organisations to support work placements, CV-building, 'better off' calculations and other activities that help people explore their future options as regards work.
- Visits and speakers which explore different career options are arranged and facilitated.
- Activities are evaluated and results of evaluation are fed into improvement plans.
- Progression and achievement are looked at in the widest sense and spiky learning journeys acknowledged.
- Progression into employment is recorded and celebrated.
- Information, advice and guidance sessions are built in to longer programmes.
- There are CPD opportunities for staff to extend their knowledge and skills to support learners on wider issues.

This topic paper encourages existing family learning providers to build on the work they have already done to enhance progression towards employment. Recording progress and achievement is vital for the recognition of the real value of the work in family learning. There is a need to capture the whole learning journey and look at progression opportunities for learners in the broadest sense, so that learners' can see the whole range of opportunities ahead of them. We are failing families if we constrain them within a narrow offer.

24 *Family learning to employment: An activity sheet for family learning*, NIACE Family Learning team, 2007 www.niace.org.uk/fl2e

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USEFUL WEBSITES

- The Skills for Families programme developed a wide range of resources that can be found on the web-page now housed on the QIA website: <http://www.qia.org.uk/>
- National Family Learning Network: <http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/familylearningnetwork>
- NIACE: www.niace.org.uk/research/family including *The Building Blocks of Quality in Family Learning: Guidance for Planners, Managers and Practitioners, Family Learning – Does that include us?* and *Linking the Thinking*.
- NIACE Family Learning to Employment: www.niace.org.uk/fl2e
- NIACE Connect-Five: www.niace.org.uk/connect-five
- www.literacytrust.org.uk
- www.esf.gov.uk

FEEDBACK

We would love to hear from you about how you've used this resource and what impact it has had.

Please complete this slip, tear it off and return it to
Family Learning, NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester, LE1 7GE.

Alternatively, email your comments to: clare.chisholm@niace.org.uk

NAME:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the family learning teams who contributed case studies and quotes from learners.

Sign Up Now – Supported by the European Social Fund

The European Social Fund (ESF) is a European Union initiative that supports activities to promote employment opportunities for all.

The ESF helps people who need additional support to enter jobs, improve their skills and develop their potential at work. Many of the people benefiting from ESF are at a disadvantage in the labour market because they lack basic skills and qualifications. ESF enables them to learn new skills and get qualified. Since 2000, over 4 million people in England have benefited.

For more information on the European Social Fund please visit the website at www.esf.gov.uk.

The Sign Up Now and Adult Learners' Week campaigns, co-ordinated by NIACE, are part-funded by the ESF. This Topic Paper aims to promote family learning as a route into learning new skills and employment for those currently disadvantaged in the labour market.



NIACE FAMILY LEARNING MATTERS TOPIC PAPERS

NIACE has introduced this new series of family learning Topic Papers to support providers on topical and current issues in family learning provision.

Topic Paper No 1, June 2007

Reviewing Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy Programmes

This paper takes the format of a checklist to support providers to review and develop LSC-funded FLLN programmes. It is intended to be used flexibly and to stimulate discussion.

Topic Paper No 2, June 2007

The National Occupational Standards for Family Learning and Qualifications for Family Learning Tutors

This paper is a briefing and update for those interested in (or confused by) national standards and qualifications for family learning tutors.

www.niace.org.uk/research/family

This Topic Paper was produced by Clare Meade and Penny Lamb, as part of NIACE's Sign Up Now campaign:

NIACE has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training, particularly for those who do not have easy access because of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient financial resources.

You can find NIACE online at www.niace.org.uk.

The family learning team at NIACE works to support the development of a broad vision of intergenerational learning opportunities for all families. For more information contact:

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