



HOUSE OF LORDS

Library Note

Debate on 3 February: Early Parenting and Preparing a Child for Success in School

This Library Note aims to provide background reading for the debate to be held on Thursday, 3 February 2011:

“The Key Role of Good Early Parenting in Preparing a Child for Success in School”

The Note covers a selection of research on predicting educational outcomes and the impact of parenting. Recent comparative data on child wellbeing then sets the context for summaries of the recent reports of the independent review on poverty and life chances, *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults*, and the independent review on early intervention, *Early Intervention: The Next Steps*.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this House of Lords Library Note is to provide background reading for Lord Northbourne's debate on the "key role of good early parenting in preparing a child for success in school", to be held on 3 February 2011 in the House of Lords. The Note begins by looking at a selection of research on predicting educational outcomes and the impact of parenting, including the role of fathers. This is followed by a brief section on the European league table of child welfare. Two recent reports are then considered, which make recommendations on the policy levers and strategic approach that should be adopted and exploited in order to improve the life chances of children: the report of the independent review on poverty and life chances, *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children from Becoming Poor Adults* (December 2010), led by Frank Field, Labour MP for Birkenhead; and the report of the independent review on early intervention, *Early Intervention: The Next Steps* (January 2011), led by Graham Allen, Labour MP for Nottingham North.

2. Research on Predicting Educational Outcomes and the Impact of Parenting

The literature on the subject of educational outcomes and parenting is extensive. The following is a very brief overview of a selection of research on the subject. The selection has been guided by coverage in policy reports and reviews, and provides an indication of the sorts of questions and evaluations being discussed. It is not intended to be a comprehensive literature review.

2.1 Predicting Educational Outcomes

In an article published in 2003, Leon Feinstein looked at predicting educational outcomes by analysing the 1970 British Cohort Survey. The British Cohort Survey was a longitudinal survey of 17,000 children born in 1970, and Feinstein used a sub-sample of data that tested the development of children at 22 and 42 months. The table reproduced below shows how the position in the early development distribution at each age predicts final qualification levels at age 26. Feinstein comments that “it is striking that, even measured at 22 months, children in the bottom quartile of this development index are significantly less likely to get any qualifications than those in the top quartile. Moreover, at 42 months more than three times as many of those in the top quartile as those in the bottom quartile go on to get A level qualifications or above. Given the young age of the children tested, these are strong findings. They suggest that, even before children have entered school, substantial signals predicting future educational progress are contained in these standard tests of child development” (L Feinstein, [‘How early can we predict future educational achievement?’](#) (2003), *LSE CentrePiece*, Summer 2003, p 26).

Age 26 Educational and Vocational Qualifications by Quartile Position in Early Development Scores

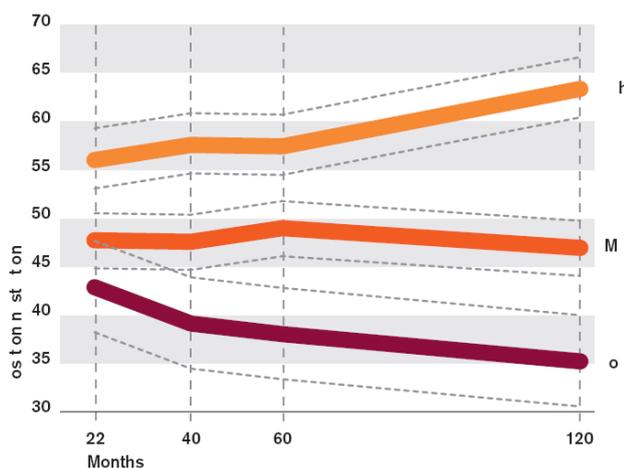
		Age 26 Highest Qualifications			
		None/Misc	Lower/Middle	A level or higher	Total
22 month					
Bottom Quartile	%	15.00	52.80	32.30	100
Top Quartile	%	8.10	48.60	43.30	100
z-stat on difference*		2.6	1.0	2.7	
42 month					
Bottom Quartile	%	25.80	57.30	16.90	100
Top Quartile	%	6.50	41.00	52.50	100
z-stat on difference*		6.4	3.7	8.4	
5 years					
Bottom Quartile	%	30.20	51.80	18.00	100
Top Quartile	%	5.20	36.40	58.50	100
z-stat on difference*		18.8	8.3	21.8	
10 years					
Bottom Quartile	%	35.00	53.50	11.50	100
Top Quartile	%	2.40	30.70	67.00	100
z-stat on difference*		25.5	12.6	29.8	

* The final row for each panel reports a test statistic for the difference between cell proportions. This has a standard normal distribution, under the null. The z-statistic on the difference in proportions in the first column of the first panel is 2.6, i.e. the difference is significant at 1%.

