

A response to the call for evidence from the
Tickell Review of the Early Years Foundation Stage
from the
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

1. The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) is an independent non-governmental organisation and charity. Its corporate and individual members come from a range of places where adults learn: in children's centres, schools, local community settings, further education colleges, universities, workplaces, prisons and in their own homes via technology. The ends to which NIACE activities are directed can be summarised as being to secure more, different and better quality opportunities for adult learners in the UK and across the world. It is particularly concerned to advance the interests of those who have benefited least from their initial education and training. Adults as parents and carers, as teachers and volunteers, and as members of communities is key to its work, particularly in combating the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.
2. NIACE has a specialist team working with providers who offer learning for the whole family, including early years children. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to this review. Our response focuses mainly on question 28, as being most pertinent to our areas of expertise.

Question 28: Parents have the biggest influence on their children's learning and development. Do you think there's a role for early years practitioners to work with parents to help improve children's learning and development at home?

3. The central role of parents and the home environment in children's learning and development is now beyond doubt and should underpin all work to improve children's learning and development in the early years. Research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's academic performance (Fan & Chen, 2001) in both primary and secondary schools (Feinstein & Symons, 1999), leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons et al., 2001).
4. Studies show that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development (Allen & Daly, 2002), including more resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, greater self-direction and self-control, greater social

adjustment, greater mental health, more supportive relationships, greater social competence, more positive peer relations, more tolerance, more successful marriages, and less delinquent behaviours. The positive effects of parental involvement is most marked in younger children. (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

5. The family is an important catalyst for providing a practical informal learning place to reinforce formal learning in schools and early years settings. Parents from disadvantaged families may not be aware of this potential and parents may need support to develop the skills to support their children's learning to best advantage. Adults who are parents and engaged in learning offer important role models for their children; they gain in confidence and self esteem, enabling them to be highly effective parents; they are supported and skilled up to take up opportunities in the labour market improving the life chances of their families. All these and more are excellent reasons for putting the Learning Family at the heart of the Early Years and Foundation stage, and ensuring that working with parents is a key and critical role for early years practitioners.
6. However, the question "*is there a role for early years practitioners to work with parents to **improve children's learning and development at home***" misses the fine balance which needs to exist between the formal learning setting and the child's home which gives equal value to learning happening in both places. If early years practitioners do not include the parents and families as equal partners in a child's learning, they effectively close down a vital component of that child's learning and development. Rather than just encouraging professionals to seek to *improve* the learning environment at home, there is a need to provide support and training to encourage early years practitioners to see parents and families as a rich resource in their own right for children's learning.
7. There is also a role for early years practitioners to support parents and children by joining up different agendas which affect family life, resulting in a knock-on affect on the learning and development of children, for example health and well being, community cohesion.
8. **NIACE proposes that staff development for early years practitioners should value home culture and the learning already taking place there in diverse ways and include ways of multi-agency working across different agendas to best support learning and development.**
9. Family learning can be described as the third space between home learning and school learning. It gives the opportunity for parents to become more aware of the part they play in their children's learning and how activities and behaviours at home can facilitate learning, including giving a practical, real-life context to school learning. It also gives opportunities for intergenerational learning where parents learn new skills which in turn change their behaviour and attitudes to a more

aspirational level for their children. In turn the professionals involved in family learning learn more about the families' home culture which enable them to incorporate this into the children's learning scene.

10. NIACE proposes that a revised Early Years Foundation Stage Framework should:

- **place home learning and culture at its centre; and**
- **include a requirement for schools and early years settings to provide activities promoting active intergenerational parental and family involvement in the children's learning**

This model would go a long way to providing a more equal chance of success in the education system to children from all backgrounds.

11. For further information about anything contained in this response please contact, in the first instance, Carol Taylor, Operational Director.

References

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