

Raising Standards, Improving Outcomes: Draft Statutory Guidance on the Early Years Outcomes Duty

A response from the Family and Parenting Institute

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Is the guidance sufficiently clear on how analysis of data and research can enable service delivery to be effective in targeting those most in need of services, and the best ways of delivering services to overcome obstacles?

While the guidance describes the ways in which services should be supporting 'parents', it is not explicitly stated that fathers may have different needs from mothers. Fathers' involvement with their children's upbringing has been shown to be significant for their educational achievement and wellbeing (Goldman, 2005; O'Brien, 2004). However, fathers may easily be excluded when services focus on mothers as the default parent. In Sure Start Local Programmes, for example, successful engagement of fathers was shown to be the exception rather than the rule (Lloyd et al., 2003).

Goldman, R. (2005) Fathers' involvement in their children's education. National Family and Parenting Institute

Lloyd, N., O'Brien, M. and Lewis, C. (2003) Fathers in Sure Start. Birkbeck, University of London

O'Brien, M. (2004) Fathers and Family Support: Promoting involvement and evaluating impact. National Family and Parenting Institute

Is the guidance clear on how to meet the needs of those most at risk of poor outcomes for example from low income families, disabled children, BME groups, SEN etc?

We welcome the emphasis on outreach work in the guidance. Research by FPI has highlighted the importance of outreach and home visiting for families who are unlikely to come to services (Barrett, in press; Apps et al., 2007). However this research also shows that this essential work can be expensive and must be prioritised if it is not to be vulnerable to funding restrictions. Families often require support with a range of difficulties, for example, debt, housing, family violence, health and mental health, in addition to support with relationship or parenting problems.

There has recently been a welcome recognition of the difficulties faced by parents trying to find childcare for their disabled children and how this contributes to the

increased risk of poverty in these families. Local authorities should also ensure that there are sufficient services to meet the specific early learning needs of disabled children. The Parliamentary Hearings on Services for Disabled Children (2006) concluded that services such as Portage that work with parents to support disabled children's play, communication and learning are highly valued, but that there is a general lack of similar therapeutic services. Early years services should also meet the needs of the estimated one in ten children in the UK with a communication disability (estimate from the charity I CAN).

Apps, J., Reynolds, J., Ashby, V. and Husain, F. (2007) Family Support in Children's Centres: Planning, Commissioning and Delivery. Family and Parenting Institute

Barrett, H. (in press) Engagement with 'hard to reach' families in the voluntary and community sector. Family and Parenting Institute

Parliamentary hearings on services for disabled children (2006) Full report. London: HMSO

Does the guidance explain what local authorities should be doing to involve parents, and listen to children in the planning, commissioning and delivery of service for young children?

There is little information in the guidance for local authorities about the detail of involving parents in developing services. Research by FPI (unpublished report for DCSF) highlighted the need for consultation with parents:

- to be strategic, and supported at a high level
- to address clear issues, which can be altered in response to parents' views
- to include parents at an early stage in shaping the questions to be asked
- to use specialist organisations with direct links to the seldom heard, with sufficient time and budget to allow this effectively
- to be transparent and review the impact of consultation

It would be useful to refer to more detailed guides than the two documents currently mentioned in the guidance (the Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance, and the TDA Consultation toolkit), for example those listed below.

As stated above, it is important that consultation involves a diverse range of parents, including fathers. It should also be clearly stated in the guidance that consultation must include those who do not use services. The outreach described in section 4.3 should therefore be two-way, listening to families as well as providing information about services.

Young children, as those most directly affected, are an underused resource in designing early years services. In paragraph 33, to encourage local authorities and their partners to follow up the references on listening to young children it would also be useful for the footnotes to include the details of relevant publications.

Council for Disabled Children and Contact a Family (2004) Parent participation: improving services for disabled children: Professionals' guide. Council for Disabled Children and Contact a Family

Family Policy Alliance (2005) Parent participation: Improving services for children and families. Family Policy Alliance.

Do you believe that local authorities and their partners require any further information than currently exists to support them in meeting the requirements set out in the guidance?

Given the finite resources available to local authorities and the different roles they are expected to play in supporting children and families, it would be helpful for them to have some guidance in how they are expected to allocate these resources as well as the outcomes they are expected to achieve.

The 2005 Commission on Families and the Wellbeing of Children proposed that there should be open government discussion in concrete financial terms of the relative investment expectations between early prevention, support where children are in need, support in at risk cases and local authority care.

Claire Jordan, Policy Officer
Family and Parenting Institute
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