(L Feinstein, ‘How early can we predict future educational achievement?’ (2003), *LSE CentrePiece*, Summer 2003, p 27)

Based on the graph reproduced below, Feinstein goes on to look at how the results of these pre-school indicators are stratified by social class. The social class classifications are based on both parents' occupational classification at the child's birth (social-economic status, SES): high SES—father in a professional/managerial occupation and mother similar or registered housewife; low SES—father in a semi-skilled or unskilled manual occupation and mother similar or housewife; medium SES—those omitted from the high and low SES categories. Children whose mothers were housewives were categorised by the SES of fathers. The graph shows, according to Feinstein, that “although children are already stratified by social class in standard tests of intellectual and personal development at 22 months, this stratification has become more extreme by age 10 as assessed by the standard tests for academic development appropriate at that age. There is certainly no evidence here from the late 1970s that entry into schooling in any way overcame the polarisation of children’s educational achievement linked to the deepening effects of parental background” (p 28). He concludes “having a low test ranking at 22 months does not matter decisively for a child’s future position in the distribution unless the child has low SES parents as well” and that “early scores do matter but so does social class after early childhood” (p 30).

Average Rank of Test Scores at 22, 42, 60 and 120 Months by SES of Parents



(L Feinstein, 'How early can we predict future educational achievement?' (2003), *LSE CentrePiece*, Summer 2003, p 29)

2.2 Impact of Parenting

There have been a number of studies which have looked at the impact of parenting and the home learning environment. Professor Charles Desforges and Alberto Abouchaar undertook a literature review on the impact of parenting. They found that the research consistently showed that:

- Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.

- The extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity.
- The extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child gets older and is strongly influenced at all ages by the child characteristically taking a very active mediating role.
- Parental involvement is strongly positively influenced by the child's level of attainment: the higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved.
- The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.
- Other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of 'at-home' parenting.
- Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, and also with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers.
- Research affords a clear model of how parental involvement works... In essence parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child's self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations.

(C Desforges, A Abouchaar, [*The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review*](#) (2003), Department for Education and Skills, RR433, pp 4–5)

Kathy Sylva et al evaluated evidence from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project, which is a European longitudinal study of the effects of pre-school education of children aged between 3 and 7. The study looked at background characteristics related to parents, the child's home environment and the pre-school settings children attended. Sylva concludes that "for all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are" (K Sylva et al, [*The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project: Findings from Pre-School to End of Key Stage 1*](#) (2004), SureStart, p 1).

Research has also been carried out on why children do well despite disadvantages in life. A paper by Ingrid Schoon and Samantha Parsons assessed whether growing up in a socially disadvantaged family has lasting implications for psychosocial adjustment in adulthood. Using the National Child Development Study, which surveyed people born in 1958, and the British Cohort Study of 1970, they concluded: "generally the study indicates that a stable and supportive family environment provides the ideal context for

the child to flourish. In the long run, however, even resilient children are still at least in part handicapped by the experience of early social disadvantage” (I Schoon and S Parsons, ‘Competence in the Face of Adversity: The Influence of Early Family Environment and Long-term Consequences’ (2002), *Children and Society*, vol 16, p 270).

Jo Blanden, also using the British Cohort Survey, found that “the level of parental interest is extremely important; with father’s interest having a large influence on their sons, and mother’s interest most important for their daughters. Higher early test scores are also an important factor in helping children escape from poverty, and to some extent it appears that the benefits of parental interest work through improved child’s test scores. Results on the characteristics of schools show that having more able children in the school is beneficial for the outcomes of poor boys; even when their own ability and educational attainment are taken into account” (J Blanden, [‘Bucking the Trend’: What enables those who are disadvantaged in childhood to succeed later in life?](#) (2006), Department for Work and Pensions, Working Paper no 31, p 2).

