

Tackling Child Poverty and Improving Life Chances: Consulting on a New Approach

Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15
February 2011

Your comments must reach us by that date.

THIS FORM IS NOT INTERACTIVE. If you wish to respond electronically please use the online response facility available on the Department for Education e-consultation website: (<http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations>).

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.

Reason for confidentiality:

Name

Organisation (if applicable)

NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education)

Address:

20 Princess Road West
Leicester
LE1 6TP

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can telephone: 0370 000 2288 or email:

Childpoverty.strategy@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the Consultation Unit by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or e-mail:

consultation.unit@education.gsi.gov.uk

Please select ONE the box which best describes you as a respondent

<input type="checkbox"/> Local authorities and organisations of local authorities	<input type="checkbox"/> Families and organisations representing families and children	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector organisations
<input type="checkbox"/> Research bodies and academics	<input type="checkbox"/> Public bodies and named partners in the Child Poverty Act	<input type="checkbox"/> Employers and business organisations
<input type="checkbox"/> Practitioners working with children, young people and families	<input type="checkbox"/> Central Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Social Enterprises
<input type="checkbox"/> Other		

Please Specify:

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 and families 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 are key to its work, particularly in combating the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage.

Building our Approach

1 What do you think are the key points from the [Frank Field Review](#) which the Government needs to incorporate into the child poverty strategy?

1. **Importance of the Home Learning Environment.** NIACE agrees with the comment in section 4.12 that “What parents do in the home is at least as important as early years and school education.” Because parents are a child’s first and most important educators, low levels of skills amongst parents leads to an intergenerational transfer of deprivation and under-achievement. However, the converse is also true, and we would extend this to include a culture of learning within the **whole** family that helps to support a child’s learning and aspiration. The importance of the adult family members’ own learning and development cannot be underestimated, as indicated in the hypothetical example of Ella and John (Box 4.1). To summarise, a precondition for an effective home learning environment is that **there should be a clear and explicit adult education strand in the child poverty strategy**
2. **Building on parental success.** NIACE sees this as a vital principle, which views parents as partners in their children’s learning, rather than as problems. Family Learning programmes which bring together children and adult family members, and help parents to understand their children’s development while motivating them to become lifelong learners themselves, has been shown to be an effective way of involving families in their children’s learning both at foundation years stage and later, as well as enhancing the Home Learning Environment. As mentioned earlier, we see this as involving the whole family and are pleased that the need for services to welcome parents and carers, including fathers and grandparents, is mentioned in section 4.31.
3. **Build capacity in the community.** There is a risk that Foundation Year services could become siloed services that operate in isolation from the wider community. We would support an intergenerational approach that brings together parents and other family members to learn together and develop networks and groups, and we would see adult and intergenerational learning as a vital plank to this community development process.
4. **Foundation Year services being seen as core government services.** NIACE fully agrees with this principle, as key to ensuring that the importance of a child’s development at Foundation Year stage is recognised, and would add that learning in the family should be added to the list of support provided by Children’s Centres in section 4.22, as being a key contributor to Foundation Year outcomes.

5. **A new intergenerational contract.** NIACE would be concerned about a simple shifting of funding from other parts of the education system, as may be deduced from Mr Field's personal commentary on page 24. NIACE's Learning through Life Inquiry argues that the discussion on education funding for different age groups should be seen as part of a new intergenerational contract, and not as a zero-sum game in which each generation battles against the rest for a larger share. Frank Field makes a very convincing argument that investment in the Foundation Years is vital to combating child poverty. However, NIACE would argue that breaking the cycle of poverty transmission between generation will not be done by relying on initial compulsory education which fails a significant proportion of children. These people need continuing access to education and training system.

2 What are your thoughts on the best way to incorporate early intervention into the child poverty strategy? (Note: We expect that the Graham Allen Review's interim report will be published before our consultation closes on the 15th February 2011. Respondents are welcome to include any reflections on the report in their responses).

