

REVIEW OF FAMILY LEARNING SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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FOREWORD



This Review of Family Learning is the first of its kind in Scotland. Our objective was to produce an easily accessible guide for practitioners, giving you a summary of evidence drawn from a wide range of research, case studies and consultation with partners. The Review is designed to highlight what has worked well in Scotland, and what we can learn from effective practice from other parts of the world.

I believe effective family learning can make a powerful contribution to our ambition for achieving excellence and equity in education outcomes for Scottish learners, with positive outcomes for both the adults and the children involved. Family learning is an early intervention and prevention approach which is ideal for reaching the most disadvantaged communities. Done well, family learning

helps close the attainment gap through breaking the inter-generational cycles of deprivation and low attainment. Its effects can extend beyond the duration of the intervention and provide lasting impacts and improved outcomes.

I trust that you will find this Review of Family Learning valuable and look forward to working with you to deliver positive outcomes for families and future generations.

Dr Bill Maxwell
Chief Executive

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Background

The [2016-17 Programme for Government](#) focuses on a number of themes which include: an education system which provides opportunities for all; empowering people and communities; raising standards in schools; closing the attainment gap; and delivering opportunities to young people regardless of their family background.

Why a family learning approach?

Supporting, equipping and building capacity amongst Scotland's parents to capitalise on children's opportunities for learning is key in raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. A family learning approach can also be a catalyst in helping adults take up adult learning and training opportunities, gain employment or attain new skills. This in turn positively impacts on children's individual attainment, their aspirations and personal learning journey.

Approach to the task

In producing this Review and collating the findings, Education Scotland considered national and international research evidence, conducted an analysis of current practice in family learning across all Scottish local authorities and gathered case studies from a range of practitioners. Additionally, a series of consultation events and meetings took place with key stakeholders. Practitioners and researchers across Scotland engaged with and enthusiastically supported the work throughout this Review and have shared examples of family learning in their local areas.

The Review

This Review takes stock of the available evidence on family learning. It identifies the benefits of family learning programmes across literacy, numeracy, ESOL (English for speakers of other languages), parental involvement and health and wellbeing. The complexities in evaluating programmes, having a developed workforce and the need for family learning to be embedded into policies and strategies are also discussed.

Examples of family learning have been gathered through case study examples that focus on the different themes mentioned above. The case studies help provide information on the diversity of programmes being delivered across Scotland as well as further understanding of the family learning approach.

Conclusions

A number of key messages and recommendations for strategic leaders, practitioners and researchers have emerged from this Review. The key message from the Review is that family learning as an early intervention and prevention approach works in reaching disadvantaged families and communities to improve their life chances.

Learning outcomes and benefits resulting from family learning approaches can be categorised into five key areas: new skills; increased confidence and understanding; improved communication; changed behaviours; and changed relationships with community and family. Family learning also facilitates increased parental participation and engagement, improved school attendance, reduces persistent absenteeism and can increase pupils' attainment. The wider outcomes of family learning are shown through skills development, employability, progression into further education opportunities, and interactions within the family, as well as improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills. Family learning should be part of an overall strategic approach to supporting families and communities as and when appropriate.

The evidence gathered throughout this Review of Family Learning highlights that improving and increasing ways in which parents and families can be equal partners in their children's learning at home, school and in communities is crucial to raising attainment for all and closing the poverty-related attainment gap. For adults, family learning programmes have an impact on their own educational attainment, future training and further learning and employment opportunities. Family learning as an approach is not a new concept but one which helps break cycles of poverty and disadvantage amongst communities whilst at the same time enhancing the intergenerational transfer of skills from the parent to the child and the child to the parent.

Moving forward

Improving outcomes for families remains a key focus for all. There are a number of key messages and recommendations from this Review of Family Learning (see section 6) which require to be taken forward by key stakeholders. Education Scotland, Scottish Government, local authorities, third sector organisations, practitioners, further and higher education establishments, researchers and others involved in the delivery of family learning programmes will continue to work closely in partnership to progress these. Potential actions for strategic leaders, practitioners and researchers from the key recommendations in section 6, are listed below.

Strategic

- Gathering more evidence through a range of methods including inspection findings and feedback at a local level.
- Using the evidence to help inform future policy developments and drivers for change.
- Publishing professional learning resources on the National Improvement Hub and international platforms to support practitioners who are working with families.
- Funding should be made available for family learning programme development and delivery at a strategic and local authority level.
- A framework for family learning should be developed to improve greater cohesion between strategic and operational levels.

Operational

- Ensure that evidence-based research influences the design of programmes which should be tailored to meet local needs before being rolled out.
- Obtain, synthesise and share further Scottish research, international research and longitudinal evaluations on the impact of family learning.
- Use evidence to develop strategic plans in relation to whole family approaches to engagement and learning outcomes.
- Develop an appropriate evaluation framework for family learning programmes.
- Map current family learning provision within a local authority to inform future partnership approaches.
- Key stakeholders should ensure that resources are available to meet the drivers in the Scottish Attainment Challenge and the National Improvement Framework. Those delivering family learning programmes should have the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding. Access should also be provided to Continuous Professional Development.
- The National Improvement Framework Plan for Scottish Education should be informed by the key findings and recommendations of this Review of Family Learning.
- Family learning opportunities within Scottish Attainment Challenge authorities and schools should be considered in light of this Review.
- A key feature of family learning is the development of the adults involved. Stakeholder groups delivering adult learning outcomes should continue to support family learning provision.

Research

- Further research is required on the longitudinal impact of family learning across Scotland. This would include wider family learning outcomes that are not always anticipated.
- Additional research on methodology is required to support the provision of family learning, why and how it should be used and why and when it should not.
- Future family learning research should be undertaken in light of the Scottish Government's National Research Strategy.