The role fathers play in parenting has been highlighted recently by the BBC *Panorama* programme, [‘Britain’s Missing Dads’](#) (transmitted on BBC One on 17 January 2011). Eirini Flouri and Ann Buchanan used the National Child Development Study to, inter alia, explore the role of early father involvement in children’s later educational attainment independently of the role of early mother involvement and other confounds. They found that “father involvement and mother involvement at age 7 independently predicted educational attainment by age 20. The association between parents’ involvement and educational attainment was not stronger for sons than for daughters. Father involvement was not more important for educational attainment when mother involvement was low rather than high. Not growing up in an intact two-parent family did not weaken the association between father’s or mother’s involvement and educational outcomes” (E Flouri and A Buchanan, ‘Early Father’s and Mother’s Involvement and Child’s Later Educational Outcomes (2004), *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol 74, p 141). Flouri and Buchanan concluded that “early father involvement can be another protective factor in counteracting risk conditions that might lead to later low attainment levels”.

The National Academy for Parenting Practitioners published a paper by Kirsten Asmussen and Katey Weizel, which evaluated evidence on family life. They found that research showed that children do better when “they receive consistent love and care from at least two responsible and committed adults” (K Asmussen and K Weizel, [‘Evaluating the Evidence: Fathers, Families and Children’](#) (2010), National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, p 6). Furthermore, where fathers “are actively involved in their children’s care, children are more likely to feel good about themselves, do well at school and stay out of trouble” (p 3). The quality of the time fathers spend with their children is more important than the quantity, and “a child who has a close and supportive relationship with his or her father is more likely to do well in adulthood regardless of whether or not he or she lives with him when they are growing up”. However, Asmussen and Weizel also comment that research showed that “fathers can negatively contribute to their children’s development when they persistently engage in anti-social behaviour. In these instances, more father involvement actually results in worse outcomes for children’s behaviour”.

Looking at male unemployment and its impact on lone parenthood, Robert Rowthorn and David Webster write that “male worklessness has been a major causal factor behind the past rise in female lone parenthood” (R Rowthorn and D Webster, ‘Male Worklessness and the Rise of Lone Parenthood in Great Britain’ (2008), *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, vol 1, p 82). Their analysis also suggested that “higher male employment would help to contain, and maybe reverse, the growth of lone parenthood,

by reducing inflows into lone parenthood and increasing outflows through re-partnering and the consequent formation of stepfamilies”. However, the opposite was not true: “changes in female employment are found to have no consistent net effect on the level of lone parenthood. This may be because improved female employment opportunities have offsetting effects on inflows and outflows, affecting un-partnered births, separation and re-partnering in different ways”.

3. International Comparisons of Child Wellbeing

This section provides figures on the wellbeing of children in the UK compared with other countries. In 2009, the Child Poverty Action Group published a briefing on a league table of child wellbeing in European countries compiled by researchers from the University of York. The table reproduced below included 43 indicators summarised in seven domains of child wellbeing. While the Netherlands came top of the league table for overall child wellbeing, the UK ranked 24th:

The Child Wellbeing Index

Rank	Country	Health	Subjective wellbeing	Children's relationships	Material resources	Behaviour and Risk	Education	Housing and environment
1	Netherlands	2	1	1	7	4	4	9
2	Sweden	1	7	3	10	1	9	3
3	Norway	6	8	6	2	2	10	1
4	Iceland	4	9	4	1	3	14	8
5	Finland	12	6	9	4	7	7	4
6	Denmark	3	5	10	9	15	12	5
7	Slovenia	15	16	2	5	13	11	19
8	Germany	17	12	8	12	5	6	16
9	Ireland	14	10	14	20	12	5	2
10	Luxembourg	5	17	19	3	11	16	7
11	Austria	26	2	7	8	19	19	6
12	Cyprus	10			13			11
13	Spain	13	4	17	18	6	20	13
14	Belgium	18	13	18	15	21	1	12
15	France	20	14	28	11	10	13	10
16	Czech Republic	9	22	27	6	20	3	22
17	Slovakia	7	11	22	16	23	17	15
18	Estonia	11	20	12	14	25	2	25
19	Italy	19	18	20	17	8	23	20
20	Poland	8	26	16	26	17	8	23
21	Portugal	21	23	13	21	9	25	18
22	Hungary	23	25	11	23	16	15	21
23	Greece	29	3	23	19	22	21	14
24	United Kingdom	24	21	15	24	18	22	17
25	Romania	27	19	5		24	27	
26	Bulgaria	25	15	24		26	26	
27	Latvia	16	24	26	22	27	18	26
28	Lithuania	22	27	25	25	28	24	24
29	Malta	28	28	21		14		

Notes: Green indicates top third of the table; yellow the middle; and red the bottom. Blank cells are where insufficient data was available.