NIACE supports many of the proposals in Graham Allen's review, and certainly the principle of intervening early to prevent problems arising. It believes that the learning of adults in a family is a fundamental underpinning to much of what Mr Allen proposes. From speaking and listening skills, reading with children to effective parenting behaviours and understanding of healthy behaviours; all of these are underpinned by the learning of adults in the family. Mr Allen rightly points out that by intervening in the 0-18 years, building the foundations for healthy adulthood, will increase the chances of tomorrow's parents being more effectively prepared for parenthood.

However, in order to reach the parents of tomorrow, we need to engage the parents of today in learning, and in developing a learning culture in the family. As Graham Allen points out, "it is parents and carers who are the key agents to provide what makes a healthy child..." Alongside the type of targeted Early Intervention described in the review, we also need to be developing a culture in services that works with the whole family and that helps parents and carers to develop their capacity and skills, recognising them as partners not problems. Universal access to adult and family learning within a multi-agency context, is key to this approach, and provides a long term early intervention impact. NIACE is currently working with BIS and the LGA to demonstrate this impact through a Social Return on Investment approach.

The Child Poverty Act 2010

3 Do you agree with our working definition of socio-economic disadvantage?
(paragraph 4.2 and 4.3)

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

NIACE accepts this definition in the context of the child poverty strategy. However, we would be concerned if a purely child-focused definition were used to define socio-economic disadvantage more broadly. While it recognises the primacy of child poverty and the argument for intervening early in order to break the intergenerational cycle of disadvantage, it would argue that a broader strategy that recognises adult poverty, both in terms of its impact on child poverty but also in its own right, is also needed. A definition and approach that cohesively tackles poverty from a variety of angles would act as a strong multiplier for the effects of this strategy.

4 Are these the right areas for the child poverty strategy to cover?
(paragraph 4.4)

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments: There are important areas missing from this list such as **housing** and **access to transport**. However, other organisations are better placed to comment on these.

NIACE would like to focus on how adult learning impacts on child poverty in the areas outlined.

- **Early intervention and the ‘Foundation Years’**. The importance of adult and family learning in creating an underpinning culture of learning in the family is outlined in our response to the Field and Allen reviews above.
- **Employment and skills**. This needs to be aligned with the work of BIS, in particular the recognition of generic learning outcomes that may not directly lead to employment, but which underpin employability – such as confidence, communication skills, ability to learn, as well as ‘basic skills’ such as literacy and numeracy. In addition, learning that leads to adult and family financial capability is a key plank in encouraging financial independence.

In addition, the development of adult skills is key to the within-generation social mobility that improves the financial independence of families. This applies not only to workless families, but also to families who are in-work but still in poverty.

- **Devolving power**. Adult learning is key to ensuring that communities have the skills, knowledge and understanding to participate in the devolved structures envisaged in tackling childhood poverty.

Finally, NIACE would like to see the inclusion of the area of **health and wellbeing**. The Marmot Review has clearly demonstrated the link between poverty and health outcomes and how child development affects health. Adult and Family learning have been shown to contribute to improved health outcomes, not only through specific programmes such as healthy eating or exercise, but also through the benefits that increased confidence and building social networks brings to mental health. Intergenerational family learning contributes to child development as outlined above, and ensures that health benefits are shared and sustained within the family.

Reviewing the role of the Child Poverty Commission

5 Do you agree that the role and the remit of the Child Poverty Commission should be broadened to reflect the new approach?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments:

What is important in determining children's life chances?

6 What do you think makes the most difference to the life chances of children?

Comments: NIACE believes that being part of a family which values learning and which has the resources (both financial and personal) to support learning is one of the key factors that makes a difference to the life chances of children:

- the role model that adults in the family can provide through their own learning should not be underestimated;
- parents and carers who build up their own knowledge and skills can pass them onto their children, and help their children with their school work;
- being part of a learning family raises the aspirations of both children and adults.

