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Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning

Lifelong Learning and the Early Years

IFLL Sector Paper 3

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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.

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Foreword

This is the third of the Sector Papers to be published from the Inquiry into the Future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL). The Sector Papers will discuss the implications of lifelong learning for each of the sectors involved in providing learning opportunities: early childhood, schools, family learning, further education, higher education, private training providers, voluntary and community organisations, local authorities, learning cities, cultural organisations, and local learning ecologies. The goal here is to encourage innovative thinking on how these parts do or do not fit together, as part of a systemic approach to lifelong learning.

The Inquiry was established in September 2007 and will produce its main report in September 2009. It is sponsored by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), with an independent Board of Commissioners under the chairmanship of Sir David Watson. Full details of the Inquiry can be found at www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry.

The overall goal of the Inquiry is to offer **an authoritative and coherent strategic framework for lifelong learning in the UK**. This will involve:

- articulating a broad rationale for public and private investment in lifelong learning;
- a re-appraisal of the social and cultural value attached to it by policy-makers and the public;
- developing new perspectives on policy and practice.

IFLL: principal strands

The Sector Papers are complemented by several other strands of IFLL work:

- *Thematic Papers*. These relate nine broad themes, such as demography, technology or migration, to lifelong learning. Each one reviews evidence submitted to the Inquiry, and then draws together strands from the debate into a synthesis of the issues, with key messages.
- *Context Papers*. These will provide a broad overall picture of expenditure on all forms of lifelong learning: by government, across all departments; by employers, public and private; by the third sector; and by individuals and households. The goal is to provide a benchmark for mapping future trends.
- *Public Value Papers*. These will look, from different angles and using a variety of techniques, at the 'social productivity' of lifelong learning, i.e. what effects it has on areas such as health, civic activity or crime. The goal is both to provide evidence on these effects, and to stimulate a broader debate on how such effects can be measured and analysed.

- *Learning Infrastructures*. Unlike the others, this strand consists not of a series of papers but a set of scenarios, designed to promote debate and imagination on what the infrastructure for learning might look like in the future. This challenges us to integrate the physical environments of learning, the virtual environments or learning technologies, and people's competences and behaviour.

Published papers are available from the IFLL website: www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/Publishedpapers.htm

Periodic updates on IFLL progress are to be found in our Bulletin: www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry/docs/IFFLBulletin4.pdf

(You can register for Inquiry Bulletins at: www.niace.org.uk/lifelonglearninginquiry).

Professor Tom Schuller
Director, IFLL

Sir David Watson
Chair, IFLL Commissioners

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Executive summary

Lifelong learning is widely considered to be a transformational process, both for individuals and for the wider community. For individuals, engagement in learning is associated with creative fulfilment, enhanced well-being, and can provide a stimulus for new personal narratives. For our society, learning is seen to be both a key to unlocking economic success and a means to an invigorated national identity.

However, much writing and thinking about lifelong learning relates to a purely adult constituency; in chronological terms, anyone from early adulthood to old age, each of whom, it is inferred, can expect to capitalise on the benefits of an investment of learning within the span of their own lives.

Less attention has been given to the benefits of learning for adults for the very youngest members of society, in particular those whose lives are compromised by structural disadvantage.

The possible intergenerational benefits of a revitalised system of lifelong learning provide the focus of this paper. In addition, it is suggested that there is a discrete number of policy and delivery areas where adequately funded lifelong learning could make a particularly decisive contribution to early childhood development and family well-being.

These are:

- a new education and skills deal for all parents;
- a broader definition of *Skills for Life*, to include skills related to parenting and the care and education of children, financial and health literacy;
- reformulating Sure Start children's centres as intergenerational learning centres;
- a qualified and appropriately structured Early Years Workforce.

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Early childhood: perspectives and imperatives

It is not possible to contemplate early years development without considering the impact of child poverty. Across most countries of the European Union (EU) and the OECD, poverty is a major challenge for national states. In 2005, 19 per cent of children under the age of 16 in the EU were living in low income households, equivalent to 19 million in total.[1]

On taking office, New Labour pledged to halve poverty in the UK by 2010 and set a target of poverty elimination by 2020. An OECD survey published last year found that, between 2000 and 2005, poverty fell faster in the UK than in any other OECD country. However, the gap between the rich and poor remains larger in the UK than in the majority of other OECD member countries.[2] In one of the richest economies in the world, some 3.9 million children in the UK live in poor households.

Not all children who grow up in low-income households will experience adverse outcomes or experience them to the same degree, but poverty increases the probability that children will be subject to poorer health, higher rates of infant mortality, accidental injury, lower educational achievement, increased risk of mental disorders and premature death.[3,4]

The government's approach to tackling child poverty has included, as one strand, investment in enhanced public services, including, since 1997, more than £25 billion in early years and childcare services, a raft of measures to support parenting, and a network of 3,000 Sure Start children's centres providing integrated early childhood services for 2.3 million children under the age of five and their families. Next steps include a new Child Health Strategy, a refreshed national childcare strategy and legislation to enshrine the Government's poverty targets.

Despite these robust actions, child poverty, having fallen from 1997, began to rise again in the two years to April 2007.[5] In the same year, Unicef delivered a damning, if contested, 'report card' on children's well-being, placing the UK at the bottom of 21 OECD nations. [6]

In addition, and as the recent White Paper on Social Mobility acknowledges, divergences in development between children from different backgrounds continue to occur early, manifesting themselves in Foundation Stage Profiles at age four or five, with children from disadvantaged backgrounds developing significantly less well.[7] The first independent UK inquiry into children's well-being, *The Good Childhood Inquiry* –

[1] European Commission (2008).
[2] OECD (2008).
[3] Bradshaw, B (2002).
[4] ONS (2005).
[5] Department for Work and Pensions (2008).
[6] Unicef (2007).
[7] Cabinet Office (2009).

commissioned by the Children's Society – documented a society where commercial pressures and excessive individualism have sidelined the needs of children. So far, it seems, poverty and inequality remain entrenched in the UK, compromising the life chances of children even before they are born.

It is not that Government's initiatives have no chance of working. The evidence at this stage is scant, but the most recent impact study from the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS), published in 2008, suggests that there have been demonstrable benefits for three year olds living in Sure Start areas, compared with a comparison group of three year olds living in similar areas.[8] Similarly, there has been some narrowing of the gap in children's readiness for school, which is attributed to the introduction of free universal nursery education for three and four year olds.

However, one particular problem is that while government spending on services designed to tackle poverty is rising – with poor families receiving a greater proportion of this increased spending – the reality is that particular groups of families are less likely to make use of those services. Teenage mothers, for example, are less likely to breastfeed and more likely to smoke during pregnancy. Parents living in poverty, who may have the greatest needs, are also the parents least likely to seek family support.[9] The take-up of childcare – the flagship of government policy – is lower among poor families, black and minority ethnic (BME) families and other priority groups.

Those priority groups, described in practice guidance for children's centres, are to all intents the same or similar groups which form the focus for widening participation; they are perhaps the same adults who have been described as 'barely touched by the *Skills for Life* strategy'.[10]

[8] NESS (2008).
[9] Katz, I., La Placa,V., and Hunter, S. (2007).
[10] NIACE (2008) Policy Briefing for Westminster Hall Debate: Skills for Life

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Ending the cycle of underachievement

It is perhaps telling that the campaign against child poverty in the UK has been led by a coalition which consists mainly of children's charities, church groups and trades unions. Children are only poor because of their parents and few, if any, lifelong learning bodies have, for example, signed up to the End Child Poverty charter. [11]

However, most poor children live in homes which are workless or where parents are in low-paid work, placing lifelong learning at the heart of tackling poverty. There can be no lasting solution until definitive progress is made towards increasing the skills and employability of those parents who are most economically marginalised.

In addition, the wider benefits of learning, in terms of health and family and social relationships, have a particular relevance for those families most affected by poverty and social exclusion. The continuing low engagement of those groups in post-compulsory education helps to perpetuate inequalities in health and well-being, aspiration and self-esteem.

Studies which have sought to analyse the mediating influences of poverty and social exclusion have been influenced, properly, by ecological models of child development, first described by Bronfenbrenner. Providing a framework for understanding how the stresses and supports that impinge on parents and children interact and nest together within a hierarchy of four levels, the most important socio-demographic, family-level, influences on children's attainment have been found to be parental education, aspiration and income.[12] But how can parents, lacking access to educational capital or aspirations for themselves, possibly be expected to transmit these to their children?

In this context, it might be that the creation by Government of a separate Department for Children, Schools and Families provides a desirable focus on the status of childhood, but at the expense of sufficient momentum to tackle the broader social and intergenerational context in which children's lives are experienced and shaped.

Such a momentum requires a closer and more integrated relationship between all elements of the education system and between education and other services. And, as noted above, there are particular areas of policy and delivery where this closer relationship is necessary.