(Child Poverty Action Group, [Child Wellbeing and Child Poverty—Where the UK Stands in the European Table](#) (2009), p 3)

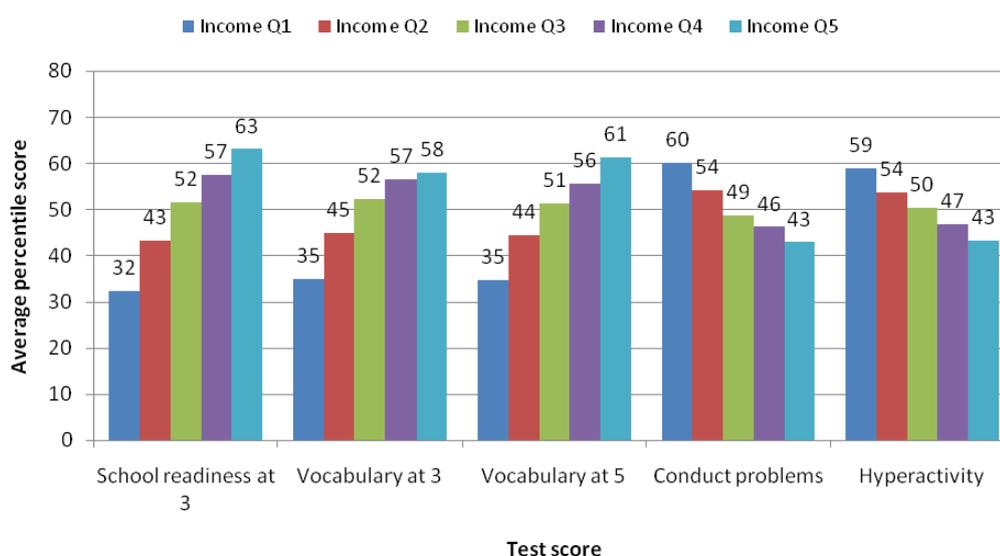
Both the OECD and UNICEF have published information on the issue, which the reader may like to consult (OECD, [Doing Better for Children](#) (2009), chapter 2; UNICEF, [Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries](#) (2007)).

4. Report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances

In June 2010, Frank Field, Labour MP for Birkenhead, was commissioned by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, to undertake an independent review on poverty and life chances. The purpose of the review was to generate a broader debate about the nature and extent of poverty; to examine the case for reforms to poverty measures, in particular for the inclusion of non-financial elements; to explore how a child's home environment affects their chances of being ready to take full advantage of schooling; and to recommend actions to be taken by government and others to reduce poverty and enhance life chances for the least advantaged, consistent with the government's fiscal strategy. The report of the independent review was published in December 2010 as [The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults](#). The report looks at the impact of poverty on children's schooling and life chances, the impact of parenting, the introduction of the concept of foundation years and its delivery, and at a new measure of poverty and life chances. It concludes "the UK needs to address the issue of child poverty in a fundamentally different way, if it is to make a real change to children's life chances as adults" (p 5). The review found "overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first five years of life. It is family background, parental education, good parenting and the opportunities for learning and development in those crucial years that together matter more to children than money, in determining whether their potential is realised in adult life".

In order to assess the impact of income, the review presents a variety of statistics on issues such as infant mortality by father's profession, young people's attitudes and behaviours to smoking, drinking, anti-social behaviour and truancy at age 14 by socio-economic status, and GCSE attainment by parental income (see further chapter 2). The table below reproduced in the report from a paper by J Waldfogel and E Washbrook is particularly interesting, as it addresses school readiness by income:

Mean Child Outcome Scores in the UK Cohort at Ages 3 and 5, by Income Quintile

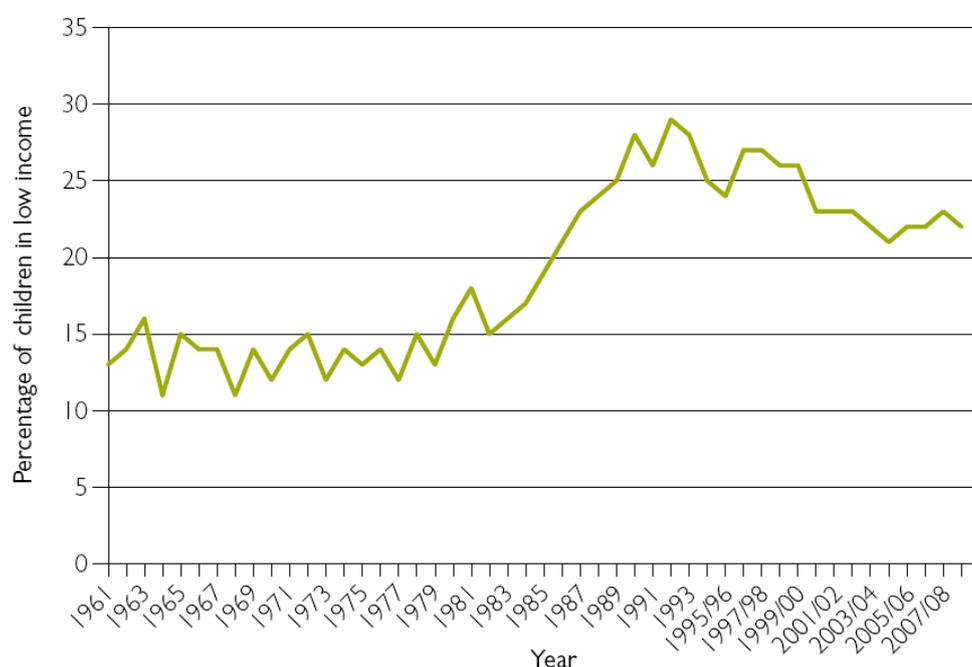


(J Waldfogel and E Washbrook, [Early Years Policy](#) (2008), Sutton Trust, p 41, figure 2)

Taken together, the figures presented in *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults* show that “gaps in outcomes and achievement between poorer children and their peers are observable from an early age and remain throughout childhood. In general then, family income and social class, over which a child has no control, are highly predictive of childhood development and, ultimately, adult outcomes” (pp 28–9).

In his personal commentary, set out in chapter 1 of the report, Frank Field explains that he has “increasingly come to view poverty as a much more subtle enemy than purely lack of money, and I have similarly become increasingly concerned about how the poverty that parents endure is all too often visited on their children to the degree that they continue to be poor as they enter adulthood” (p 12). Although income is important, Mr Field does not think it is the exclusive or dominant cause of poverty. For the past 120 years, poverty has been defined, most recently in the Child Poverty Act 2010, by reference to a minimum standard of income: those below a certain level are considered to be poor; those above not. In 1999, the Labour government announced that they would abolish child poverty by 2020. This led to the redistribution of £134 billion through tax credits. However, as the following graph, reproduced from the report of the independent review shows, from 2004 to 2005 “the effectiveness of child tax credits in reducing child poverty had not merely stalled, but in some years ground was actually lost” (p 14):

Percentage of Children in Households with Income Below 60 per cent Contemporary Equivalised Median Income, Before Housing Costs



Sources: 1961-1993, Great Britain, Analysis of Family Expenditure Survey by the Institute for Fiscal Studies; 1994/95 – 1997/98, Great Britain, Households Below Average Income; 1998/99 – 2008/09, United Kingdom, Households Below Average Income.

(Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances, *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults* (December 2010), p 34)

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that in order to cut child poverty to five per cent by 2020, a further £37 billion per annum would be required in tax credits (M Brewer,

et al, [*Micro-Simulating Child Poverty in 2010 and 2020*](#) (February 2009), IFS, p 38). The independent review questions whether such sums can be found over the period, and points out that the coalition government are going to spend an additional £3.7 billion in income transfers over the next two years to prevent child poverty from getting worse (*The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults*, p 15). Frank Field comments that he no longer believes “that the poverty endured by all too many children can simply be measured by their parents’ lack of income. Something more fundamental than the scarcity of money is adversely dominating the lives of these children” (p 16). He explains that “since 1969 I have witnessed a growing indifference from some parents to meeting the most basic needs of children, and particularly younger children, those who are least able to fend for themselves. I have also observed how the home life of a minority but, worryingly, a growing minority of children, fails to express an unconditional commitment to the successful nurturing of children”.

