

Every Child Matters
Change For Children

**Children and
Young People's Review**
Discussion document



HM TREASURY

department for
education and skills

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Children and Young People's Review – Discussion document

The Government is determined to make sure that every child and young person – whatever their race, gender, background or circumstances – gets the best start in life. It's also committed to giving them the support they and their families need so that they can reach their full potential.

The Government has already helped transform the life chances of many children and young people. But there's still a lot more to be done.

The Government's approach since 1997 has already improved the lives of children. For example:

- There is less risk of a child living in poverty – 500,000 fewer children live in relative low income poverty than in 1998.
- There are nearly 400,000 fewer children living in households where no one works.
- Children and young people are achieving better at school, with better GCSE results, for instance, and fewer children moving on to secondary school without basic skills in English and maths.

We can all have a strong influence on how our lives turn out. But some people are hampered by circumstances they can't control – such as poverty, disability and family dynamics. So in particular, the Government's Review Group is looking at how services for children and young people and their families can improve the way things turn out for individual children and young people.

This is a brief summary of the Review Group's discussion document, which shows what they have found out so far from their consultations and research, and looks at the issues raised. The report is broken down into four main areas:

- Prevention
- Young people
- Disabled children
- Families caught in a cycle of low achievement

Prevention

Preventing problems – or stepping in as soon as problems come to light – has a powerful impact on children's chances. It can make a huge difference to how well children and young people do in life. When things go well for someone – at school, at home and in their leisure time – they are more likely to expect things to continue to go well in the future. And they are likely to find it easier to do well when times are tough. But children with multiple problems often turn into adults with low expectations, worn down by difficulties. And they may pass on those limiting factors to their own children.

To prevent this cycle, support needs to be made available to children at all ages throughout childhood, to raise their aspirations and ambitions and help them succeed. And services such as schools and health services need to play a key role in identifying children at risk or who are beginning to develop problems.

The Government's publication 'Support for parents: the best start for children' committed the Government to looking at how they can best support parents, communities and public services to improve the lives of children and young people. It pinpointed four factors that can have a significant positive influence on children:

- **family prosperity** – having parents with qualifications, a job and a decent income
- **parenting** – what parents do rather than who they are
- **the wider community** – the neighbourhood and community, including housing quality and safety as well as the people
- **services** – public services, particularly education and health

It also emphasised the importance of preventing problems developing.

What should be done?

There's no quick fix that will solve all these problems – they are far more complex than that. The Government is already helping to improve the lives of children through its 'Every Child Matters' programme – and as a result of the 'Support for parents: the best start for children' report. But the Review Group believes that more can be done by public services (like schools and health) to help children become resilient and bounce back when things go wrong by:

- improving how well children do at school
- developing their social and emotional skills
- supporting parents

Parents and communities are vital to creating an environment that's supportive for children as they develop. And public services can do more to support parents and communities in this. One problem is that the most vulnerable people are often the hardest to reach, partly because they have more difficulty using the services they need. They may find it harder to talk about their

problems to someone 'in authority', for instance, or not be very good at standing up for themselves. It can take a lot of courage for them to ask for help. Sometimes it's simply a case of not feeling they deserve better. And that's an attitude that's easily passed on to their children, with long-term negative results. The Review will explore how to put this right in its next phase.

How are support systems helping?

People working in Local Authorities, the health system and the voluntary sector told the Review that the way the support systems are designed and staffed isn't yet helping with effective prevention and early intervention as much as it possibly could, so success is patchy. Currently, for instance, some families' problems are allowed to get worse and worse before they're dealt with. Help is often too little, too late. And there are gaps in the services, which mean that some areas aren't covered well enough. For example, there's a need for more parenting and family support services.

If progress is to be made, it's important that the system makes prevention and early intervention a priority across all the services – and can deal with potential problems as early as possible. So, in the next phase, the Review will look at how this can best be achieved.

Areas to target

The Review has identified three priority areas which, along with a higher income, are often missing in the lives of children and young people who are not doing well:

- high achievement at school
- good social and emotional skills – such as self-awareness, the ability to manage their feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills
- positive parenting

These areas tend to influence each other. Programmes to improve children's social and emotional skills, for instance, are having a direct impact on higher achievement. Parents being involved with their child's education, particularly fathers, also has a powerful influence on how well children do. Good progress is already being made on parenting projects around the country but there are still many gaps in the quantity and quality of support.

The next phase of the Review will look at how to ensure that services – such as education and health – reach the most disadvantaged people to improve these factors. It will focus on boosting social and emotional skills and academic achievement for all children, and on strengthening the support for parents.

Young people

Prevention and early intervention don't just mean supporting children in their early years. Young people may also need support as they develop into adults. For example, moving from primary to secondary school can be an unsettling time. And especially in the teenage years, friends can have a powerful influence on young people as they become more independent of their families. Life seems more complex than it once was. In the past, people expected to go from school to 'a job for life', perhaps with a college course in between. Now career paths are less straightforward. Good social and emotional skills, being able to work as part of a team, to solve problems and to communicate well, are more important than ever in helping young people make the best choices in life and ensuring that they experience fewer difficulties as adults.



Making the most of opportunities

There's still a lot for today's young people to celebrate. Teenage years can be full of exciting opportunities, a time for personal development and for forging new identities. Most young people are using these opportunities and are making a positive contribution. Almost two thirds of 11 – 15 year-olds have helped out at a club, group or organisation, while 90 per cent have helped out in the home or with relatives. Almost three quarters of young people take part in activities

they enjoy such as sport, music or drama. Young people have the right to services that can help them make the most of these opportunities and build resilience against the challenges they face.

The Government has invested in modernising services over the past few years and a lot has been achieved. But the picture is complex and not all young people need the same solutions. After all, individual circumstances vary so much.

What happens outside school is important

Achievement at school has a major part to play in a person's future. But how young people spend their leisure time – and what sort of support they have – is also very important. What they do in their spare time can affect their skills, their self-confidence and their ambitions, for instance. It can help prepare them for adult life and employment.

High quality, positive activities, such as structured drama groups, sports and music workshops, with personal support from trusted adults, can have favourable effects on all young people – and their communities. They can help bring young people who have difficulty using services and are at risk of greater problems in their adult life back into the mainstream. Research shows, for instance, that school and youth programmes are linked to improvements in young people's attitudes towards school, to avoiding drugs, alcohol and violence, to better behaviour and coping more successfully with peer pressure.

What stops young people taking part?

The Review has identified various barriers for young people taking part in positive activities – factors such as transport (particularly in rural areas and for disabled young people), costs (of transport and of taking part in activities) and how appealing the activities and their surroundings are to young people.

The Government's conversations with young people

- The Government believes that talking directly to young people and listening to their opinions is important. In 2005, the Government received a record 19,000 responses from young people to the 'Youth Matters' paper, which outlined plans to improve local opportunities to help young people make the most of their teenage years. It was the largest ever response to a government consultation.
- This review has built on what the Government has already heard in earlier conversations and in summer 2006 visited six groups of young people across the country. The aim was to hear more about what was important to them and to see how they would prioritise the Government's spending on things to do, places to go and support for young people.
- These young people told the Government that their top priority was support from skilled adults, followed by activities and then access.

There are also issues around safety, around some people's sense of 'territory' (which can have a negative effect on 'outsiders') and around the location of facilities.

Communities and parents place a high value on good quality activities, as do young people themselves, but at the moment quality varies hugely. So it's important that all these people – young people, parents and communities – can play a part in designing youth services for their own particular location, so that solutions can better suit local issues.

The workforce is important

High quality professionals are crucial to running youth activities well, so that young people really benefit. But youth workers' status can appear low and the hours are often anti-social. There are some good examples around the country of investment in youth staff, and the youth work sector is aiming to make entry into the profession at graduate level only by 2010. But sometimes there aren't many ways for youth workers to progress in their career. It's also important that the workforce reflects the range of backgrounds and cultures of the young people it serves. The Review will be examining how the quality of support for young people can be consistently improved.

Much is happening already

Young people are already playing a part in influencing what's available in their area through Government-funded initiatives such as the Youth Opportunity and Youth Capital Funds. These put money for local facilities and activities directly in young people's hands. And Local Authorities are developing valuable experience in working with these young people. The voluntary sector (known as the 'third sector') is playing an important role too, providing a very wide range of activities, from Scouts and Guides to faith-based groups and specific facilities for very disadvantaged young people. But these successes need to be built upon. The Review will look at what is currently available for young people and what more needs to be done to make sure that all young people have access to – and take part in – high quality activities outside school that will help them move successfully into adulthood.

Breaking the 'cycle of deprivation'

The Government's strategy for breaking the 'cycle of deprivation' is guided by three principles:

- **Rights and responsibilities:** parents are responsible for raising their children in a loving, supportive, safe, healthy and financially secure environment. They have a right to support from government to meet their responsibilities if they need it. Young people have rights and responsibilities too. For instance, the Government expects them to attend school, behave in an acceptable way and aim to achieve well at school. In return, young people have a right to expect good quality support inside and outside school, including positive activities and opportunities that appeal to them and will benefit them – and to have their views listened to.
- **Support for those who need it most:** children and families who need more should receive extra support – financial or otherwise – so that there is no longer a gap between the achievements of those who are disadvantaged and those who are not.
- **Prevention:** for children and young people, the failure to prevent problems from developing or getting worse means they are more likely to face difficulties in adulthood. Preventing problems before they arise also reduces the cost to the taxpayer – the more severe and complex the problem, the more it costs to sort it out. For example, teenage pregnancy, children in care, youth offending and not being in education, employment or training all cost money that could have been saved if these problems had been prevented.

The role of Local Authorities

From this January (2007), Local Authorities, by law, must make sure that young people have access to 'positive activities'. That means they will need to co-ordinate what's available locally and make sure that young people have enough information about things to do and places to go.



Sometimes it will be the Local Authority itself that provides the services – in arts and leisure services, for example. But often organisations from the third or private sector, or extended schools, for instance, can play an important part in making the overall offer of activities most interesting and appealing for young people. The challenge will be to make sure that the right people and organisations are involved and that all this is well co-ordinated locally to give young people the best possible range of experiences.

The Government has invested significantly in improving opportunities for young people but the Review will look at how the barriers we've mentioned can be overcome so that all young people have access – and use – high quality services. These services will help them develop the skills they need as they move into adult life.

Supporting vulnerable groups

Some children and young people are more vulnerable than others and by the time they are adults they simply aren't on an equal footing with others their age. This is partly because the difficulties they face have been allowed to reach crisis point, with no one trying to sort them out. The Review is considering particularly how best to make a difference for disabled children and for families caught in a cycle of low achievement.

Disabled children

In England, there are more than 570,000 disabled children and young people under the age of 18. They come from all backgrounds and are less likely to do well at school – or to fare as well in later life – as non-disabled children and young people. The severity of their disabilities varies widely. Some will need better access to mainstream services (such as schools, childcare and the NHS). Others will need more specialist support in other areas of their life.

There is some evidence that more and more disabled children with very complex needs are surviving longer. This is partly due to medical advances and technology, which can also help disabled children play a greater part in society and achieve more.

The right help, at the right time

The right kind of support, at the right time, can make a huge difference to quality of life for disabled children and their families. Part of the problem, though, is the difficulties they can face in getting their disabilities identified – and in securing the support they need – as early as possible. Early diagnosis and support can make a difference to the child's family too.



At the moment, disabled children are likely to achieve worse GCSEs than their non-disabled peers, twice as likely not to be in employment, education or training in their late teens, and four times more likely to be unemployed by the time they are 26. They are also more likely to suffer family break up or abuse – and to have a difficult transition into adulthood.

What's currently happening?

The Government has legislated to help improve the outcomes of disabled children and young people – through the Disability Discrimination Act, for instance, and the Children Act 1989. The Review is looking at how public services can help by working with disabled children and their families.

