

# Engaging parents and families


A toolkit for practitioners

Section 7: Family learning

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 EducationScot

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# Background

This section provides an overview of some of the key national policies relating to family learning and subsequent reviews and framework. These policies provide the overarching framework and guidance within which local authorities, schools and practitioners should work.

## 'How Good is Our....Frameworks'



The '[How good is our....frameworks](#)' are designed to promote effective self-evaluation as the first important stage in a process of achieving self-improvement. The 'How good is our learning and development in our community?' supports senior managers, local managers or practitioners working directly with young people, adults and community groups. At the heart of the document is a set of quality indicators and performance measures which will help practitioners identify the strengths in their practice and where further development is required. The frameworks contain illustrations, exemplar features of highly-effective practice and challenge questions. Practitioners at all levels, with a wide variety of different roles and responsibilities can use and adapt the frameworks.

Involving and engaging parents and community partners in self-evaluation and improvement planning is embedded throughout the frameworks. They should be used to support collaborative enquiry and interrogative approaches to self-evaluation to enable early learning and childcare (ELC) settings and schools to develop a shared understanding of what to do next.

The 'How good is our....frameworks' contains a quality indicator on family learning which focuses on increasing the positive impact of working with families to improve learning and achievement. The emphasis is on schools working in partnership with others in the community to support families to secure better outcomes through programmes which enable them to improve literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing.

## Family Learning Review (2016)

The [Family Learning Review](#) takes stock of the available evidence on family learning. It identifies the benefits of family learning programmes across literacy, numeracy, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), parental involvement/engagement and health and wellbeing.

## Education Governance Next Steps / National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan for Scottish Education (2017)

Scottish Government made a commitment in the [Governance Review Next Steps](#) to 'boost support to those parents who do not currently engage as much as they would want to through enhancing the availability of home-school link workers and extending family learning' (p4). Within the [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#), the Scottish Government are to work with partners to ensure that 'every school has access to a home-school link worker to support parents and families who find it challenging to engage in their child's learning and feel excluded from the work and life of their child's school' (2018, p37).

## Family Learning Framework (2018)

The [Family Learning Framework](#) supports practitioners to work with partners to plan, develop, deliver and evaluate family learning effectively at a local level.

## Learning at Home Review (2018)

The [Learning at Home Review](#) provides the first Scottish definition of 'Learning at Home'. Producing an easily accessible and understandable definition of learning at home and providing clarity for practitioners and parents is the main objective of the Review.

## Learning together: Scotland's national action plan on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home (2018)

This [national action plan](#) follows on from the [Review](#) of the impact of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 (National Parent Forum of Scotland, 2017). It sets out the Scottish vision for parental involvement and engagement, family learning and learning at home from pre-birth to age 18. The plan contains 13 goals and 52 national actions and provides a national vision while also allowing for local and community innovation and flexibility. At the heart of this plan is relationships based on trust, mutual respect and collaboration.

The aim of the plan is to:

- ensure that parents are supported to be fully involved in the life and work of their child's early learning and childcare setting or school
- encourage and support collaborative partnerships between practitioners, parents and families
- get the right support in place so that parents can engage in their child's learning
- expand access to family learning opportunities which meet the needs of participants
- improve the quality of all communication between practitioners, staff, parents and families
- improve the skills of leaders, front-line practitioners and support staff

# Supporting children's learning using a family learning approach

Family learning encourages family members to learn together as and within a family, with a focus on intergenerational learning. Family learning activities can also be specifically designed to enable parents to learn how to support their children's learning. 'Family learning is a powerful method of engagement and learning which can foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning, promote socio-economic resilience and challenge educational disadvantage'.

**(Family Learning Network, 2016).**



Family learning is recognised as having significant benefits for parents, carers and children of all ages. It can be delivered in a range of settings including schools, the outdoors, in the local community and is delivered by practitioners from a variety of professional backgrounds, often working in partnership. A strong partnership approach facilitates sustainability and a more robust service for families. Trust is a key factor to families accessing any provision. Working with partners who have already established relationships and addressed barriers, enables practitioners to work with families who have disengaged with the life of the ELC setting or school.

Family learning is an approach to engaging families in learning outcomes that have an impact on the whole family. In order to support a consistent understanding of family learning, Education Scotland have published a number of documents, reports and case studies on the [National Improvement Hub](#) and resources such as '[I am a Scientist](#)' and '[I am a Mathematician](#)' on [Parentzone Scotland](#). A copy of the postcard with the current definition of family learning in Scotland can be [downloaded](#) from the National Improvement Hub.

Supporting and encouraging children through enjoyable learning experiences is important through all stages of their education. When parents, family members and communities learn together this helps foster positive attitudes towards life-long learning and makes a positive difference to a child's life-long and life-wide learning.

Families who engage in family learning have the opportunity to develop the vital role they play in their child's learning at all stages of education. A key component of family learning is the negotiated learning between staff and families. This takes into account prior learning, family circumstance and aspirations. Family learning is a universal provision but can be used as an early intervention and prevention strategy. It can also help increase parental involvement in children's learning through building confidence and self-esteem. Practitioners work with families to reduce potential barriers to engaging parents and are responsive to the family circumstances such as families affected by imprisonment, English as a second language and mental health issues. Practitioners work with community learning and development staff, agencies, colleges, universities, third sector organisations and community groups to ensure they are well informed about local circumstances and resources.

# What can family learning look like when things go well?

- Creative approaches are used by practitioners and partners to engage families.
- Families engaged in family learning are highly motivated because of the programme and actively involved in their own learning and development.
- Children, young people and their parents are included, participating, achieving and progressing very well in their learning.
- There is clear evidence that the life chances of those families experiencing particular challenges are being improved as a result of their engagement in family learning.
- Families let practitioners know there has been an improvement in their health and/or wellbeing.
- Programmes developed by practitioners are responsive to identified needs during consultation with families and communities.
- Family learning programmes being developed and delivered promote equality, fairness and diversity.
- Families are matched into the right programme which is negotiated and addresses identified needs.
- Resources and services for families, children and young people are co-ordinated with the wider community, including third sector organisations.

## Activity 1: Approaches to family learning

### Purpose

To identify ways that practitioners engage with families and communities and how practice is reviewed to ensure there is continuous improvement.

### Reflective questions:

- What methods do we use to engage with families in the local community?
- How do we actively seek out meaningful partnerships with local providers?
- How do we keep up-to-date with research and changes? How does this affect delivery?
- What evaluation methods are we using to demonstrate that family learning is improving the life chances of the families involved? How do we record trends to inform interventions?
- How are we monitoring outcomes for children to highlight improvements as a result of their participation in family learning and how is this information being shared between partners as appropriate?
- How are we continuously reviewing our practice to make sure that families are feeling included and that they are participating, achieving and progressing?
- How are we ensuring that provision is responsive to the needs of families?
- In what ways are we actively promoting equality, fairness and diversity?
- How well are we matching the right programme to the right families?

Practitioners should consider the family learning quality indicator in '[How good is our school?](#)' (Fourth Edition) and the '[How good is our early learning and childcare?](#)' for more information and self-evaluation.

## Activity 2: Family learning methodology

### Purpose

To consider developing a family learning approach for specific families.

The purpose of developing a family learning approach is to:

- actively and meaningfully engage with all parents, carers, children and young people in a creative and sustainable way
- agree intended and negotiated outcomes for the family as a whole as well as addressing individual needs as appropriate
- work in partnership with families in their widest sense, including stakeholders within the ELC setting, school and beyond
- support an early intervention and prevention strategy for families

### Who can be involved:

- parents, carers, significant person in the child's life
- family learning workers
- community learning and development staff
- early learning and childcare staff
- school staff
- partners and stakeholders
- third sector staff

### Activities:

- (a) Intelligence gathering – consultation with families through a variety of ways. This can include letters being sent home, face-to-face contact, social media e.g. Facebook, texting, Twitter, blogs etc., to identify need within the community.

Running alongside the consultation with families, partners and stakeholders should be identified. These may be workers that are delivering within the third sector, community learning and development, private sector or within neighbouring early learning and childcare settings or schools. Early learning and childcare settings and schools can build on the relationships that these partners may already have with families which can make engagement easier. Working with partners at the earliest stages will enhance provision for families and reduce duplication.

Practitioners and partners should use available data and analysis that they have gathered as well as the local authority's statistical information team as this will inform targeted support needs.

Evaluation should be built in at this stage as it will give more robust evidence at the end and will inform future improvements.

Evaluation methods will vary due to the ages and stages of the children and families involved.

- (b) Develop a programme for families. This can be something new or from existing programmes that are currently running within your local area. These should be monitored and negotiated through the life of the programme.

Evaluation should be at the start of the learning journey and throughout.



Programmes may include:

- family literacy
  - family numeracy/mathematics
  - family cooking – healthy eating
  - cooking on a budget for families
  - fit families
  - English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) Family Learning
  - family learning within the Prison Service – linking with schools
  - family learning and science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)
- (c) End of programme evaluation and progression. Evaluation of the programme will be individual and significant for each family. Progression will be negotiated as appropriate and could be for the whole family or for individuals within the family. Links with partners will support this.
- (d) It is important to celebrate successes as this gives families a sense of achievement and increases confidence. This could be done through awards ceremonies, articles in newsletters or local press, information and pictures posted on the ELC setting, school and/or partner websites etc.
- (e) Self-evaluation is important after each programme. Learn from what went well or areas for improvement. This will support growth within your service and inform future programmes. Collaborate with partners and families that were involved and share the final report.

### Activity 3: Active and meaningful engagement

#### Purpose

To use creative and sustainable methods to engage families in learning.

Education Scotland have produced the '[I am a Scientist](#)' and '[I am a Mathematician](#)' resources in partnership with stakeholders, to engage families in learning.

These resources can be used by staff working with families in the classroom. It is also designed for families to use on their own at home and/or in their communities. The resources strive to show science and maths as fun, family interactive processes which support literacy, numeracy, maths and scientific interest and capabilities amongst children, young people and parents. The resources are inclusive as they utilise everyday items and outdoor activities which have a limited cost to families. Staff and families are also encouraged through [Parentzone Scotland](#) to share their scientific experiments which creates ownership and involvement in a wider scientific community.





# Reading list

Education Scotland (2015), 'How good is our school? (Fourth edition)'. Livingston.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/HGIOS4>

Education Scotland (2016), 'How good is our early learning and childcare?'. Livingston.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/how-good-is-our-early-learning-and-childcare>

Education Scotland (2018), '*Family Learning Framework*'. Livingston. Education Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/practice-exemplars/family-learning-framework/>

Education Scotland (2018), '*Review of Learning at Home*'. Livingston. Education Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/review-of-learning-at-home/>

The Scottish Government (2016), '*Review of Family Learning: Supporting Excellence and Equity*'. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland.

<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/research/review-of-family-learning/>

The Scottish Government (2017), '*2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan*'. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland.

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00528872.pdf>

The Scottish Government (2017), '*Education Governance Next Steps*'. Edinburgh. APS Group Scotland.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/education-governance-next-steps-empowering-teachers-parents-communities-deliver-excellence-9781788510431/>

# Further Information

[Generations Working Together](#)

[Learning Together: Scotland's national Action plan on parental involvement, parental engagement, family learning and learning at home 2018-2021](#)

[Local Authority websites](#)

[Parentzone Scotland](#)

[The European Literacy Policy Network \(ELINET\)](#)

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