

BRIEFING PAPER

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The Family Test

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Summary

David Cameron announced the [introduction of the Family Test in a speech](#) in August 2014:

I said previously that I wanted to introduce a family test into government. Now that test is being formalised as part of the impact assessment for all domestic policies. Put simply that means every single domestic policy that government comes up with will be examined for its impact on the family.

In October 2014, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) published [guidance on implementing the Family Test](#). The Test consists of five questions policy makers need to consider:

1. What kinds of impact might the policy have on family formation?
2. What kind of impact will the policy have on families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities, or the onset of a long-term health condition?
3. What impacts will the policy have on all family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities?
4. How does the policy impact families before, during and after couple separation?
5. How does the policy impact those families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown?

Departments are expected to document the application of the Family Test; the guidance asks Departments to consider publishing the outcomes, but it is not a requirement.

MPs have asked numerous Parliamentary Questions about how the Test is being implemented; how many assessments have been carried out; and whether assessments will be published.

In March 2016, two reviews of the test were published. [Implementing the Family Test: A review of progress one year on](#) was published jointly by The Family and Childcare Trust, Relate and the Relationship Foundation, supported by 14 other charities. The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published [Where next for the Family Test?](#)

In March 2019, the CSJ released another report: [A Review of the Family Test](#). Commentators have argued that the application of the Family Test has been inconsistent, and in some Departments, the Test does not appear to be a significant feature of policy-making. Several recommendations have been made to better embed the Family Test, including: requiring the assessments to be published; developing better tools and practices for officials; and conducting Government-wide reviews.

There have been calls to make the Family Test a statutory requirement and two Private Members' Bills (PMB) have attempted to legislate for this. The Government has resisted these calls, arguing that it would reduce the Test to a tick box exercise. However, it is looking to embed consideration of loneliness and relationships into the Family Test as part of the [Government's Loneliness Strategy](#).

1. What is The Family Test?

1.1 Announcement of the Family Test

The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, referred to the possibility of introducing a Family Test following the riots of August 2011:

So if we want to have any hope of mending our broken society, family and parenting is where we've got to start.

I've been saying this for years, since before I was Prime Minister, since before I was leader of the Conservative Party.

So: from here on I want a family test applied to all domestic policy.

If it hurts families, if it undermines commitment, if it tramples over the values that keeps people together, or stops families from being together, then we shouldn't do it.

More than that, we've got to get out there and make a positive difference to the way families work, the way people bring up their children...

...and we've got to be less sensitive to the charge that this is about interfering or nannyng.

We are working on ways to help improve parenting - well now I want that work accelerated, expanded and implemented as quickly as possible.

This has got to be right at the top of our priority list.¹

It was not until August 2014 that the intention to [introduce a 'family test' was announced](#):

[...] The reality is that in the past the family just hasn't been central to the way government thinks. So you get a whole load of policy decisions which take no account of the family and sometimes make these things worse. Whether it's the benefits system incentivising couples to live apart or penalising those who go out to work - or whether it's excessive bureaucracy preventing loving couples from adopting children with no family at all.

We can't go on having government taking decisions like this which ignore the impact on the family.

I said previously that I wanted to introduce a family test into government. Now that test is being formalised as part of the impact assessment for all domestic policies. Put simply that means every single domestic policy that government comes up with will be examined for its impact on the family.²

The DWP was given responsibility for all relationship support policies, with "every government department to be held to account for the impact of their policies on the family".³

"Families are the best anti-poverty measure ever invented. They are a welfare, education and counselling system all wrapped up into one" *David Cameron, January 2016*

¹ David Cameron, [PM's speech on the fightback after the riots](#), 15 August 2011

² David Cameron on families, [PM's speech to the Relationship Alliance](#), 18 August 2014

³ Ibid.

1.2 Department of Work and Pensions Guidance

In October 2014, the DWP issued [Guidance for Government Departments](#) on implementing the Family Test:

The objective of the Test is to introduce an explicit family perspective to the policy making process, and ensure that potential impacts on family relationships and functioning are made explicit and recognised in the process of developing new policy.⁴

The guidance sets out when and how Government Departments should apply the Test:

While public policy by definition impacts the lives of individuals, families, communities and society as a whole, there will be policies, which do not have any impact at the level of the family per se, or where the impact is small and indirect, or temporary in nature. Where that is the case it may not be sensible or proportionate to apply the test. If policy makers are unsure, they should reflect on the questions and the rest of this guidance. In most cases it will be obvious where a policy is not in scope, but the indirect impacts of policy on families are not always obvious. If in doubt it is recommended that the questions are addressed and any further analysis that is needed is carried out.⁵

The Family Test is in the form of five questions which policy makers should reflect on during policy formulation:

- What kinds of impact might the policy have on family formation?
- What kind of impact will the policy have on families going through key transitions such as becoming parents, getting married, fostering or adopting, bereavement, redundancy, new caring responsibilities or the onset of a long-term health condition?
- What impacts will the policy have on all family members' ability to play a full role in family life, including with respect to parenting and other caring responsibilities?
- How does the policy impact families before, during and after couple separation?
- How does the policy impact those families most at risk of deterioration of relationship quality and breakdown?⁶

The guidance emphasises the need to consult widely when considering the Family Test questions:

While policy teams working on specific areas of family policy will have a good understanding of the impact of their policy on family relationships, expertise in this area largely sits outside of Government. Policy teams will need to engage with the evidence base and build their own understanding of how their Department's policies impact families. This will mean engaging with key stakeholders, using consultation processes to collect evidence, including family impacts in evaluation strategies and in some cases engaging directly with a diverse range of families, including children. The Open Policy Making approach encourages the use of a range of tools and techniques for engaging with

⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, [Family Test: Guidance for Government Departments](#), 31 October 2014

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

stakeholders in developing policy and these should be considered when building the evidence base on how particular policies impact families.⁷

The guidance states that Departments should document the assessments they carry out in an appropriate way as part of the policy making process:

Where a detailed assessment is carried out, departments should consider a standalone document to bring together their analysis. Departments should consider publishing assessments where they are carried out, and where policy is being submitted for collective agreement through the Cabinet Committee process, the assessment should be included alongside other policy documentation.⁸

1.3 Role of the Cabinet Committee on Social Justice

In June 2015, Iain Duncan Smith, then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, announced that the Cabinet Committee on Social Justice would take the lead in ensuring that the Family Test is properly applied across Government Departments:

Asked by: Mr David Burrowes

May I welcome the introduction of the family test and the Secretary of State's lead on that? What is he doing to ensure that it does what the Prime Minister says it should do, which is change the way Government do business?

Answered by: Mr Duncan Smith | Department for Work and Pensions

This test will be reviewed through the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, which I chair. We intend, and the Prime Minister intends, that it will have teeth. We want to see an improvement in family life and greater support for those who have to juggle care for their children, care for elderly relatives and work. Through that process we hope to improve their lives.⁹

According to the [List of Cabinet Committees](#) (last updated 9 January 2019), there is no longer a Social Justice Cabinet Committee. In a [debate on the Application of the Family Test](#) (March 2019), the Government was asked whether this committee still exists. The Minister responding to the debate did not address this question.¹⁰

1.4 Attempts to make the Family Test a statutory requirement

There have been attempts in the House of Commons and the House of Lords to make the Family Test a statutory requirement. There have been two Private Members' Bills on this subject; both failed to progress (see below). Both the 2015 and 2017 Conservative Governments have not supported the introduction of a statutory requirement. Lord Agnew of

⁷ Ibid., p9

⁸ Ibid., p5

⁹ HC Deb 22 June 2012 c612

¹⁰ [HC Deb 13 March 2019 c132WH](#)

Oulton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Education), said the Government is “cautious about making it statutory because that would very much remove flexibility in how it was used.”¹¹ On 13 March 2019, Justin Tomlinson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, elaborated on this point:

I acknowledge that some would like the family test to be a statutory obligation, but feedback from policy makers, and points highlighted in speeches today, suggest that a statutory test could risk becoming a box-ticking exercise at the end of a policy process, with pass or fail outcomes, rather than something embedded at the beginning of the process, which is key. A legislative test would also risk losing the flexibility to adapt and change.¹²

Caroline Ansell’s Private Member’s Bill

In June 2015 Caroline Ansell came 20th in the Private Members’ Bill Ballot for the 2015-16 Session. She opted to introduce the [*Assessment of Government Policies \(Impact on Families\) Bill 2015-16*](#) the purpose of which is described below:

A Bill to require ministers to carry out an assessment of the impact of government policies on families by giving statutory effect to the family test; to place a duty on the Secretary of State to make a report on the costs and benefits of requiring local authorities to carry out equivalent tests on their policies; to require the Secretary of State to establish, and make an annual report on, indicators of and targets for the government’s performance in promoting family stability; and for connected purposes.¹³

The Bill was presented to Parliament on 24 June 2015. The debate on Second Reading began on Friday 4 December 2015. Caroline Ansell explained why she had introduced the Bill:

In that light, a whole host of questions have been put to Departments. They ask the Minister how many of his or her Department’s policies have been assessed against the family test and what steps have been taken to publish the outcome of such an assessment. I regret to say that the answers to those questions have been rather limited. In many instances, the response was that the guidance urges only a consideration of publication, and therefore no publication had followed. There have been good examples of the assessment in relation to the Childcare Bill and the Education and Adoption Bill. However, the potential within the family test is as yet unrealised.¹⁴

The Government opposed the Bill. Priti Patel, then Minister for Employment, said:

Placing the family test on a legislative footing, however, runs the risk of turning the test into a tick-box exercise across Government Departments, when our ambition is to work across government with Departments to embed the benefits of thinking about policy from a family perspective at all stages of policy development, not just complying with legislative requirements.¹⁵

¹¹ [HL Deb 9 May 2018 c14](#)

¹² [HC Deb 13 March 2019 13 March 2019, volume 656, c137WH](#)

¹³ [Assessment of Government Policies \(Impact on Families\) Bill \(HC Bill 26\)](#)

¹⁴ [HC Deb 4 December 2015 c674](#)

¹⁵ [HC Deb 4 December 2015 c677](#)

The debate was adjourned; the Bill did not progress and fell due to lack of parliamentary time.

Lord Farmer's Private Member's Bill

The *Family Relationships (Impact Assessment and Targets) Bill [HL] 2017-19*, was sponsored by Lord Farmer and Fiona Bruce MP. The Bill completed its stages in the House of Lords but has not been scheduled for Second Reading in the Commons at the time of writing.¹⁶

The Bill would:

Require public bodies to accompany any proposal for a change in public expenditure, administration or policy with a family impact assessment; and to require the Secretary of State to report on the costs and benefits of extending family impact assessments to local authorities and to establish and evaluate progress towards objectives and targets for family stability.¹⁷

Although not called Family Tests, the [House of Lords Library briefing paper](#) on the Bill said that the principles behind the assessments were based on the 2014 Government guidance published for Family Tests. Supporters of the Bill noted that not using the term 'test' was a deliberate attempt to get away from a pass/fail assessment and encourage a 'broader exercise' in public policy.¹⁸

[A Manifesto to Strengthen Families](#), a campaign announced in 2017 supported by over 50 Conservative MPs and 11 Peers, recommended that the Government support this Bill.

1.5 Integration with the Loneliness Strategy?

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness suggested in 2017 that the Family Test should become a Family and Relationships Test. This would widen its scope to consider the impact of policies on connections between individuals and within communities.¹⁹

In October 2018, the Government published its loneliness strategy, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#). Within it, the Government said:

Government's intention is to embed consideration of loneliness and relationships throughout the policy-making process. Government will explore various mechanisms for doing this and **will, for example, include it in guidance for the Family Test.**²⁰

Rishi Sunak, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, later confirmed that it is the Government's intention to include loneliness in Family Test guidance:

¹⁶ Information on debates in the Lords can be found on the [Bill pages](#).

¹⁷ [Draft Family Relationships \(Impact Assessment and Targets\) Bill \[HL\]](#), as brought from Lords on 1 May 2018, Bill 205, 57/1

¹⁸ [HC Deb 13 March 2019 volume 656, c120WH](#)

¹⁹ Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action](#), December 2017, p14

²⁰ HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p61

The loneliness strategy takes action on the Jo Cox Commission's recommendation for a family test: it requires government departments to report on their work on tackling loneliness in their annual Single Departmental Plans from 2019/20 and commits to including loneliness in the guidance for the Family Test.²¹

To date, this has **not** amounted to the introduction of mandatory Family Tests for Government Departments, as this exchange, following the announcement of the loneliness strategy, indicates:

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con)

I commend the Minister for her statement and her work on this issue and welcome a cross-departmental strategy on loneliness. Does she agree that one of the greatest antidotes to loneliness is stronger families? In the opinion of many of us, it is the greatest antidote and can help many linked problems, such as homelessness, addiction and mental health challenges. As the strategy is implemented, will my hon. Friend commit to ensure that her Department and others actively consider how they can promote the strengthening of family life? As a start, will they also ensure that the family test is properly and comprehensively applied across Government?

Tracey Crouch

I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We recognise the importance of families in tackling loneliness, and it is true that the fragmentation of families and the way in which we all live and work may well have contributed to loneliness. Many young people leave their home communities, often for study or work, and that in turn can have an impact on families. We are an incredibly busy society, and we can quite often forget members of our family, so all that is at the heart of the strategy.²²

1.6 The Family Test Network

According to a letter from Justin Tomlinson, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Work and Pensions, to Steve Double,²³ the Department for Work and Pensions has set up a Family Test Network. The letter, sent in October 2018, said that 13 Departments are represented in the network, which aims to:

...increase the capacity of departments to use the test by collaborating on identifying, developing and sharing effective practice. This new network will support this Department in a review of the Family Test guidance and we will encourage Departments across the Government to develop their own materials for policy officials, tailored to their particular policy context.²⁴

In March 2019, Mr Tomlinson went into greater detail about the Family Test Network and efforts being made to embed the Family Test across Whitehall:

We are working with a network of representatives from all domestic policy Departments to develop tailored resources to help

²¹ PQ 193407 [\[Loneliness\]](#) 23 Nov 2018

²² [HC Deb 15 October 2018 c460](#)

²³ A copy of this letter is included in Centre for Social Justice, [A Review of the Family test](#), 4 March 2019, pp29-30

²⁴ *Ibid.*

officials apply the test in their unique policy contexts, and ensure that advice to Ministers reflects the impact on families. That will be underpinned by **refreshed central guidance for officials, which we expect to publish this summer** [...] My Department will actively consider including the family test in the DWP business plan.

I am pleased to be part of the inter-ministerial group that is focusing on how to improve support for families in the first 1,001 days. Another of the report's recommendations is for Ministers to take a more active role in ensuring that the family test is applied in their Departments. **I have raised the family test with that inter-ministerial group, and I will ask Ministers actively to consider whether the test has been considered in all the advice they receive, on any topic, in their Departments.**

[...] **Each Department has a nominated representative on the new family test network**—my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay highlighted the importance of that—and the network is identifying, developing and sharing best practice on applying the family test. That helps us to deepen our understanding of how the test is applied across Government, and what further support officials need to embed it fully as part of any considerations made when formulating policy.

The network pays particular attention to the need highlighted in the report to build evidence, and we are currently exploring ways to support Departments in that.

We will continue to encourage and support Departments to apply the family test, and to make their own judgments on whether and when publishing assessments is appropriate. **We will consider whether more can be done to improve transparency**, which includes reflecting on the report's recommendations. It is unclear, however, whether knowing how many family tests a certain Department has applied would bring much greater or more meaningful transparency.

[...] **We are helping Departments to develop a toolkit of resources for officials to improve consistent and meaningful family test application** across Government. Given that effective implementation of the test is fundamentally an issue of capability, we are **also working with Civil Service Learning and the Policy Profession unit**, to consider how best to support policy makers to apply the family test effectively.²⁵

The Minister went on to describe several pro-family projects being undertaken to demonstrate that “principles of the family test are visible across the Government.”²⁶

The report the Minister refers to here is [A Review of the Family test](#), published by the Centre for Social Justice March 2019. See section 2.4 for more information.

²⁵ [HC Deb 13 March 2019 cc137-38WH](#) (emphasis added)

²⁶ [HC Deb 13 March 2019 cc138-39WH](#)

2. Application of the Family Test

2.1 Parliamentary Questions (PQs)

Several PQs have been asked about the application of the Family Test in respect of particular policies and how it is being applied in individual departments.

For instance, Caroline Ansell (MP for Eastbourne between 07 May 2015 and 03 May 2017) asked Departments about training they had provided on the Family Test. Tim Loughton asked Departments about what guidance they had given to support the implementation of the Test. Nic Dakin asked Departments what steps they had taken to embed the Family Test in policy making. Kate Green asked Departments about the guidance they have provided on implementing Family Test and the number of policies assessed against the Family Test.

David Burrowes (MP for Enfield, Southgate between 05 May 2005 and 03 May 2017) asked several questions about the Family Test after its introduction. For example:

Asked by: Burrowes, Mr David

To ask the Leader of the House, pursuant to his oral contribution of 10 March 2016, Official Report, column 444, whether he expects primary and secondary legislation to be subject to the family test and the results published.

Answering member: Chris Grayling | Department: Leader of the House

A Family Test was introduced by the Government in 2014 – it aims to bring a family perspective into policy making. It will ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning, both positive and negative, are recognised in the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions, and any subsequent legislation, made by Ministers.

The Test is not a ‘tick box’ or ‘pass v fail’ exercise, it is about thinking carefully how new policy can support or potentially undermine family relationships. Policy is always about trade-offs but the Family Test ensures family considerations are explicitly considered and recognised when making those trade-offs.

While the guidance encourages publication, there is no requirement to do so.²⁷

Many of the responses to PQs describe briefly what the Family Test is and refer to guidance issued by DWP but provide little additional information. During the March 2019 debate on the [Application of the Family Test](#), several Members expressed frustration at the Departmental responses to their Parliamentary Questions. Fiona Bruce said that the answers were inadequate and did not explain the actions taken by Departments to apply the Family Test. She also contested the argument, made in several Departmental responses, that the Family Test did not apply to the Department’s policy brief.²⁸

²⁷ PQ 33911 [[Legislation Family Test](#)], 18 April 2016

²⁸ [HC Deb 13 March 2019 c120WH](#)

The Government has referred to the Family Test in responses to some PQs, for instance:

Asked by: Bruce, Fiona

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, with reference to the Early Intervention Foundation review, What works to enhance interparental relationships and improve children's outcomes, commissioned by his Department and published on 22 March 2016, what steps he is taking to strengthen the policymaker's role in promoting awareness of the effect of the quality of the relationship between parents on their children.

Answering member: Caroline Nokes | Department: Department for Work and Pensions

The report presented by the Early Intervention Foundation shows that children exposed to frequent, intense and poorly resolved conflict between their parents are at risk of poorer long term outcomes. Since publication policymakers have engaged with the Early Intervention Foundation through conferences and seminars to increase their understanding of the report's findings.

This evidence is being used to inform our approach to developing policy for future relationship support provision. Since autumn 2015 we have been working with 12 local authorities to develop evidence-based strategic delivery plans to embed relationship support into local services for families.

In addition we introduced the Family Test in October 2014, which means that for the first time new Government policies will be assessed for their impact on the family. This ensures that family stability is at the heart of government policy making.²⁹

A short list of PQs that have asked about the Family Test is included in the appendix to this paper. More can be found by using the [Parliamentary search](#) tool. The Centre for Social Justice, writing in March 2019, calculated that there had been 149 PQs on the Family Test.³⁰

2.2 Implementing the Family Test: A review of progress one year on

In March 2016, the Family and Childcare Trust, Relate and the Relationship Foundation, supported by 14 other charities, jointly published [Implementing the Family Test: A review of progress one year on](#). The report documented the responses of 14 Government Departments to requests for information on how they had incorporated and implemented the Family Test since its launch in October 2014.

Ten departments replied. The report states that five Departments (listed below) said that they had produced tailored guidance or tools to apply the Family Test:

- Department for Work and Pensions;
- Department for Education;
- HM Treasury;

²⁹ PQ 50589 [on [Families: Government Assistance](#)], 31 October 2016

³⁰ Centre for Social Justice, [A Review of the Family test](#), 4 March 2019, p5

- Department for Business Innovation and Skills; and
- Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Four departments (listed below), according to the report: “did not provide a meaningful response about how, or whether, the department is implementing the Family Test”:³¹

- Home Office;
- Cabinet Office;
- Department for Health; and
- Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The report concluded that “the majority of departments have shown limited commitment to implementing the Family Test,”³² and raised concerns about variations in departments’ responses to the Test.³³ The report acknowledged that it was still early days, and might take some time for best practice to emerge, but expressed concern about the “absence of a transparent mechanism to record when the Test has been applied” because:

[...] this means that it is impossible to accurately assess how successfully the Test is being incorporated into the policy making process. There is little information available to the public about a process and little accountability for the Test. Whilst the Government rightly wishes to ensure that the Test does not become a ‘tick box’ exercise, this does not preclude recording and monitoring of its use.³⁴

The report made the following recommendations:

Recommendations of *Implementing the Family Test: A review of progress one year on*

- The Government should put the Family Test on a statutory footing.
- Departments should be required to publish a record of their Family Test assessments.
- The Government should publish an annual review reporting on its performance.
- The Government should develop and publish tools and resources to support departments in applying the Family Test.
- The Government should examine the feasibility of a local Family Test.
- Devolved administrations should consider developing their own Family Tests.³⁵

In April 2016, Baroness Lister asked the Government how it planned to respond to this report:

Asked by: Baroness Lister of Burtersett

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what plans they have to respond to the recommendations in *Implementing the Family Test, a review of progress one year on* by Relate, the Relationships Foundation and the Family and Childcare Trust.

³¹ [Implementing the Family Test: a review of progress one year on](#), 29 March 2016

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ [Implementing the Family Test: a review of progress one year on](#), 29 March 2016

Answered by: Baroness Altmann | Department: Department for Work and Pensions

DWP welcome the Family Test, a review of progress one year on by Relate, the Relationships Foundation and the Family and Childcare Trust. We will consider the findings of the report in the next phase of our Government wide strategy to improve the embedding and implementation of the family test.³⁶

2.3 The Centre for Social Justice: Where Next for the Family Test?

In March 2016, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) published: [Where next for the Family Test?](#)

The report made recommendations based on the outcome of a roundtable event which involved people “with a range of expertise in government”.³⁷

The CSJ supported putting the Family Test on a statutory footing, but also believed that there are other ways in which implementation could be strengthened.³⁸

Recommendations from *Where next for the Family Test?*

Develop better evidence of what helps and what hurts families:

[...] the CSJ recommends that government departments collect and publish:

- evidence of how greater family stability would advance their own agenda, encouraging external experts to submit evidence for consideration;
- how their departmental policy is supporting families and family stability;
- what further steps they are planning to take to support family stability.

Strengthen the Family Test:

[...] departments would be asked to:

- apply the Test where relevant against this evidence base;
- publish their assessment of the Test;
- explain why the Test has not been applied where this is the case.

The CSJ also wanted the **Cabinet Committee on Social Justice to oversee the process** and publish, on an annual basis:

- the objectives and targets of Government in relation to promoting strong and stable families;
- the Government’s proposals and policies for meeting these objectives;
- the indicators that must be measured for the purposes of assessing the Government’s progress towards these objectives; and
- the data on which the family stability indicators are based.

³⁶ PQ HL7515, [on [Families](#)] 25 April 2016

³⁷ Centre for Social Justice, [Where Next for the Family Test](#), March 2016

³⁸ Ibid.

2.4 Centre for Social Justice: A review of the Family test

In March 2019, the CSJ published [A Review of the Family Test](#). In a similar fashion to the work carried out by the Family and Childcare Trust and other organisations in March 2016, the evidence for this review was collected through responses to PQs and letters to 14 Government Departments. The questions posed are explained on page six of the review.³⁹ Departmental responses to these lines of enquiry can be found in the appendices.

The CSJ's key findings included:

- A number of Departments appeared to have developed 'bespoke resources' for the application of the Family Test. The approach developed by the Ministry of Defence seemed to be the most advanced. Nine departments had created resources to assist civil servants and Ministers in applying the Test, and there were examples of guidance being developed for individual Departments. The guidance tended to be 'general in nature' and did not help officials "understand how the policy responsibilities of their department specifically impacts on families."
- Some officials and Ministers reported that some Departments have attempted to integrate the Family Test into civil service training.
- The DWP had established a Family Test Network to review guidance and support its application across government.
- The Ministry of Defence and the Department of Health and Social Care both demonstrated that they expected Family Tests to be considered, a commitment backed by appropriate procedures.
- Several departments did not provide a meaningful response, see the Family Test as relevant to their policy work, or regard the publication of Tests as necessary.⁴⁰

Recommendations from *A Review of the Family Test*

The CSJ made the following recommendations:

- Ministers should commit to rejecting advice or proposals to which the Family Test has clearly not been applied. When formally securing collective Cabinet agreement on policy/legislative proposals before they are publicly announced or presented to Parliament (the 'write-round' process), a 'clear statement' on the application of the Family Test should be included.
- The Government should create an 'expert reference group' to make better use of external expertise and help Departments to 'establish an evidence base on issues relating to the family.'
- The Government should also establish a 'government-wide duty to record the application of the Test to be published on a regular basis.'
- Each department should,
 - ensure that Business Plans and Departmental objectives explicitly consider the impact on families;
 - appoint a senior policy lead to work with the Family Test Network; and
 - create its own bespoke Family Test guidance.

³⁹ Centre for Social Justice, [A Review of the Family Test](#), March 2019, p6

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp7-9

2.5 Published Family Test Assessments

Family Tests should be applied to new domestic policy expected to impact families, but Departments are **not obliged** to publish them. A few that have been published are detailed below.

Department for Communities and Local Government [Lifetime tenancies: equalities impact assessment](#), May 2016

This Equalities Impact Assessment mentions the Family Test under the protected characteristic of age. It considered the proportion of tenants with children. It concluded that making lifetime tenancies flexible enough to cover a child's secondary education is beneficial for children. The policy was also expected to 'increase headroom in the social rented sector' and benefit overcrowded families with children (estimated to be 85% of all overcrowded households in social housing).

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Higher Education and Research Bill Equality Analysis](#), May 2016

The following analysis of the Family Test implications of the Higher Education and Research Bill was provided in the Equality Analysis:

Consideration of the Family Test

The Family Test was introduced on 31 October 2014. The objective of the test is to introduce an explicit family perspective to the policy making process, and ensure that potential impacts on family relationships and functioning are made explicit and recognised in the process of developing new policy.