The Government has also set out a series of policy reforms, such as 'Improving the life chances of disabled people' and 'The Special Educational Need (SEN) strategy – removing barriers to achievement'. But despite legislation and much good work, there are still variations locally. And some families with disabled children report that their needs are simply not being met – often because of barriers such as transport problems, inflexible appointment systems, and physical or language problems. Waiting for equipment, treatment or short breaks seems to be a common experience, which can have lasting social, physical and emotional consequences. And, although in some areas Local Authorities do

encourage disabled children and families to shape their own services, many families feel that their voice is not being listened to.

The Government has published the Local Government 'White Paper', which sets out how local government should deliver services that respond to the needs of disabled children and families. The Review will consider what else needs to be done so that support is given early on, services are well-planned and co-ordinated to meet the local need, and staff have a good knowledge and understanding of disabled children's needs.

Families caught in a cycle of low achievement

Research for the Review found that there is a small minority of families with severe problems that have been going on for generations – and that the more problems a family has, the less likely their children are to do well. For instance, the likelihood of young people aged 13 to 14 ever having been in care doubles for those who live in families with one of the problems highlighted in the surveys, compared with young people who live in families with none. And those who live in families with five or more of the problems are six times more likely to have been in care. There are similar trends for other outcomes such as frequent truancy and being suspended or excluded from school.

Families with multiple problems also get involved with more support services. The Review found that in practice families can be in touch with dozens of people offering them support. Yet they tend to benefit from this support less than the wider population.



Some recurrent problems of families caught in a cycle of low achievement

- mental health problems
- substance and alcohol misuse
- domestic violence
- homelessness
- unemployment
- poverty
- truancy and educational underachievement
- behavioural problems and lack of parenting skills
- contact with the criminal justice system

Support for these families is crucial

It's important for the Government to support these families, even though it's difficult to do so effectively. Their family environment is harming the whole family and resulting in a cycle of low achievement for their children and their children's children.

These families can also harm their local communities – through crime and anti-social behaviour, for instance – and they cost the taxpayer dearly through the public services they use, such as social services and the criminal justice system. Improving the support for these families could not only improve the quality of life for the communities they live in, but could also save money that could be used to prevent problems in other families.

Services must work together

Because of the complexity of their problems, such families often need complex packages of challenge and support, from a variety of sources. The Government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda has created greater co-operation between children's services, which is an important step. But the links between children's and adults' services aren't as well developed. And support is often only available for a comparatively short length of time – too short for the problem to be solved and stay solved. There's number of good examples where public services do work well together to help support whole families, dealing with the range of their different problems together. But the Review finds that this is not happening in all cases.



Building relationships

Another issue is that families with problems that affect how well they look after their children can be reluctant to get involved with social services and may not trust the support they're offered – which means it's very difficult to make a difference to their situation. So it's not just a question of stepping in to 'turn around' these families. It also means building trust and constructive relationships with them to change their attitudes. Parenting programmes are having a positive effect. The skills of the workforce are crucial here and the new National Academy for Parenting Practitioners will help ensure the right skills to support parents.

Coupling support with sanctions can curb harmful behaviour and help persuade people to co-operate with offers of help. Empowering the families to become involved, to take responsibility and control of their own lives is another useful approach. Encouraging current users of a service to act as mentors or ‘buddies’ to inspire other parents to get involved also works well. The Review is looking further at a range of options that sensitively combine sanctions and support, and considering ways to improve matters for these families long term.

Next steps

The Review recognises that the most important influence on children and young people is usually the people in close contact with them – such as parents or communities. Public services need to recognise and support this. There has been progress but more could be done to enable parents, adults and communities to play a greater role in supporting children and young people.



It's also important that public services create a partnership with the people who use them, making sure that users know what's available, and that each service on offer is what's needed, when it's needed. That way, services are more likely to be used – and more likely to improve the life chances of children and young people.

The Review will carry on its work to decide how the Government should respond to all these challenges, drawing on evidence from a wide range of sources. The Review continues to welcome feedback and any comments on this document or further views on how the Government should respond can be sent to: cypreview@hm-treasury.gov.uk. The Review Group will report in the spring of this year with their recommendations.





If you want more information on any of the plans in this document check out the following websites:

www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/youth

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

You can visit the Children's Rights Alliance for England at:

www.crae.org.uk

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D35/0207

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