His observations are important, in this context, as a number of studies show that “the successes individuals achieve during their adult life can be predicted by the level of cognitive and non-cognitive skills they already possess on their first day at school. These differences in skill levels have been noted after as little as 22 months of life, and are shown to widen within the toddler population by the age of five. The skill levels are related to the class, or as it is now more commonly spoken of, the income of their parents. The findings also worryingly show that the brightest five year olds from poorer homes are overtaken by the progress of their less gifted but richer peers by the time they are ten”. This does not conflict with Mr Field’s view that income is not the only indicator of poverty, as others studies show that “there is much more beyond just improving short-term family incomes in determining the life chances of poor children”. Factors include “a healthy pregnancy, positive but authoritative parenting, high quality childcare, a positive approach to learning at home and an improvement in parents’ qualifications”. These factors form the key drivers that the independent review proposes to include in their life chances indicators. Where the gap on each of the drivers was narrowed, it “was found to predict virtually all of the difference in children’s outcomes at age 5”. Poor children are at the moment less likely to benefit from these advantages, “but with the right support from government, the voluntary sector, and society as a whole, this doesn’t always have to be true. If we can ensure that parents from poor families know how best to extend the life opportunities of their children (the advantages that many middle class and rich families take for granted and which a significant number of working class parents achieve) then—even if we cannot end income poverty in the short term—we can break this intergenerational cycle of disadvantage. We can ensure that poor children don’t inevitably take their poverty into adulthood” (pp 16–17).

The life chances indicators, which would include child, parent and environmental factors (see further chapter 5 of the report), form the measure through which the success of what the report calls the foundation years can be measured. The foundation years would run from pregnancy until age five, and using the concept and terminology would allow greater prominence to be given by national and local government to the earliest years of life. It would “increase public understanding of how babies and young children develop and what is important to ensure their healthy progress in this crucial period; make clear the package of support needed both for children and parents in those early years; establish the foundation years as of equal status and importance in the public mind to primary and secondary school years; and ensure that child development and services during those years are as well understood” (p 6).

Support during the foundation years would be provided by a single, coherent service (p 58). This would involve a Cabinet Minister for the foundation years; making an expanded range of services available in children’s centres to include, for example, birth registration and benefit advice; and local child poverty and life chances commissions to

investigate, co-ordinate and tackle local issues. The service would be universal so that all parents could be comfortable asking for support. Sure Start children's centres and associated networks would provide a first port of call for foundation years service for all parents. Help would be provided to those most in need, with the aim that in the long term schools and childcare in deprived areas are at least as good as those in affluent areas. The fairness premium announced by the government in October 2010, which is aimed at helping the poorest children between 2 and 20, and includes the pupil premium, should be extended to the foundation years. The service would build on parental success, as they have the biggest influence on children, ensuring that childcare and schools engage all parents and that parenting and life skills are taught in schools through the curriculum (p 59). Capacity should be built in the community, as informal networks are an important source of support and influence on parents. In order to do so, local authorities should ensure that private, voluntary and independent providers are able to bid to run children's centres and services within them, and foundation years' staff should actively encourage local parents groups and other networks. The services would be professionally led, with the Department for Education, together with children's centres, sponsoring training and development. It should also be underpinned by evidence, with local authorities pooling data to understand whether disadvantaged children are benefiting from key services. Finally, information should be available to the public on the progress of three and five year olds so that they can hold services, local authorities and central government to account.

The foundation service would encompass maternity units and midwifery services to support and advise pregnant women; children's centres to provide support such as parenting courses, stay and play, relationship support for parents, speech therapy and other support for children, as well as providing wider support as a one stop point for a range of parent centred services including skills advice, birth registration, advice on benefits, debt and other issues; a home visiting service staffed by both trained health visitors and outreach workers, to provide home based support for parents unable to attend centres or for those who require more intensive support; and wider voluntary support networks (p 59).

The independent review sees the role of parents as central to the foundation years strategy: "what parents do is the single biggest influence on children's attainment; therefore services should aim to engage and support parents, building parents' own strengths in dealing with problems, not add to their worries" (p 64). Services should welcome all parents and carers, including fathers, and grandparents, and should "encourage parents to come to parenting courses as a matter of course throughout the first three years of life". Furthermore, parenting and family relationships should be "given greater prominence on the school curriculum, with pupils able to obtain a cross-curricular qualification at GCSE level in parenting from relevant modules in other subjects. This should start from primary school age, exploring friendships, families and what's important for babies. Later, the emphasis should shift towards the complexities of relationships, pressures, and mental health, how to build and maintain stable relationships and considering how parents can best support children's development. In secondary school, there should also be a focus on other life skills, such as budgeting and information and communication technology. The content should be evidence-based and should introduce children to the basis for the life chances indicators and how parents are best placed to support their children".

Other proposals include ensuring all new parents have early access to a parenting course, targeting, in the beginning, those likely to benefit most; engaging parents in schools on an ongoing basis by using home-school agreements to encourage schools, parents and pupils to discuss their goals; the continued publication and promotion by the Department for Education of clear evidence on what is successful in encouraging

parental engagement in their children's learning; continuing Ofsted reports on schools and childcare engagement with parents; improving awareness of parenting across the country, led by the Cabinet Office Behavioural Insight Team along with other key Departments; and building capacity in the community to support families through groups such as the National Childbirth Trust, which is seen as successful in bringing parents together to share their experiences (p 65).

5. Report of the Independent Review on Early Intervention

In July 2010, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, asked the Labour MP for Nottingham North, Graham Allen, to lead a review on early intervention. Mr Allen had previously co-authored a book with Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative MP for Chingford and Woodford Green, titled [Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens](#) (2008), on a national strategy for inter-generational change. The first part of Mr Allen's review was published in January 2011 as [Early Intervention: The Next Steps](#), and builds on some of the work from his previous book. The report sets out the rationale for early intervention, which is to "create the essential social and emotional bedrock for all children to reap the social, individual and economic rewards" (p x). The report identifies where existing government programmes can be built upon and looks at the best proven programmes. It goes on to "describe the rigorous methodology and institutional arrangements, independent of government, required to make a much-needed step change in the way in which our society invests in its human potential". A second report, to be published by summer 2011, will discuss the new funding options needed to resource early intervention.

The term "early intervention" is used by the review to refer to general approaches to help give children aged 0 to 3 "the social and emotional bedrock they need to reach their full potential; and to those which help older children become the good parents of tomorrow" (p xiii). Although most parents provide this support to their children, "those denied these qualities have a bad start from which few of them recover" (p 3). Intervening later on is not as effective, but cannot be dismissed out of hand, and should be balanced with early intervention. The report explains: "it is not an either/or—we must continue to swat the mosquitoes but we can drain the swamp too. The bleak truth is that decades of expensive late intervention have failed. Major social problems have got worse not better: despite heroic frontline efforts tackling the symptoms, their causes often remain unaddressed. Little or no value for money can be demonstrated for the billions of pounds spent on current late intervention programmes and little prospect of value from the billions set aside fatalistically for such programmes in the future".

The central problem for all developed countries, according to the report, is that "intervention happens too late, when health, social and behavioural problems have become deeply entrenched in children's and young people's lives. Delayed intervention increases the cost of providing a remedy for these problems and reduces the likelihood of actually achieving one. More often than not, delayed intervention results only in expensive palliative measures that fail to address problems at their source" (p 4). The review team conclude that "it is time to recognise that the prevailing culture of late intervention is expensive and ineffective", and to move early intervention programmes that build social and emotional capabilities. Early intervention programmes have "resulted in significant and sustainable improvements in health, behaviour and social and economic outcomes. They offer immediate rewards to individuals and local communities and the prospect of lasting gains to society and the economy". The vast cost of late intervention means that it does not take long for early intervention programmes to "pay back their costs many times over—even on the most conservative estimates of savings".

However, early intervention should not only encompass 0 to 13, but 0 to 18 as well: in order to fulfil their roles, parents and carers must also benefit from policies across the age range 0 to 18. Such policies strengthen the ability of babies, children and young people to raise their future children “with the social and emotional capabilities that are the right of every child. These policies are also interventions, which break damaging cycles and prevent the transmission of social and emotional underdevelopment through successive generations” (p 6).

The report outlines the “bedrock capabilities” which enable children to engage with others and society, to learn, to develop fully, to attain and to achieve:

Social capabilities—a child will engage in give-and-take exchanges with an adult; will engage with other children; will demonstrate the ability to get along with others; will understand and respond to the emotions of others; will develop a sense of belonging to a larger community through social interactions and relationships, and will have an awareness of their relationship to others in a group; and will develop the ability to interact co-operatively with others.

Emotional capabilities—a child has secure attachment; is able to experience, recognise and express a variety of emotions, and to recognise and empathise with those emotions in others; will manage their internal states and feelings, as well as stimulation from the outside world; will develop strategies to control emotions and behaviours; will manage their behaviours; and will recognise their ability to do things.