Our assessment is that the policies covered in this Equality Analysis will not have a family impact beyond improved access to higher education and better employment prospects for graduates, which is positively associated with stable family formation.⁴¹

The Green paper that preceded the Bill had also included a consideration of the Family Test:

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [FULFILLING OUR POTENTIAL Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice](#), November 2015

This considered that the policies would not have an impact on the areas covered by the five questions of the Family Test but asked for views on this in consultation responses.

⁴¹ Department for Business, Innovation and skills, [Higher Education and Research Bill - Equality Analysis, May 2016](#), p40

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Devolving Sunday Trading Rules, Impact Assessment, March 2016](#)⁴²

There were lots of requests from Members to publish the Family Test in relation to this legislation. The Department did, but faced criticism on the delay to do so, as illustrated by the following PQ:

Asked by: David Burrowes

Following yesterday's deliberations on Sunday trading, may I congratulate the Government on the precedent they have set in the publication of the family test alongside new legislation, even though it was published too late, coming as it did just a few hours before Report? It helpfully conceded the negative impact of the proposals on the family. Will the Leader of the House confirm that for all primary and secondary legislation, a family test will be published at the beginning, rather than at the end, of proceedings? In addition, will he inform us of what will happen if legislation does not pass the family test?

Answering member: Chris Grayling

The purpose of impact assessments and things such as the family test is to enable the House to take an informed decision. Such tests are less a bar over which a measure needs to jump than a package of measures on which the House can form its decisions. The Government's intention remains to keep the House as fully informed as possible so that it can take those decisions.⁴³

The Family Test was considered as part of the Impact Assessment. The assessment identified three impacts on the family:

Positive:

- Greater employment opportunities may ease families' financial problems, especially if paid a Sunday premium, and more flexibility might make working-time childcare easier.
- Longer opening times gives families greater flexibility over when they do their shopping.

Negative:

- Working on Sundays may interfere with family time, especially if other members of the family work Monday to Friday. Saturday, workers may feel pressurised to work Sundays. This could be mitigated by the right to opt-out of Sunday working.

Department of Health, [Family Test for the new contract for doctors and dentists in training in the NHS, March 2016](#)

This ten-page Department of Health report examined each of the five Family Test questions in some depth.

⁴² DEP2016-0226

⁴³ HC Deb 10 March 2016 [on the [Family Test](#)] c443

3. Appendix: Parliamentary Questions and Debates on the Family Test

A few recent parliamentary questions and debate contributions that add more detail are reproduced below. There have been many more questions asked; these can be found by using the [Parliamentary search](#) tool.

3.1 Parliamentary debates

The Family Test has been raised in several debates. There was a debate specifically concerning the [Application of the Family Test](#) on 13 March 2019 (HC Deb 13 March 2019, volume 656, cc115-139WH).

The Family Test has been raised in the context of other debates. During a debate on Benefits: Reductions (01 November 2018) the Family Test was briefly discussed. Baroness Lister of Burtersett (Lab) said;

Looming over the debate, and more importantly over low-income families, is the so-called managed migration of universal credit. Welcome as the Budget changes are, they do nothing to rectify UC's fundamental design flaws, which become increasingly apparent as families suffer the consequences. One such flaw is payment—including money for children—into one account, which has been widely condemned for facilitating economic abuse and potentially aggravating domestic violence. Women subject to domestic violence are also being put at risk by two other cuts, which are especially harmful to larger and some minority-ethnic families: the two-child limit and the benefit cap. Both break the long-standing principle that entitlement to safety-net benefits should reflect a family's needs. Over 70,000 families, two-thirds of whom were in work, lost up to £2,780 in the first year of the two-child limit. It is difficult to see how such a crude cut, directed at children, can support family life. The Government have refused to publish their family test assessment, despite an FOI request which was turned down on utterly flimsy grounds. I wonder why.⁴⁴

[Benefit Cap \(Housing Benefit and Universal Credit\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2016](#)

HL Debate 08 Nov 2016 | 776 cc1121-1139

[Social Mobility](#)

HL Debate 27 October 2016 | 776 cc377-406

[Enterprise Bill \[Lords\]](#)

HL Deb 9 March 2016 | 607 cc315-387

⁴⁴ [HL Deb 1 November 2018 c1492](#)

[Immigration Bill](#)

HL Deb 3 Feb 2016 | 768 cc1793-1910

[Welfare Reform and Work Bill](#)

HL Debate 27 January 2016 | 768 cc1283-1345

[Welfare Reform and Work Bill](#)

HL Deb 17 Nov 2015 | 767 cc28-128

[Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill \[Lords\]](#)

HC Deb 17 Nov 2015 | 602 cc554-643

[Welfare Reform and Work Bill](#)

HC Deb 27 Oct 2015 | 601 cc207-312

[Tax Credits](#)

HC Deb 20 Oct 2015 | 600 cc845-923

[Health: Children and Young People](#)

HL Deb 7 Jul 2015 | 764 cc156-172

[Childcare Bill \[HL\]](#)

HL Deb 1 Jul 2015 | 762 cc2074-2126

3.2 Parliamentary Questions (a selection)

[Social Security Benefits: Children](#)

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of Portsmouth

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Bates on 5 February (HL5370), whether they have applied the Family Test to the policy to provide support to a maximum of two children; and if so, how the potential impacts on families are being taken into account.

Answering member: Lord Bates | **Department:** Treasury

The government is committed to supporting families. To achieve this, we introduced the Family Test, which aims to ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning are recognised early on during the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions made by Ministers. The Family Test was introduced in 2014, and remains official government policy. The guidance for implementing the Family Test can be found here and is also attached:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-test-assessing-the-impact-of-policies-on-families>

The Family Test was considered during the development of the policy to provide support for a maximum of two children in Child Tax Credit and Universal Credit. The published Impact Assessment shows the measure will have a positive impact on overall family stability. The Impact Assessment is attached.

04 Dec 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL11630

[Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy: Families](#)

Asked by: Baroness Eaton

To ask Her Majesty's Government how many Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy policies have been assessed against the Family Test; and whether they have published the outcome of any such assessments.

Answering member: Lord Henley | **Department:** Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Government is committed to supporting families. In order to achieve this, in 2014 we introduced the Family Test, which aims to ensure that impacts on family relationships and functioning are recognised early on during the process of policy development and help inform the policy decisions made by Ministers.

The majority of BEIS policy areas do not have a direct impact on the formation, make-up, or breakdown of families. However, where these impacts are relevant, the Family Test is applied to policy changes in a proportionate manner. Officials leading directly on the policy development are responsible for undertaking this analysis, and for advising Ministers on these impacts.

When applicable, analysis on family impacts is included within impact assessments, which are publicly available. This analysis is usually qualitative in nature, as it is difficult to make quantitative estimates on the impacts from policy changes. Following implementation of the policy, BEIS monitors and reviews its impacts in a proportionate manner.

08 Nov 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL11018

[Social Security Benefits: Children](#)

Asked by: Baroness Lister of Burtsett

To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Lord Bates on 29 March (HL6647), whether they will now publish the outcome of the Family Test Assessment on the policy to limit Tax Credits and Universal Credit support to two children.

Answering member: Lord Bates | **Department:** Treasury

The government does not routinely publish the Family Test assessment of policies.

An impact assessment of the policy of providing support for a maximum of two children in Child Tax Credits and Universal Credit was published and is available here and attached:

<https://www.parliament.uk/documents/impact-assessments/ia15-006e.pdf>

The impact assessment considered the impact of the policy on families and other protected groups.

15 May 2018 | Written questions | Answered | House of Lords | HL7463

[EU Nationals: Immigration](#)

Asked by: Mulholland, Greg

To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Urgent Question of 4 July 2016, on EU Nationals: UK Residence, what assessment she has made of whether her Department's policy complies with the Government's family test.

Answering member: James Brokenshire Department: Home Office

The Government has been clear that there will be no immediate changes in the circumstances of European nationals and their family members entering or currently residing in the UK.

11 Jul 2016 | Written questions | House of Commons | 41902

[Junior Doctors: Conditions of Employment](#)

Asked by: Madders, Justin

To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what the outcome was of his Department's application of the Family Test to the decision to impose a new contract on junior doctors.

Answering member: Ben Gummer | Department: Department of Health

On the 11 February 2016 my Rt. hon. Friend the Secretary of State made an oral statement, Official Report, columns 1763-1765 in which he announced that he would proceed with the introduction of a new national contract for doctors in training, following advice that there was no realistic prospect of reaching agreement with the British Medical Association.

The Secretary of State will carefully consider the draft final terms of such a contract in light of any applicable duties and the Family Test.

11 Mar 2016 | Written questions | House of Commons | 30293

[Sunday Trading: Families](#)

Asked by: Brennan, Kevin

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, whether his proposals for the extension of Sunday trading hours has passed the family test.

Answering member: Anna Soubry | Department: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

The Government's Family Test is not a pass or fail measure.

The Government has conscientiously considered the impact on families and the evidence on this presented during the consultation. The Government will publish the Impact Assessment, including the Family Test, shortly.

03 Mar 2016 | Written questions | House of Commons | 28528

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