[11] www.endchildpoverty.org.uk
[12] Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979).

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A new education and skills deal for parents

The Government's policy on parenting is articulated most clearly in the policy statement *Every Parent Matters*. Within the statement, change for children and families is predicated on three key propositions: that family background is implicated in poor outcomes for children; that changes in employment patterns and family and social structures have created additional pressures on family life and parenting, requiring support from outside the family; and that there are parents who 'lack the motivation, skills or awareness' to confidently and effectively engage with their children's learning and development.[13]

These propositions have, to a degree, been contested. It has been argued, for example, that the expanding domain of professional support for parenting ignores class differences. The fact that middle-class parents are able to command better resources – including better schools – enables them to more effectively support their children's education. In this view, it is a lack of access to resources rather than faulty parenting which accounts for poorer outcomes for disadvantaged children.[14]

Whatever the truth of this, the fact is that becoming, or being, a parent is not considered sufficiently important to have its own unique claim to education – whether that is to gain the skills necessary to gain employment and so provide for children's physical and material well-being, or to have access, as a right, to learning which relates to the care of children and to their social, emotional and pedagogical needs.

The current tangle of initiatives and funding rules, parenting programmes and family intervention projects underplays the priority which should be given to parenting as a role in its own right. And since studies of poorer parents suggest that they consistently identify financial hardship as the primary barrier to effective parenting, education to promote economic well-being might be considered a first priority.[15]

A qualitative study commissioned by the Scottish Government Education Directorate, to explore the views of parents, carers and children in relation to early interventions, early years services and family support services, found that families feel that there is a lack of joined up working between support services which is particularly important where families have a complex range of needs; parents and carers do not want to be forced to return to work, but if they do want to, they want a joined up package of support to help them do that and to support them through the transition back into employment.[16]

Among a range of progressive measures put in place by the Government is an entitlement for some adults to free tuition. Parents who lack Level 2 qualifications

[13] DfES (2007).
[14] Gewirtz, S, (2001).
[15] Ghate, D. and Hazell, N. (2000).
[16] Scottish Government Education Directorate (2008).

can access free tuition and younger parents can access free tuition up to a Level 3 qualification. Other upcoming measures in the Social Mobility White Paper include additional help for low-income families, through individual skills accounts and a trial back-to-work payment to those who have been carers for at least five years.

However, the reality is that access to learning is not distributed equitably and remains 'rife with inequalities'.[17] The *Skills for Life* Survey in 2003 found that more than 5 million people between the age of 16 and 65 in the UK are qualified only at Entry Level, with a further 12 million qualified only at Level 1.[18] Those who are income disadvantaged are disproportionately represented within this group, yet are only half as likely as those at the upper end of the income scale to enrol on a *Skills for Life* or other course. They are also more likely to drop out of courses.

More recently, the National Audit Office (NAO) found that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) was making good progress towards public sector targets for basic skills, but concluded that the true impact of *Skills for Life* on the nation's skill base was not known.[19]

In a large body of research evidence relating to 'hard-to-reach' groups, issues adduced relate variously to factors within the individual – poor basic skills, vulnerability, cultural barriers or distrust or negative attitudes to education.

However, other environmental factors – lack of transport, costs and childcare – so predominate that it is not clear whether and to what extent non-participation in education and other services can be seen to be a voluntary decision.

A key factor for parents is the availability of childcare. Although a variety of forms of help are available, often the amount of help that can be given is insufficient or the terms of help are unduly restrictive; e.g. only for lone parents or only for non-working parents in low-income families where a partner is working.

Childcare costs allocated to colleges are not sufficient; many have established waiting lists for college-based childcare; full costs are not always covered; deposits are sometimes required; and childcare is normally available for contact time and not aligned with the need for childcare for personal study time or attendance at colleges for assessment or national tests.[20]

College-based childcare is not, in any case, always the best or most appropriate form of learner support. Parents should be free to use the childcare setting of their choice, including childminders or nurseries which their children already attend at other times of the day or week. Consideration might be given to individual childcare accounts for priority learners.

Particular groups of families face additional barriers and inequalities. Parents with a disabled child are much more likely to be unemployed or not in education because

[17] Demos (2008).
[18] DfES (2003).
[19] National Audit Office (2008).
[20] Daycare Trust (2008).

of the care needs of their children, but may also be unable to access skills training because the childcare which is available is unable to meet their children's needs. BME families come up against barriers which may be, specifically, language or culturally related, but are also over-represented among families on low incomes without access to transport.

What is clear is the need for adult learning to be planned and configured to match the realities of life for poorer families – which means, for example, in the local community and not an expensive bus ride away – and provided at times of day which are matched to the times at which children are taken to and picked up from schools or nurseries. In highly deprived neighbourhoods, many people are literally confined to very small territories – a few streets – which they seldom leave. If adult learning providers are serious about widening participation, a *small world* approach is required. This may inevitably mean dismantling larger institutions and rethinking adult education and skills training as primarily neighbourhood based.

Because there is also some evidence that skills programmes or active labour programmes may not always increase employability, parents may also require help in finding and keeping employment, help with transport to get to work, or help with claiming in-work benefits. Parents who have very large families, are disabled, have mental health problems, or have children who are disabled will need more help.

Parents are highly relevant to a large number of government objectives across the fields of health, education, employment and welfare reform, but are not the subject of a sufficient policy built around their specific and particular needs. Current education and learner support entitlements should be simplified into a clear and transparent offer for all parents who lack basic or vocationally related skills, irrespective of marital or employment status. If we are serious about tackling child poverty, the urgency of more determinedly supporting parents to achieve economic well-being for their children must be obvious.

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Skills for parenting

Being poor is not synonymous with inadequate parenting, but may diminish the capacity for supportive parenting, where stress or depression caused by financial and other types of adversity decreases parents' coping abilities, and those parents may also lack resources for outings, trips and other social experiences. The poorer health and other problems experienced by children may in turn influence parental responses.[21]

However, parenting is challenging, regardless of income or employment status. The indications are that it is getting harder.

Figures released last year by Government in response to a Conservative parliamentary question, indicated that more than 4,000 children had been excluded from school in the previous year, the main causes being 'assault' on teachers or other children. Mental health problems among children are increasing with those in low-income families being most at risk.[22]

In 2006, nearly 30 per cent of children aged between two and 15 were classified as overweight or obese.[23]

More broadly, family and child well-being is compromised by excessive or unaffordable debt, described by the Citizens Advice Bureau, even before the current recession, as hitting record levels.[24] Tellingly, a report released by Save the Children on families living in severe poverty – 50 per cent or less than median income – speculated that many of the poorest families in Britain were not claiming all the benefits to which they are entitled.[25]

In the face of this, the areas of functioning which currently constitute *Skills for Life* seem a little narrow. Important as the skills of literacy and numeracy are, they can only constitute a part of the competences and understandings needed for life, both in and out of the workplace.

A variety of parenting programmes already exist. Some, like the Webster Stratton's *Incredible Years* and the *Triple P* have been found, empirically, to result in demonstrable improvements to children's behaviour. Home visiting by voluntary organisations, health visitors, family nurses and children's centre outreach staff also address the need for help with parenting and wider family support, but all these types of help are more likely to occur where there is evidence of particular risk or a problem has already occurred.

[21] Guo, G. and Harris, K. (2000).
[22] ONS (2005).
[23] NHS (2008).
[24] Citizens Advice Bureau (2006).
[25] Save the Children (2007).

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The inclusion of skills for families, covering children's learning and behaviour, health, financial literacy, family disability and related areas would complement other parenting support services. Available to all parents, embedded literacy could provide, at the same time, the opportunity for some parents to achieve a first qualification.

A study of family outreach, currently being undertaken by Capacity for DCSF, has involved interviews with more than 200 parents. While managing children's behaviour and children's learning are key areas with which most parents want help, getting back into education and finding employment are also particular areas of help-seeking for low-income parents.[26]

Different groups of parents have different views on what constitutes 'good parenting' and policy needs to be flexible and supportive, not overly prescriptive. Identification of the training needs and a suitable qualification framework for the children's outreach workforce is still at a very early stage. The *Skills for Life* programme has invested significantly in quality assurance, in terms of curricula and staff training and has, therefore, much to offer in this area.

[26] Capacity Ltd (in progress).

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Reformulating Sure Start children's centres as intergenerational learning centres

Children's centres are integrated service hubs for children under the age of five and their families. Centres serving the most deprived areas provide access to family healthcare, advice and support for parents, including drop-in sessions, outreach services, integrated early education and childcare and links with Jobcentre Plus. While their focus is on improving outcomes for children, much, if not most, of their work is with parents.

Some children's centres have developed services such as inclusion projects for disabled children and adults, helping families with debt, housing or benefit problems, or sponsoring food co-ops and cafes, delivering arts projects or arranging outings and holidays for families needing respite. In many cases they deliver these services in partnership with other agencies and voluntary organisations.

Children's centres have a brief which includes, or potentially includes, further training and education for parents and support to move into employment, but this is not part of the required or core offer. Some provide learning opportunities related to health or diet, aspects of child development or parenting; some work with adult learning providers to provide family learning or *Skills for Life* courses; and some have established broad partnerships with training agencies to support parents into sustainable employment.

However, there is currently no requirement to provide sustained progression towards any definable employment goal. A themed study by the National Evaluation of Sure Start in 2004 found that few programmes made active efforts to reduce the number of children living in workless households, with only a minority adopting active strategies with partner agencies to take advantage of employment opportunities.[27]

The *Step into Learning* Initiative has raised awareness among children's centres about basic skills needs and the Childcare and the Early Years Provider Survey in 2007 found that 87 per cent of children's centres provided help with literacy and/or numeracy.[28] However, no information is available on whether this took the form of family learning or more sustained work leading to full qualifications. While children's centres are required to undertake self-evaluation, many lack baseline and other information relating to outcomes which would enable them to monitor progression.

[27] NESS (2004).
[28] Nicholson, S., Jordan, E., Cooper, J. and Mason, J., (2008).

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Children and community learning centres

Support for training and employment – and broader adult learning – should be brought within the core offer of children's centres, with adult learning providers co-located or at the least established as key partners alongside health, social care and specialist services.

Children's centres are charged with, and have demonstrated some success in, reaching priority or 'hard-to-reach' parents, achieving this through close partnerships with social services and health, community and self-help groups and links to specialist services such as drug and alcohol teams.[29] They are accessible to families without transport, offer provision at times which fit with the school or nursery day and can provide access to childcare. Some are now extending their hours to evening and weekend opening. With a family support and outreach function, there is the opportunity to provide sustained help for hesitant or vulnerable learners, and so reduce the attrition rate between enrolment and achievement.

The recent launch of the Child Poverty Pilots, linking children's centres to schemes for improved employability, underlines this direction of travel.

In recasting children's centres with adult education providers as key partners, alongside health and other family centres, there is both an opportunity, not only to more systematically address poverty, but to offer parents a wider span of learning opportunities, whether of a functional nature (e.g. financial literacy) or more broadly educational. In this, there is the chance to redistribute the benefits of lifelong learning in fairer ways and support aspiration among poorer parents and from them, to their children.

However, through these closer links, there is also the opportunity to recast children's centres as *learning communities,* providing opportunities for reflection, and enabling parents to take responsibility for particular roles, not just within the private space of their homes, but in the wider community.

At the heart of the original Sure Start model was the idea of breaking with hierarchical models of service delivery and aligning support for families with community empowerment. The aim was to form effective partnerships between local authorities, primary care trusts, voluntary and private organisations, parents and other members of the local community which would tackle local problems and work towards reducing social exclusion.

It is not clear that this aim has been achieved, and it has been suggested that parental *voice* is only heard through relatively restricted informal contacts and processes, rather than through representation and power-sharing.[30] A themed NESS study of

[29] Capacity Ltd (in progress).
[30] Ulla Gustafsson, U., and Driver, S., (2005).

empowerment found consistent evidence of individual empowerment in terms of coping with crises, developing skills and aspirations, social networking and moving away. There was less evidence of collective empowerment.[31]

A co-production model, which involves beneficiaries as active agents, with broad opportunities for new learning, may offer a better model for tackling local disadvantage. *Hidden Work*, a report from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, describes the ways in which other public service agencies have adopted co-production as a means of improving the lives of beneficiaries and also strengthening the reach and effectiveness of the services.[32] Some children's centres are already supporting volunteering, intermediate labour projects and the development of social enterprise. Closer links with lifelong learning could only strengthen these efforts.

[31] NESS (2006).
[32] Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006).

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A qualified and appropriately structured early years workforce

In 2007, according to the Childcare and Early Years Provider Survey, there were 112,600 providers of childcare and early years education, including maintained schools. This includes 13,600 full day-care providers, 8,700 sessional providers, 8,500 after-school and 5,800 holiday clubs, 59,800 childminders, 450 nursery schools and 15,700 schools.[33]

Across all provider types and all staff types, 64 per cent of the workforce was qualified to Level 3 or above and 11 per cent of the workforce was qualified to Level 6 or above. Among non-maintained providers, staff were more likely to be qualified to Level 3 than any other level, and 65 per cent of staff in group providers held at least a Level 3 qualification.

Childminders were generally the least qualified group, with only 36 per cent holding Level 3 qualifications and a third holding no qualifications. Staff in maintained schools were better qualified. Overall, 42 per cent of staff working in early years provision held at least a Level 6 qualification and 79 per cent held at least a Level 3 qualification.

High-quality early years settings can help children's development. The key finding in this area is the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) study which showed that children who had attended pre-school had higher levels of attainment in English and Maths and demonstrated more 'pro-social' behaviour when they were assessed in Year 6.[34]

There was also a quality effect, with children in high-quality settings achieving higher average attainment rates. Attending a quality pre-school setting was also found to help to compensate for a low-quality home learning environment. Provision is generally of poorer quality in the most disadvantaged areas.[35] One of the factors associated with quality in pre-school provision is the level of qualifications held by staff.

DCSF has recently published an update to the 10-year National Childcare Strategy, in which it sets out the steps it is considering to raise the level of qualifications in the childcare workforce.

These include:

- a graduate in every full day-care setting by 2015; and
- making a Level 3 qualification a minimum requirement for all settings.[36]

Among the pathways for raising the skills of the workforce is the Early Years Professional Status, which can be achieved through a number of training routes,

[33] Nicholson, S., Jordan, E., Cooper, J. and Mason, J. (2008).
[34] Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004).
[35] Ofsted (2008).
[36] DCSF (2009).

including a four-month validation pathway for experienced graduate professionals and a 15-month extended professional development pathway, enabling staff with relevant Level 5 qualifications to 'top up' to a full degree. A Graduate Leader Fund of £800 million is available during the period 2008–11 to support these developments.

Other funded programmes relate to continuing professional development; e.g. Communications Language and Literacy Development, Every Child a Talker, and Social and Emotional Aspects of Development.

Generally, these proposals have been welcomed by the early years workforce as a long overdue means of raising the status of early education and childcare, bringing coherence to the current diversity of types and levels of qualification and improving outcomes for children.

However, the implementation of the refreshed strategy will have a bearing on the cost structure of early years provision, particularly voluntary sector providers, and it is likely that further investment from Government will be necessary if childcare is to be affordable.

In addition, while raising the skills and qualifications of the workforce will increase the quality of experiences offered to children, it will not necessarily engage more families to make use of formal childcare. Childcare usage is less common among low-income groups and some minority ethnic groups.

A study for DCSF of attitudes to childcare among low-income parents found that many did not find it personally relevant, because they associated it with working parents and those with no family members around to help. Low-income parents generally had close relationships with their extended family and this was by far the preferred option.

Trust was a key barrier to using formal childcare, with the greatest trust placed in maintained nurseries, schools and school clubs and least trust in childminders. The study also found that the way in which the educational benefits of childcare are expressed in terms of '*goals*', '*stages*' and '*targets*' in government literature was alienating for low-income parents, who preferred to think of their children learning at their own pace and in a fun way.[37]

Outreach is seen as a means of engaging low-income or disadvantaged groups of parents in childcare and other services. DCSF has provided funding for outreach workers based in schools and in children's centres, and is currently considering their training needs and the most appropriate qualifications framework.

Another way of engaging those groups of parents would be through creating appropriate progression into the workforce for parents themselves. The playgroup model provided a template for this in the past, but the current emphasis on Level 3 and above may mean that the need for entry points for those less well qualified will suffer from a loss of focus.

[37] Roberts, K. (2008).

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Other skills are relevant to creating a body of early years and childcare provision which is not only professional but inclusive of all families. A recently published exploratory study of frontline perspectives of child poverty found that poverty was 'not commonly recognised as a relevant or appropriate construct for practitioners' and, while practitioners welcomed wider roles in addressing poverty, a number of support needs were identified, associated with wider roles in addressing poverty.[38] Those support needs are not currently recognised within the Children's Workforce Strategy.

[38] Cameron, D., Fryer-Smith, E., Harvey, P., and Wallace, E. (2008).

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Conclusion

This paper has considered the need for lifelong learning providers and policy-makers to adopt a firmer focus on the family, particularly disadvantaged families, as a means of strengthening family life; creating opportunities for personal fulfilment and change for adults; and providing a more secure foundation for early child development.

The Leitch Review stated that *'ensuring everyone has the opportunity to improve their skills is the best way to improve social mobility in the UK'*. Inarguably true, it is nevertheless also true that the family is the single most important influence in transmitting educational success. Without a step change in the way in which exclusion from those opportunities is perpetuated within some families, from one generation to the next, social mobility will remain compromised.

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