(Early Intervention: The Next Steps, p 7)

Although these skills are “such critical building blocks that most people would assume that they are common to all of us”, for “many they are absent or underdeveloped”. Children with essential social and emotional capabilities are “less likely to adopt anti-social or violent behaviour throughout life. It means fewer disruptive toddlers, fewer unmanageable school children, fewer young people engaging in crime and anti-social behaviour. Early intervention can forestall the physical and mental health problems that commonly perpetuate a cycle of dysfunction”. The report goes on to argue that only those children who have this basic foundation of social and emotional skills will be school ready, life ready and child ready:

School ready—having the social and emotional foundation skills to progress in speech, perception, ability to understand numbers and quantities, motor skills, attitude to work, concentration, memory and social conduct; having the ability to engage positively and without aggression with other children and the ability to respond appropriately to requests from teachers.

Life ready—having the social and emotional capability to enter the labour market; understanding the importance and the social, health and emotional benefits of entering work, the impacts of drug and alcohol misuse, crime and domestic and other violence.

Child ready—understanding what it is like to build and sustain a relationship, to have a family and to look after a small child; understanding how babies grow and develop and how parents can best promote this development.

(Early Intervention: The Next Steps, p 9)

The review therefore recommends a “rebalancing of the current culture of ‘late reaction’ to social problems towards an early intervention culture, based on the premise of giving all children the social and emotional bedrock they need to achieve and to pre-empt those problems” (p 27). Within that context, there should be a shift to a primary prevention strategy, which wards off the initial onset of a disorder, and offers substantial social and financial benefits. The machinery of government should be co-ordinated to “put early intervention at the heart of departmental strategies, including those seeking to raise educational achievement and employability, improve social mobility, reduce crime, support parents and improve mental and physical health”.

The starting point for taking early intervention forward is the adoption of the “foundation years” concept developed by the independent review on poverty and life chances in their report *The Foundation Years: Preventing Poor Children Becoming Poor Adults*, discussed above. The foundation years should cover the years from 0 to 5 and include pregnancy, and be given the same status and recognition as primary or secondary stages (*Early Intervention: The Next Steps*, p 46). The outcome should be to secure high levels of school readiness. This approach would require sustainability and a long-term view, and “consideration should be given to creating a lasting, stable settlement between central and local government within a published framework or codification of the local/central relationship” (p 48). The settlement should, furthermore, “be agreed by all political parties, and adhered to whichever of them are in power in central or local government”.

Examples of current initiatives and policies that could be used to support early intervention include the new arrangements for the health service proposed by the government and the forthcoming consultation on maternity and paternity support (p 51). The Family Nurse Partnership programme, which has recently received additional government funding, should also be expanded, “with the aspiration that every vulnerable first-time young mother who meets the criteria and wants to join a Family Nurse Partnership should be able to access it, and that discussions should take place with all relevant interests on how to ensure sustained local commissioning, leadership and finance” (p 52). Children’s centres “should be in a strong position to provide an environment focused on children and families, where services of proven worth... which best meet their needs, can be joined together on their behalf. Health services are key to centres in engaging vulnerable families as well as offering the full range of early intervention services” (p 53). Recognising the importance of parenting and the home learning environment, a national parenting campaign should be initiated, “as the crown jewel of the big society project, pursued with enough passion and vitality to make it irresistible even to the most jaundiced” (p 58). A broad-based “alliance of interested groups, charities and foundations” should be created “to ensure that the public, parents, health professionals and, especially, newly pregnant women are aware of the importance of developing social and emotional capability in the first years of life, and understand the best ways of encouraging good later outcomes for their children”.

The report goes on to identify and explore the best early intervention programmes currently available, based on “rigorous standards of evidence, highlighting programmes on a scale, according to the strength of evidence” (p xiv, chapter 6). A number of local authorities have agreed in principle, if the government wants, to place early intervention at the heart of their strategies and to implement some of the recommendations of the report (chapter 7). The report recommends that 15 of these local authorities should form the first group of early intervention places, which would become focal points for innovation. An early intervention foundation should be created, independent of central government and funded, in the first instance, through private, philanthropic, ethical and local funding (chapter 8). The early intervention foundation would encourage the spread of early intervention; improve, develop and disseminate evidence of successful

interventions; provide independent and trusted monitoring on the effectiveness of early intervention programmes; and act as a broker between financial investors, local authorities and service providers.