As the consultation recognises, financial resources are important to the life chances of children. NIACE sees the development of adult skills as one of the key planks in raising families out of financial poverty in a sustainable way, potentially creating both within-generation social mobility and generational social mobility, in particular helping people into employment and improving the prospects of those already in employment (see NIACE's response to the BIS/DWP Skills Conditionality consultation for details of our concerns in this area - <http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/Skills-Conditionality.pdf>)

Emerging proposals for radical reforms to the system

7 Are there additional measures, compatible with our fiscal approach, which could help us combat poverty and improve life chances?

x Yes

No

Not Sure

Comments: NIACE is pleased to see the inclusion of informal adult and community learning to engage and motivate disadvantaged families, foster locally designed family learning programmes and strengthen communities. We would hope that this approach will be strategically aligned with the other approaches outlined in this document, so that the learning of adults and families is seen as an underpinning factor:

- Schools using some of their pupil premium to engage disadvantaged families through and in family and adult learning;
- Early Intervention approaches including family and adult learning in their programmes;
- Community budgets being used to commission adult and family learning as an important plank in supporting families with multiple problems (the experience of the Family Learning Impact Funding and Transformation Funded projects has demonstrated how effective this can be.)
- Sure Start children's centres to focus on the whole family, with the development of the learning family model seen as a core part of their service.

However, NIACE has some concern that the combining of budgets within the Adult Learning Safeguarded funding stream, may have unintended consequences that will run counter to the child poverty agenda, if the proportion of the funding that is used for learning together as a family is reduced.

8 What further steps can be taken to help local authorities to reduce poverty and improve life chances?

Comments: NIACE agrees that the removal of ringfencing from budgets and, in particular, the pooling of budgets (as in the Early Interventions grant and Community Budgets) can be positive, increase flexibility and lead to creative approaches. However, we are concerned that in the context of local authority cuts, the pressure on budgets will lead to some important services being seen as expendable. Obviously, we are particularly concerned that, if the underpinning value of adult and family learning is not recognised, that these services will be cut in some areas, resulting in the loss of a vital rung on the ladder that supports families out of complex issues.

9 How can the voluntary, community and private sectors contribute most effectively to local approaches to tackling child poverty and improving life chances?

Comments:

NIACE sees local communities, through the organisations of civic society (whether voluntary and faith groups, responsible employers and social entrepreneurs) as key to supporting families. The LGA/Centre for Social Justice publication, 'Hidden Talents' describes a family-centred model of early intervention which promotes the '4 A's of Aspiration, Attitude, Achievement and Access. At each stage, these are supported by the community which offers role models, nurture and discipline, relationship, encouragement in failure and celebrates achievements.

The BIS-funded Transformation Fund projects highlight many examples where voluntary, community, and private sector organisations have delivered innovative learning programmes which have had profound effects on family poverty and the potential life chances of children. The Family Learning Impact Funding, delivered through local authorities, was often used to offer programmes in partnership with voluntary and community organisations, to great effect. In order for the impact of these kinds of programmes to be effective in the long-term, they need to be strategically aligned with local priorities and, in particular, the voluntary and community organisations who are often working with the most vulnerable groups and families, need to be involved in the setting of those local priorities.

In order for voluntary and community organisations to be involved in these

ways, they need a secure funding base, providing organisational capacity.

10 Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make.

Comments:

11 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, was it easy to find, understand, complete etc.)

Comments:

The reduced timescale for response, particularly at a time when there are many consultations and proposals being issued, was problematic. This is particularly an issue for many smaller community and voluntary organisations who may lack the capacity, but whose views are vital to an informed development of strategy in an area such as this.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply x

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

xYes No

All DfE public consultations are required to conform to the following criteria within the Government Code of Practice on Consultation:

Criterion 1: Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

Criterion 2: Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

Criterion 3: Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

Criterion 4: Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

Criterion 5: Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

Criterion 6: Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

Criterion 7: Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

If you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Donna Harrison, DfE Consultation Co-ordinator, tel: 01928 738212 / email: donna.harrison@education.gsi.gov.uk

Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 February 2011

Send by post to: Consultation Unit, Floor GB, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2GJ.

Send by e-mail to: Childpoverty.strategy@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk