

Building on progress: Families

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of a stable environment that
makes for good families.
The aim is to support families
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Foreword by the Prime Minister

From the beginning of its time in office this Government has been concerned to support families.

In 1997 childcare was a neglected part of the welfare state. With Sure Start Children's Centres, we have opened up new territory. Through the New Deal, the national minimum wage and Child Tax Credits there has been improved financial support for families. We are delivering the 10-year childcare strategy, replacing the Child Support Agency and have reformed children's services through the *Every Child Matters* programme.

And, in a sense, of course, family policy is a much wider category than this. Protecting law-abiding citizens against the anti-social behaviour of a minority; ensuring that children's results at school are improving; improving public health; and maintaining a high rate of employment: these are all the everyday concerns of families and the policies of many departments are designed to meet them.

So, the record of the past decade is a good one. But, as in all aspects of policy,

we have had to keep abreast of change. Social changes have made the idea of the family very different from what it was a generation ago.

Most children born today will not be living with both their natural parents by the age of 16. Children tend to stay at home for longer, there are more single parents than there were, people are marrying later and women are having children later in life. The divorce rate is higher, there are more stable couples who choose not to get married, more children are born outside marriage, the average size of a household is declining, and the population is ageing.

There is no question that the stability associated with marriage usually provides the best environment in which to bring up children. But to make the promotion of marriage the main focus of family policy would be ineffective and could lead to discrimination against children whose parents have broken up or suffered bereavement. In practice, it is difficult for the state to promote specific forms of family structure. Tax incentives, for example, will have at best an uncertain

and limited impact, and in any case are an inefficient use of government funds as they would largely benefit the better off.

It is the loving atmosphere of a stable environment that makes for good families. This can be found within marriage and within other forms of relationship. It can also be absent in any form of relationship. So, of course, society should do what it can to support marriage. But the tax and benefit system is a very crude way of doing this which is why the last Government began to phase out the Married Couples Allowance.

So, the aim is to support families in all their variety. But this is not an area of policy that government can simply pursue on its own. Family policy necessarily reaches into the private domain where the state can only act in conjunction with individuals and families.

Some families need a modicum of support. The role of government is to provide them with a platform, to enable them to take responsibility for themselves.

Then there are some families which require rather more than that. These families have more entrenched problems and need more intensive help. The children within them are finding that their life chances are impaired. It is a matter of fairness that they be helped. And some of these families actually cause wider social harms. The community in which they

live suffers the consequences. The state cannot realistically withdraw from any of these families.

Specifically, there are three areas of family policy where the state should act. First, it should address those things that damage families and impair the life chances of the children within them, such as poverty, low aspirations, poor parenting and conflict in relationships. Second, it should support people in striking the right balance between life at home and life at work. And, third, it should address the class of families that current policy is still not reaching adequately. We need to think radically, along the lines of the recent Social Exclusion Action Plan, about how we help to change the lives of these families. Taken together, what is needed is a coherent package of policies that provide direct support to families.

The Government's overarching objectives in family policy are to improve the outcomes of family members and to ensure that all families are treated fairly, which means focusing particular attention on the most disadvantaged groups.

Executive summary

The Government's overarching objectives in family policy are to improve the outcomes of family members (for example children's educational attainment, the health of family members or the income of parents) and to ensure that all families are treated fairly, which means focusing particular attention on the most disadvantaged groups.

These have not always been the objectives of government policy. In fact, the policies of successive governments have changed significantly over the past 50 years and beyond, often in line with evolving attitudes towards family life. Chapter 1 discusses the changing role of government in relation to the family and sets out the current Government's rationale for intervention in this policy area.

£21 billion has been invested in childcare and early years services since 1997.

Significant progress has been made towards the goals of improved outcomes and equity over the course of the past decade. For example, there are now just 47 secondary schools where fewer than

one in four pupils gains five or more good GCSEs compared with 616 in 1997; £21 billion has been invested in childcare and early years services since 1997; and the New Deals programmes have helped 1.7 million people into work since 1998.

Drawing on a series of ministerial seminars, citizens' deliberative forums and other pieces of work carried out as part of the Government's Policy Reviews,¹ this paper argues that, over the course of the next 10 years, more should be done to help achieve the Government's two overarching objectives of improving outcomes and ensuring greater equity. Specifically, the Government should do more to:

- **support families** to exercise their rights to manage their own affairs while living up to the responsibilities they have (for example as parents). This means increasingly focusing on improving the life chances of family members (addressing such issues as poor educational attainment and a culture of low aspirations) and ensuring that information and support on relationships

and parenting are transparent and accessible to all parents, including non-resident parents. Supporting families should also go hand in hand with greater clarity for parents about their rights and responsibilities. This should be the case from the outset of becoming a parent, and the Government should therefore require both parents' names to be registered following the birth of a child. These policies are discussed at greater length in Chapter 2;

- **enable work–family life balance**, by helping people move from welfare into work, improving childcare and supporting family commitments. Measures on these three themes in Chapter 3 of this paper include learning lessons from pilot schemes to extend free childcare and education provision to those up to two years old; keeping under review the case for a gradual extension of the right to request flexible working for parents with older children (six and over); and investigating the reasons for the marked gender divide in requests for and granting of flexible working. Given the difficulties that some businesses may face in granting more flexible working and managing paternity and maternity leave, the Government should also continue to look for ways to support businesses in implementing flexible working, and in particular should identify ways in which it can assist small and medium-sized enterprises in this area; and

- **address the hardest to reach families**, by tackling the causes and consequences of deep-seated social exclusion which can inflict huge costs on individuals, families, the economy and society. Specifically, the Government should continue developing better ways of identifying the most at-risk families (including those susceptible to family breakdown). Once identified, these families can be offered intensive, tailored support, for example through health-led programmes based on the successful Nurse–Family Partnerships.² The Government should ensure that public service providers are properly coordinated. One approach is to ensure that individual professionals or service providers are accountable for the well-being of families as a whole. These issues are discussed in Chapter 4 of this paper.

The success of families is first and foremost down to the commitments and behaviour of the individuals within them.

The success of families is first and foremost down to the commitments and behaviour of the individuals within them. But the Government does have a role to play in ensuring that citizens are given the opportunity to secure the best outcomes for their families and in improving equity. This paper sets out the Government's vision of how this can be achieved over the decade to come.

The state aims to enable people to achieve the best outcomes that they can. The vast majority of individuals are able to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. The appropriate role for the state is to ensure that citizens have the opportunities and the information required to enable them to make those decisions.

1. The role of the state in relation to the family

Introduction

1.1 As the nature of the family has changed over the last 50 years, so the policies of successive governments towards the family have changed in parallel. This chapter discusses how family policy has changed since the end of World War II, why the state has a continued role to play in family policy, and what the objectives of this policy are.

The evolution of family policy

1.2 After World War II, government policy supported the widespread model of single-earner married couples, with the vast majority of babies born within marriage. Married people received additional tax allowances, as did working people with children. The state did not provide or assist with the provision of childcare, assuming that women would stay at home to look after their children. Abortion was illegal (in 1939 one in six deaths in pregnancy was caused by unsafe illegal abortions). Contraception was not widely available.

1.3 From the 1960s onwards, the role of the state began to reflect more liberal

attitudes about family life and childbearing. Divorce laws were liberalised under the Divorce Act 1969. Official support for contraception was made possible in 1967, and the contraceptive pill was made available on the NHS in 1975. Child Benefit was introduced between 1977 and 1979. This replaced previous financial support and increased the proportion of support paid directly to mothers.

1.4 In the 1980s, the proportion of children in poverty increased rapidly, from 15 per cent in 1979 to over 30 per cent in the early 1990s.³ Child Benefit was frozen for three years from 1987. The state's financial relationship with families also changed in 1990, when income tax began to be calculated on an individual rather than a family basis.

1.5 Since 1997, the Government has developed an approach in line with four of the features of the strategic and enabling state,⁴ to meet its two overarching objectives in family policy (see paragraphs 1.6–1.15 below). First, it has explicitly focused on the importance of improving children's **outcomes** – for example in

The family is a fundamental building block of society.

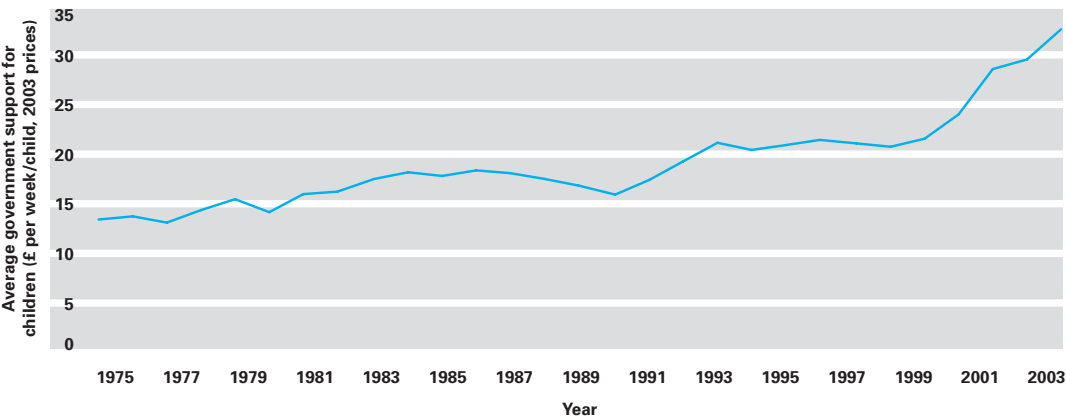
educational attainment. Second, it has sought to **tackle insecurity** in the labour market and home life. In particular, the Government has put policies in place to reduce child poverty – for example through Sure Start, Child Tax Credits and support for childcare (see the increase in government financial support for families with children shown in Figure 1).⁵ Third, it has sought to **empower people** by giving them choices about how to balance family life with other commitments – for example by introducing the right to request flexible working and improving maternity and paternity leave. Fourth, it has coupled **rights with responsibilities** – for example by introducing parenting orders and parenting classes to tackle anti-social behaviour.

The objectives of family policy

1.6 The family is a fundamental building block of society, and the success of families is, first and foremost, down to the commitments and behaviour of the individuals within them. The choices and judgements that people make every day determine the type of family in which they live. It is, therefore, legitimate to ask what the appropriate role of the state is with regard to families. Should these matters not be left entirely outside the scope of government action?

1.7 It is right to be wary of state interference in family life. However, it would be far too simplistic to demand that the state withdraw altogether. The role that families play within society requires a legal framework to function effectively.

Figure 1: Financial support for families with children



For example, there need to be legal definitions of marriage, of inheritance and of what decisions people can take on behalf of their dependants. So the state has to be involved with families at least to the extent of providing a clear and workable set of relevant laws.

1.8 There are, however, other reasons why the state might need to have an active family policy. First, the state's overall aim is to enable citizens to secure the best possible outcomes for themselves and their families. Second, it wants to improve the extent to which those outcomes are equitable, by ensuring that all citizens are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential. In order to achieve equity, the state may have to take particular action with regard to the hardest to reach families. The implications of these overall objectives for family policy are set out below.

Enabling all citizens to secure better outcomes

1.9 A family's actions may affect other families or wider society. Healthy and stable family relationships are conducive not only to child well-being and adult social and emotional health, but also to wider economic and social stability. The state has a legitimate interest in promoting these wider positive effects and in preventing the social costs created by dysfunctional families.

Crises such as bereavement, serious illness or unemployment put serious stresses on families through no fault of their own.

1.10 Even for those decisions that do not affect other families or wider society, families may require information, advice and support to make them effectively. For example, parents will want information about childcare and education options for their children, and about legal rights such as maternity pay. If people do not have the right information, they may not be able to make the best choices for themselves or wider society. In some cases, state intervention will be the most efficient and effective way of ensuring that people have access to appropriate information.

Improving equity

1.11 Some families may be less well equipped than others to take advantage of opportunities and choices that are available to them. Crises such as bereavement, serious illness or unemployment put serious stresses on families through no fault of their own. In the interests of equity it is necessary for the state to provide particular support at times of crisis and to the most disadvantaged groups.

1.12 Delivering equity means ensuring that those who depend on others (such as children or the elderly) are treated well. Families require one party (the parent) to act on behalf of another (the child), as children

often do not have the ability to act on their own behalf. In the overwhelming majority of cases, parents make decisions that are in the best interests of their children. However, occasionally they do not. In these cases the state needs to protect the interests of the child, and in the most extreme cases find alternative parenting (for example through foster care or other means). Similar arguments apply in the case of care for elderly relatives or other dependants.

1.13 A decision to have a child is a momentous occasion in any person's life. Yet while parents may have initially made a full commitment to the child, the changing pressures in their own lives may undermine this over the longer term. If an individual does not live up to their responsibilities (for example by refusing to pay child maintenance after a relationship breaks down), the costs of that failure may fall on other, more vulnerable people, thereby damaging equity. Therefore, it may be necessary to provide an institutional structure or legal framework to support a binding long-term contract between parents and their children, which ensures that both parents fulfil their responsibilities. While there are not the same legal obligations between adult children and elderly parents, the state may still want to support these relationships.

1.14 Of course, the state aims to enable people to achieve the best outcomes that they can in a number of ways not immediately connected to family policy. Yet, other policies may lead to it indirectly affecting decisions within families. For example, policies that increase people's economic productivity and employability may change their decisions about when to marry or have children. Policies on housing affect the accommodation available to families and whether extended families remain in one household. The state may need to balance the impact of other policies by changing the way in which it supports families (for example by providing more assistance with childcare in response to successfully increasing female labour market participation).

1.15 These reasons do not justify the state becoming involved in all aspects of every family. The vast majority of individuals are able to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. The state should ensure that citizens have the opportunities and the information required to **enable** them to make those decisions. In very few cases, where people are not capable of making effective decisions (for example because of substance misuse) or where they make a choice that could seriously harm others, the state will need to intervene more directly.

In very few cases the state will need to intervene more directly.

Families themselves are generally best placed to judge how to manage their affairs, and government should neither limit their choices nor make value judgements about private decisions.

2. Supporting families

Introduction

2.1 This chapter puts British families in historical context and sets out the trends that have emerged in recent decades as a basis for describing the policies that are needed to achieve the Government's objectives. Looking at what affects the life chances of children and other family members, the chapter shows that family income, parental education levels and the strength of relationships – as well as their underlying causes (such as individual aspirations) – are more important than the form that families take.

2.2 Families themselves are generally best placed to judge how to manage their affairs, and government should neither limit their choices nor make value judgements about private decisions. But, in line with the features of the strategic and enabling state, the Government does have a role in achieving the two objectives set out in Chapter 1 – enabling

citizens to secure better outcomes and improving equity.

The family in historical context

2.3 The traditional nuclear family – with a 'breadwinning' husband and a wife responsible for housework and childcare – was not always the norm in British society. For example, before the 18th century, for the majority of people the family was not the distinct entity that it is today. All members of the household were expected to work together. Young people who became servants or apprentices were treated in the same way as the members of the family that they joined, and they would rarely see their biological parents again.⁶

2.4 During the 18th century, this changed. Workers began to be paid a wage for their labour. Family members no longer worked together but rather used their earnings to support the family. In this period, the family also became a unit based on ties of marriage and lines of descent.⁷ Family relationships took on a new quality as family members began to treat each other

Families continued to change alongside social and economic developments throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

differently – as unique individuals with personal and emotional needs. By the end of the 18th century and beyond, love and companionship – as opposed to parental or family selection – had become more important in marriage.⁸

2.5 Families have continued to change alongside social and economic developments throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. By the 1980s, families were in a transition from a society in which there was a single overriding norm of what a family should be like to a society in which a plurality of norms were recognised as legitimate.⁹

More recent developments in British families

2.6 Nowadays, people are marrying later, if at all, and it is the norm to live with a partner before marrying. Married couples are more likely to divorce, and more children are born outside marriage. And the population is ageing, with older people the most likely to live alone. This section outlines the main trends affecting families today in more detail.

2.7 People today are getting married later. More than half of the women born in 1961 were married, or had been married, when they reached the age of 24.¹⁰ By comparison, less than one in five women born in 1975 had married by the time they were 24. However, although marriage rates have declined in recent years, **marriage is**

still popular – with around a quarter of a million marriages taking place in 2005.¹¹

2.8 The later age at which people are marrying reflects two changes: **a later start for their first live-in partnership and a shift from marrying to living together without being married.**¹² The latter change has been dramatic and rapid. In previous generations, a substantial majority of women were married before moving in with a partner. By contrast, less than 20 per cent of young women today were married before they began living with a partner.¹³ And by 2005, nearly one in four unmarried men and women under 60 was living with a partner – around twice the rate in 1986.¹⁴

2.9 More people are getting divorced.

The rate of divorce climbed from 2.1 divorces per 1,000 married population in 1961 to around 13 per 1,000 in 2005.¹⁵ Despite this rise, couples who are living together without being married are still more likely to break up than married couples. For example, among parents of children under three, when comparing couples of an equivalent age, income, education level, ethnic group and benefit status, an unmarried couple that is living together is around twice as likely as a married couple to break up.¹⁶ This may reflect, simply, that married couples may, on average, be more committed to one another.¹⁷

2.10 Given the declining numbers of married couples it is unsurprising that **children are born increasingly outside marriage** (see Figure 2). In 2003, around 25 per cent of children born in England and Wales were born to unmarried parents who were living together, and around 15 per cent were born outside a live-in partnership.¹⁸

2.11 Overall there has been a tripling of single parenthood in recent decades, with the proportion of children growing up in lone-parent families rising from 7 per cent in 1972 to 24 per cent in 2006.¹⁹ Most of this change took place in the 1980s and 1990s, with 21 per cent of children growing up in a lone-parent family by 1997. On current trends, only around 35–40 per cent of children born today can expect to live with both natural parents up to their 16th birthday.²⁰

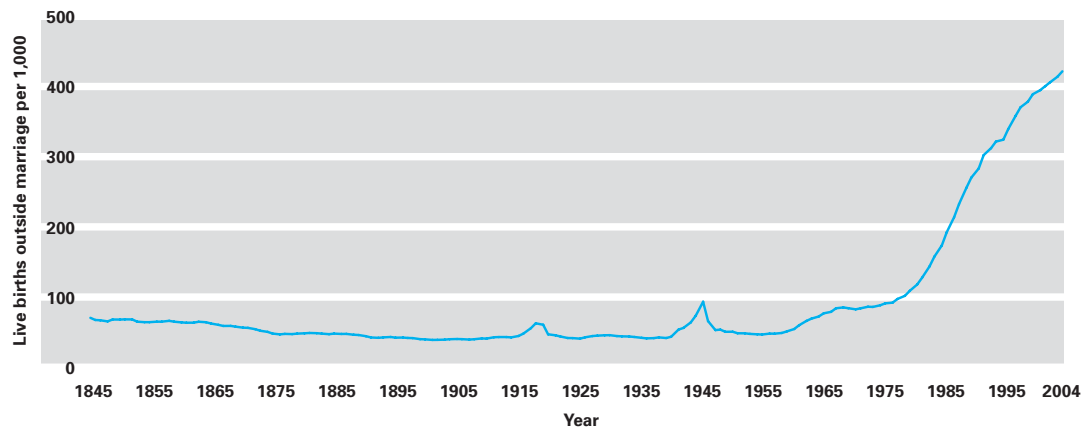
2.12 The average size of the household is declining, falling from 2.9 people in 1971 to 2.4 in 2006, and is set to be just 2.1 people by 2026.²² People today are more likely to live alone, as illustrated in Figure 3.²³ While there are more younger people living alone than in the past, the elderly are still more likely to live alone than any other group – in 2005, 60 per cent of women and 29 per cent of men aged 75 or over lived alone.²⁴

2.13 The UK's population is ageing.

Forecasts suggest that by 2014 there will, for the first time, be more people aged over 65 than aged 15 and under, as depicted in Figure 4.

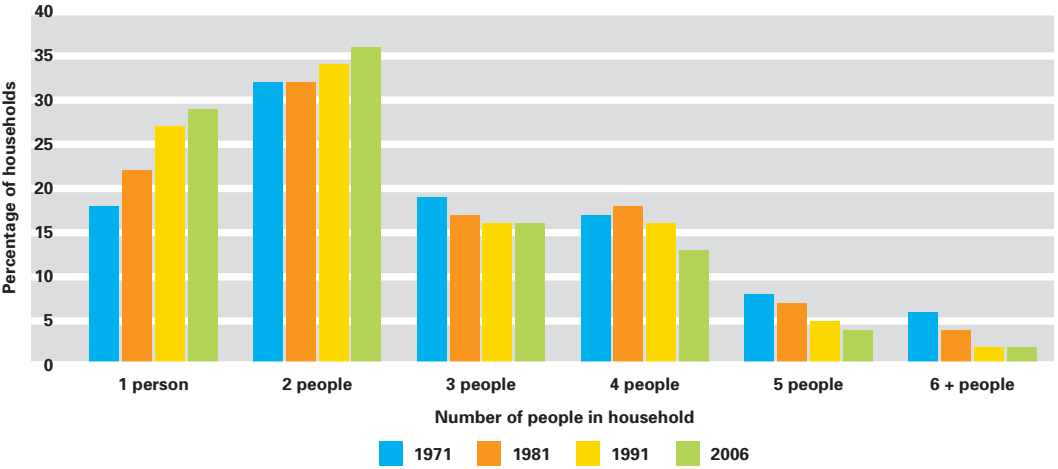
2.14 Considering relationships outside the household, **multi-generational families (composed of three, four or even five generations alive at the same time) are becoming more common** as a result

Figure 2: Births outside marriage, 1845–2004²¹



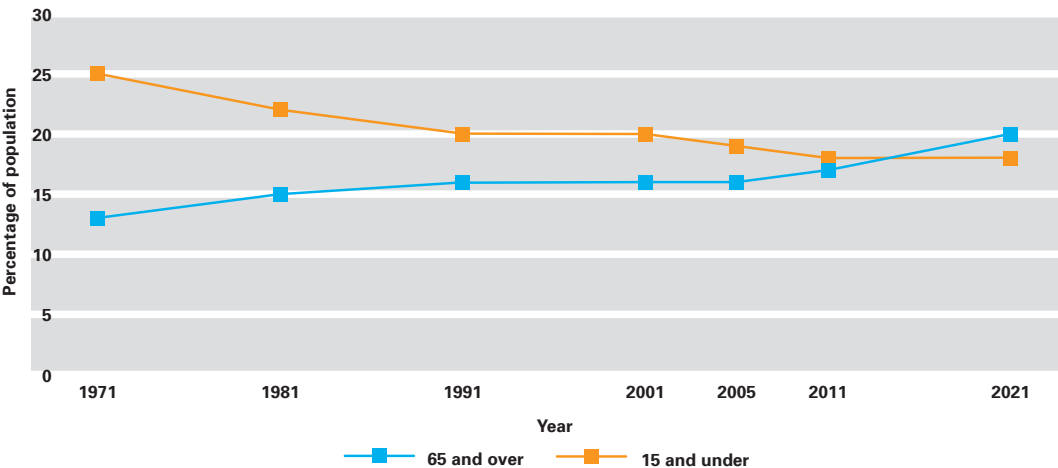
Source: Ermisch J., *Changing patterns of family formation*, 2007

Figure 3: Household size, 1971–2006²⁵



Source: Census; Labour Force Survey; Office for National Statistics

Figure 4: The age of the population, 1971–2021²⁶



Source: Office for National Statistics; Government Actuary's Department; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

of the ageing population. Given this, and the fact that immediate families are becoming smaller, it has been argued that extended family networks have become

‘beanpole-like’ – extending vertically (up to grandparents and great-grandparents) rather than horizontally (through networks of aunts and uncles).²⁷

Explanations for changes in British families

2.15 Numerous factors account for the changes to family types in Britain. The most important of these are:

- the changing economic situation of men and women, for example the increasing financial independence of women brought about by rising female employment;²⁸
- changing social attitudes, for example the fact that there is significantly less stigma attached to divorce, living alone or living with a partner to whom an individual is not married than in the past;
- government policy, for example the 1969 Divorce Reform Act in England and Wales;²⁹ and

- demography, for example the fact that people are living longer than they used to and are having children later in life (see Figure 5).

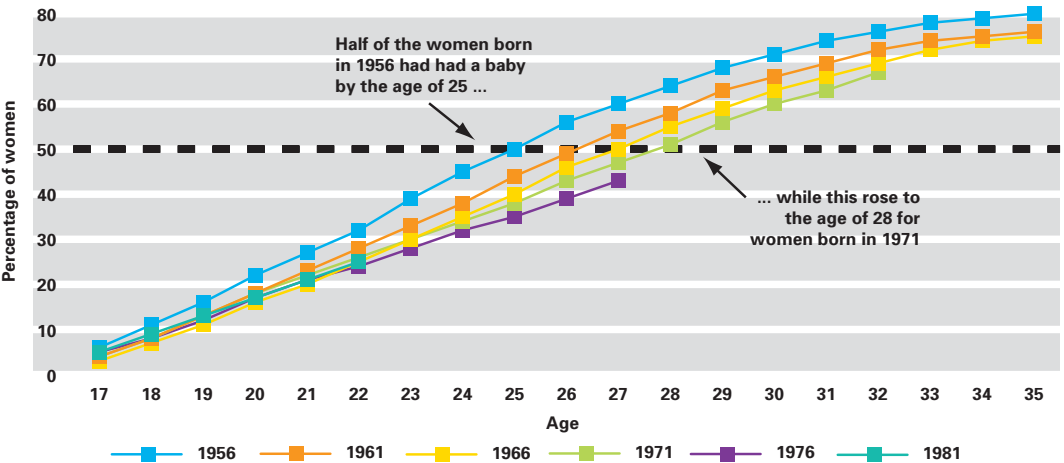
Improving the outcomes of children and family members

2.16 This section looks at what factors lead to improved outcomes for children and family members, followed by a discussion of what the Government has already done to help bring this about and what more the Government can do.

Factors influencing outcomes and what this implies for government

2.17 Several family-related factors are associated with children’s outcomes. These factors are not necessarily independent of each other, and could be

Figure 5: Percentage of women who are mothers by different ages, by birth cohort³⁰



Source: Ermisch J., *Changing patterns of family formation*, 2007

symptomatic of other issues – such as whether an individual has low aspirations or life skills. The three most important of these factors are:

- **prosperity:** individuals growing up in a low-income household are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as poor health and low educational attainment;³¹
- **education:** the level to which parents, and mothers in particular, are educated is one of the strongest predictors of children's educational attainment;³² and
- **strength of parental relationships:** for example, conflict between parents can have a detrimental impact upon children's outcomes, and commonly precedes, emerges or increases during the separation and divorce processes, often continuing beyond them.³³

2.18 Long-term stable relationships, including marriage, are often associated with higher parental income and educational attainment and relatively low levels of parental conflict. It is therefore unsurprising that households in which there are two committed parents are associated with better outcomes, both for children and for those adults within the relationship. Conversely, lone-parent families are associated with poorer outcomes for children, both in childhood and into their adult life. In other words, children generally benefit from being raised

within a stable, two-parent family rather than a single-parent family.³⁴

2.19 But this does not necessarily mean that the family type **causes** these outcomes. Rather it is the combination of factors set out in paragraph 2.17 that result in better or worse outcomes for children. This is illustrated by evidence that growing up in a lone-parent family as a result of bereavement or of donor insemination is not associated with the same negative outcomes as growing up in a lone-parent family resulting from divorce.³⁵ Similarly, inter-parental anger and conflict are strong predictors of, and risk factors for, child maladjustment **regardless** of whether a child is living in a family that is intact, divorced or a step-family.³⁶

2.20 This is important because it confirms that government should concentrate on improving these underlying factors – educational attainment, the employment prospects of parents, and the strength of family relationships – rather than attempting to incentivise the creation of particular family types. Marriage is to be valued because it allows couples to demonstrate and celebrate the strength of their commitment to a relationship. But the Government cannot create commitment of this kind where it does not already exist. There is, for example, little evidence to suggest that providing financial incentives would create more stable and successful marriages. Similarly, policies that aim to

provide incentives for couples to stay together when relationships have broken down do not help to reduce parental conflict, and may therefore not be in the best interest of children's well-being or benefit those within the relationship.³⁷ The Government should therefore not act to incentivise specific forms of relationship.

Grandparents and wider family networks

2.21 Immediate relationships are important for children's and parents' well-being, but so are wider family networks.³⁸ The amount of support provided by extended family relatives is a matter not simply of family structure, but of the need people have for support and of relatives' capacity to provide it.³⁹ The role of grandparents in particular has evolved. Whereas in the past they may have seen themselves as involved on a voluntary and casual basis, they are increasingly seen as an important source of stability and continuity for children, especially if parents have separated.⁴⁰ There is also evidence, however, that such arrangements can put an immense amount of stress upon grandparents when relationships are maintained.⁴¹

2.22 At the same time there are many grandparents and older people who have no contact with family members or friends. Older people are the most likely to live alone, which may increase the risk of isolation. Around three in 10 people over

the age of 65 do not see any friends at least once a week,⁴² while almost one in 10 of those aged 65 and over report feeling often or always lonely, a feeling which increases with age.⁴³ Consequences can be serious: loneliness resulting from the death of a spouse, poor social support and physical illness or disability can lead to self-harm⁴⁴ and suicide in old age – particularly among older men.⁴⁵

2.23 The following sections look at how the issues raised so far in this chapter have been addressed by the Government to date, and how they can be further addressed in the future.

The Government's approach so far

2.24 Chapter 1 set out the reasons why government might legitimately become involved with family choices. This chapter has shown that there is not a strong case for government to try to encourage one type of family over others. But the poorer life chances of children resulting from low levels of parental education, poor employment prospects and weak family relationships (as well as some of the underlying factors that contribute to these outcomes, such as low aspirations) do create a rationale for government intervention. Given, therefore, its focus on improving outcomes and equity, the Government has put in place a number of policies over the past decade aimed

at tackling child poverty and supporting relationships.

2.25 Since 1997, investment and reform in education and the well-being of young people has been a major focus of government policy. Specific areas of focus include:

- **Support to help strengthen family relationships.** The Government has introduced measures to help build stronger families. For example, the Department for Education and Skills invests in relationship support, delivered through the third sector, and also supports conflict resolution for parents whose relationships have broken down. In 2005–06 the Government allocated £25 million in financial backing for voluntary sector work supporting marriage, relationships and parenting. By 2010 all schools will offer a range of parenting support, including information sessions as well as more specialised support for parents whose children have problems with attendance or behaviour. In addition, the recent Green Paper *Care Matters*⁴⁶ outlined proposals to help local services support families to stay together, such as assessing the impact of intensive parenting support or therapy.
- **Financial and relationship support for families and tackling child poverty.** Since 1997, a range of financial support

for families has been established. For example, Child Tax Credits are worth over £2,900 per year (for households with one child aged under one year). The effect of tax credits alongside other policies such as the minimum wage and adult skill development has helped to reduce the number of children living in relative poverty by over 600,000 since 1998–99,⁴⁷ while the New Deals have been enormously successful – helping over 1.7 million people into work since 1998.⁴⁸

- **Creation of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission (C-MEC).** The planned creation of C-MEC will result in the state focusing on the hardest cases, and will remove the barriers that currently prevent many from making their own arrangements regarding child maintenance after a separation. In order to facilitate this, there will be more accessible and joined-up services to help and support parents.
- **Joining up children's services.** The launch of the programme *Every Child Matters* in 2003 marked a major new phase of government activity to improve not only the educational attainment of children, but also their well-being more generally. *Every Child Matters* has brought together responsibility for educational outcomes and children's social services, supporting joined-up working with a pooled budget. Extended

schools are one of the most visible results of the *Every Child Matters* programme with over 4,000 already in place.⁴⁹ The 10-year childcare strategy is discussed further in the following chapters.

- **Balancing rights with responsibilities.**

Schools and other organisations can now use Parenting Contracts, which are two-sided voluntary agreements between parents and either the local authority or the governing body of the school, to address specific behavioural or attendance problems. The Government has also introduced Parenting Orders to compel a parent, where required, to attend parenting classes and fulfil other requirements deemed necessary by the court for improving their child's behaviour.

- **Narrowing the gaps in educational attainment.** Today there are just 47 secondary schools where fewer than one in four pupils gain five or more good GCSEs, compared with 616 in 1997. Ten years ago there were just 83 all-ability schools where more than 70 per cent of pupils achieved five good GCSEs, whereas today there are 604 such schools. And the overall proportion of pupils gaining five A*–C GCSE grades, or the equivalent, increased from 45.1 per cent in 1997 to 58.1 per cent in 2006.

- **Increasing quality of life for older people isolated from family support structures.** The report *A sure start to later life*, published in 2006, laid out a set of strategies to end the inequalities faced by older people. Eight 'LinkAge Plus' pilots will each provide a single gateway to accessible services for people aged 50 and over, with both drop-in centres and, for those who find it difficult to travel, outreach services. These will help older people to access a whole range of services, including housing, transport, health services, employment advice and information about volunteering opportunities. Findings from the evaluations will be disseminated to allow other local partnerships to establish similar approaches in their areas.

Future policy directions

2.26 Despite the policies and achievements that the Government has put in place so far, the continuing challenges created by changing family life means that there are a number of areas in which further steps are needed. This section examines what the Government can do to further improve family members' outcomes, and to help couples to strengthen their relationships in their own and their children's interests.

2.27 The Government should increasingly focus on improving the life chances of family members. This builds on the Government's continuing attempts to improve outcomes for children and families mentioned above. While addressing income and poverty itself matters for future life chances, poor parental educational attainment, parents' difficulties in sustaining strong social relationships and low levels of individual aspiration are also direct causes of poor life chances for children. These should, therefore, be addressed alongside tackling poverty itself. **This should also include an assessment of the impact that a culture of low aspirations can have upon life chances when they are passed on from generation to generation, and how such aspirations can be raised.**

2.28 In every family, strong relationships between parents and between parents and children provide the key to successful parenting. The quality of parent and child interaction is considered to be the most reliable predictor of children's well-being following relationship breakdowns.⁵⁰ In other words, it is not who or what the parents are that is important, but what the parents do.⁵¹

2.29 So rather than attempting to mould families around a single conception of the family, the Government should enable citizens to improve their lives by focusing its attention on helping parents, from an

early stage, to build and sustain strong relationships. Where this is not possible it should aim to minimise the kind of family conflict that can adversely affect the life chances of children, supporting and encouraging parents to meet their responsibilities. To support this the Children and Young People Review announced additional funding through Sure Start Children's Centres. In addition **the Government should ensure that information on relationship support services – in particular for the hardest to reach families – is made more transparent and accessible.** The hardest to reach families could be targeted through the proposal in Chapter 4 to introduce systems for identifying at-risk families.

Rather than attempting to mould families around a single conception of the family, the Government should enable citizens to improve their lives.

2.30 Strong relationships between children and a non-resident parent are particularly important. Divorce and separation commonly disrupt one of the child's most enduring and important relationships – that with their father.⁵² The strength of this relationship, rather than the frequency of father-child contact, is key to child outcomes.⁵³ Of course, fathers will require sufficiently extensive and regular interaction with their children to maintain

a high-quality relationship, but the amount of time is usually less important than the quality of the interaction that it fosters.⁵⁴ The children of less committed fathers seem to suffer more deprivation and show more behavioural problems than those whose fathers are more committed⁵⁵ – the key factor is whether fathers are actively involved in their children’s upbringing. This applies to both one- and two-parent families.

2.31 The Government has already set out a clear policy on contact with children for the non-resident parent following divorce or separation.⁵⁶ However, given the importance of this relationship for children’s life chances, the Government should continue to improve other aspects of post-divorce or separation arrangements for children. It should seek to introduce measures that maximise positive and meaningful involvement with the non-resident parent – which is usually the father. This will often mean involvement in a child’s life outside the home, which is why the parenting strategy launched this spring by the Department for Education and Skills suggested that schools hold fathers-only parent evenings. Similarly, the Children and Young People Review announced additional funding through Sure Start Children’s Centres to support outreach among disadvantaged parents and provide parenting classes for up to 30,000 parents, with a particular

emphasis upon supporting more fathers.

The National Academy for Parenting Practitioners will address gaps in parenting programmes nationally, for example gaps in provision aimed at fathers, including non-resident fathers.

2.32 The Government has an important role to play in setting out the responsibilities that parents and carers have towards their children, in order that both children and the wider society are protected from the harm that would result from failure to live up to these responsibilities. **The Government should ensure that parents are made fully aware of the rights and responsibilities that they have towards their children and each other,⁵⁷ and should investigate what the most effective ways of doing so would be. The Government should also ensure that families have access to sound information and advice about parenting.**

2.33 Possible approaches include an online resource or other information tools, and targeted campaigns at key moments in a child’s life – such as in the first year of school. Areas such as discipline, health and education should be covered, and linked to information and support on these matters (including useful non-governmental websites). Studies have shown that grandparent carers want improved information on law, benefits,

entitlement and complaints systems. **The Government should therefore ensure that information and advice is fully accessible for older carers, through universal services and guidance services such as Parentline Plus and Parent Know-How.**⁵⁸ These moves will empower families to provide their children with the supportive environment that we know is best for their chances in later life.

2.34 One area that could further enhance parental responsibility is the registration of births. At present both parents have to consent before an unmarried father's name can appear on a birth certificate and nearly one in five births outside marriage record only the mother's name. The Government believes that children have a right to know that both parents are responsible for them and to be supported by a framework that encourages an ongoing relationship with their parents. As set out in the Child Maintenance White Paper, the birth registration system needs to do more to actively promote joint registration and **current legislation should be changed to require both parents' names to be registered following the birth of their child, unless it would be unreasonable to do so.** In taking this work forward, the Government will only legislate once satisfied that robust safeguards can be put in place to protect the welfare of children and vulnerable mothers.⁵⁹

The Government believes that children have a right to know that both parents are responsible for them.

At a glance: policy recommendations to support families

- The Government should increasingly focus on improving the life chances of family members. This focus should include an assessment of the impact that a culture of low aspirations can have upon life chances when they are passed on from generation to generation, and how such aspirations can be raised.
- The Government should ensure that information on access to relationship support services – in particular for the hardest to reach families – is made more transparent and accessible.
- The Government should address gaps in parenting programmes nationally, including gaps in provision aimed at fathers, including non-resident fathers.
- The Government should ensure that parents are made fully aware of the rights and responsibilities that they have towards their children and each other, and should investigate what the most effective ways of doing so would be. The Government should also ensure that families have access to sound information and advice about parenting.
- The Government should ensure that information and advice is fully accessible for older carers, including through universal services and guidance services such as Parentline Plus and Parent Know-How.
- The Government should use legislation to require both parents' names to be registered following the birth of their child, unless it would be unreasonable to do so.

The Government wants to enable all families to make choices about work and family commitments and achieve the balance that is appropriate for them.

3. Enabling work–family life balance

Introduction

3.1 The previous chapter examined the Government’s role in supporting families where appropriate. Equally as important to families is the role the Government plays in enabling individuals to balance work and family commitments⁶⁰ – particularly at times of increased stress such as at the birth of a child or caring for ill family members.

3.2 Balancing work and family commitments is a difficult challenge for today’s families. But achieving this balance is extremely important for both individuals and society – an appropriate balance between work and family life can help to achieve the Government’s objectives: to improve outcomes for family members and to improve equity. Therefore, the Government wants to enable **all** families to make choices about work and family commitments and achieve the balance that is appropriate for them.

3.3 This chapter tries to answer two questions: why should the Government intervene in this policy area and what role should the Government play to enable

families to successfully balance work and life? Each question is discussed in turn.

Why should the Government intervene in work–family life balance?

3.4 Having a work–family life balance means being able to be an effective member of the labour force while also being able to spend enough time meeting family commitments. There are many benefits to achieving a good work–family life balance:

- Individuals, families and society benefit from individuals being in work. So it is undesirable for them and society to be in a situation where they feel they cannot work because of the impact on their life and commitments beyond the workplace.
- Staying at home to look after children, elderly relatives and other dependants is valuable, and society should recognise this. Children benefit from quality time with their working family members. Indeed this is critical for children’s development.

- Motivation and, to some extent, productivity in the workplace can increase when individuals are able to strike the right balance between work and family life.

This section summarises the relevant evidence about these and other benefits.

Benefits from work

3.5 For the vast majority of families, employment is the main source of income. Exits from poverty can be associated with a move into work.⁶¹

3.6 If individuals with caring responsibilities are retained in the labour market their skills and productivity benefit the economy. There are also benefits for individuals themselves as work has been shown to be generally good for physical and mental well-being.⁶²

3.7 Having parents⁶³ in employment (with a decent household income and with qualifications) increases a child's chances of well-being as a child and of success as an adult.⁶⁴ There is also some evidence that children benefit from parents having paid work during later pre-school years.⁶⁵

Benefits of parents caring for their children

3.8 Mothers or fathers who stay at home to look after their children play a vital role. There are strong benefits from parents spending quality time with their children. Parents' behaviour, particularly

when children are young, has a significant impact on their children's outcomes.

For example, what parents do with their children at home is a powerful predictor of attainment at ages three, five and seven.⁶⁶

What matters is **how** parents care for and interact with their children in their early years. For example, there is powerful evidence that post-natal depression, harsh parenting styles and low levels of stimulation are strongly associated with negative outcomes.⁶⁷ However, there is evidence that non-parental care in the early years of a child's life can also improve child development. The effective provision of preschool education (EPPE) project found that from the age of three (and possibly even two) high-quality childcare and early years services have clear benefits, with the most disadvantaged benefiting the most.⁶⁸

Staying at home to look after children, elderly relatives and other dependants is valuable, and society should recognise this.

Benefits of looking after friends and relatives

3.9 Around 6 million people provided unpaid care in the UK in April 2001.⁶⁹ They play a vital role – looking after those who are sick, disabled, vulnerable or frail – and provide a valuable contribution to society. Without this extensive caring, many more people would need the support of the

statutory services, and might need to enter a residential or nursing home or go into hospital. This might be detrimental to the quality of life for some people needing care. In communities, the networks of giving, of caring and of supporting relatives, friends and neighbours are part of the glue that helps join society together.⁷⁰

Benefits of flexible working

3.10 The fact that there are benefits from work, from employees caring for their children (and non-parental care) and caring for friends and relatives, points to the importance of encouraging flexibility and balance as an approach. There is clear evidence of benefits from flexible working. The Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI's) report *Success at work* notes that: 'Employers who have introduced family friendly working policies report improved morale, commitment and retention of staff, leading to financial savings, improved customer service and the ability to react more effectively to changes in demand. Increasing the scope for flexible working can also help employers recruit and retain people from the widest possible pool of talent.'⁷¹ This is reinforced by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), as they report that employers primarily see benefits of flexible working in terms of improved employee relations (64 per cent) and recruitment and retention of employees (52 per cent), and to some extent increased productivity (18 per

cent) and improved customer service (11 per cent).⁷²

3.11 Employees who work flexibly are very positive about their experience. Almost nine in ten employees who work flexibly cite positive consequences of working this way, and over half report no negative consequences. A third of employees working flexibly say they are very satisfied with their working arrangements, compared with less than a quarter (22 per cent) of non-flexible employees.⁷³

Rationale for government intervention

3.12 The government could leave work-life balance entirely to negotiations between individuals and their employers, opting not to become involved. However, as outlined in Chapter 1, this is not a satisfactory solution for the following reasons:

- Leaving individuals to negotiate with their employers, with no additional legal rights to a fair consideration of their request, is unlikely to produce an equitable outcome across all socio-economic classes. In particular, lower skilled workers with less bargaining power in the labour market are less likely to be able to arrange a reasonable balance of work and other commitments without some underpinning legal rights.
- Without government support, individuals with caring responsibilities may not have sufficient information about what options are available to them and what

types of care are likely to benefit their children and relatives.

Future challenges

3.13 The challenge involved in striking the right balance between work and family commitments is changing as the nature of families and their relationship with the economy evolves.

3.14 While in the past policy could take the existence of a (typically female) caregiver for granted, it can no longer do so. Many children have both parents (or their lone parent) working and therefore are less able to spend as much time together as a family. Between 1971 and 2005 there was a substantial rise in the female employment rate – from 56 to 70 per cent.⁷⁴ Dual income households have become the norm. There has also been an 11 percentage point rise in the employment rate of lone parents since 1997.⁷⁵

3.15 But against this background of growth and opportunity for employment, over 16 per cent of children are growing up in workless households.⁷⁶ Since 2003 there have been more children in poor households where no one works than in poor households where at least one household member is working. The Government still needs to help parents get back to work to reduce children's chances of poverty.

3.16 The population is ageing. In the next 35 years, the proportion of the population aged 75 and over is projected to increase from 7.8 to 13.6 per cent.⁷⁷ The number of carers could rise from 5.7 million in 2001 to 9.1 million in 2037.⁷⁸ This will put increased demands on families to balance work and their caring commitments.

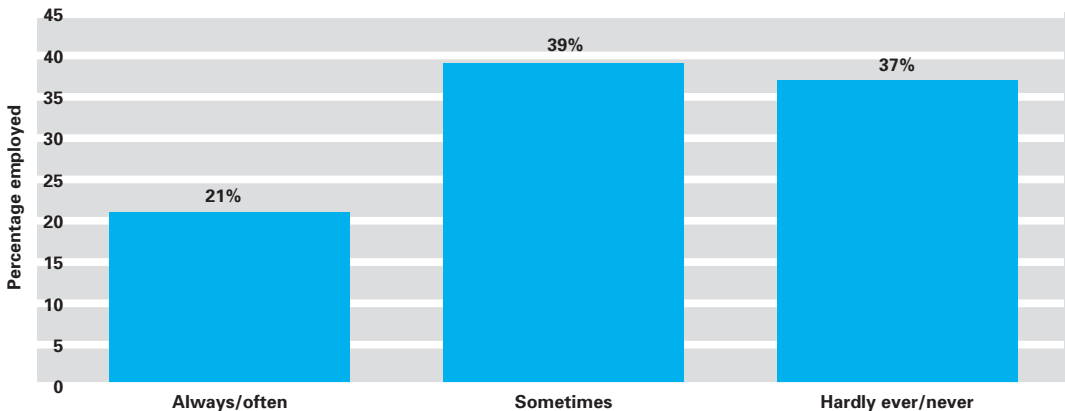
Twenty-one per cent of adults found that the demands of their job 'always' or 'often' interfered with family life.

3.17 As well as the problems of demographic change, many families feel intense pressure to balance work and family life:

- Twenty-one per cent of adults found that the demands of their job 'always' or 'often' interfered with family life (see Figure 6).⁷⁹
- As families are shifting to a 'beanpole' structure (becoming smaller, more geographically dispersed and more focused on immediate parents, on fewer children and on grandparents) – parents can feel lonely and isolated⁸⁰ and increasingly vulnerable to loss of income.⁸¹

3.18 In conclusion, balancing work and family commitments is challenging, but there are clear benefits for families

Figure 6: How often do the demands of your job interfere with your family life?



Source: *British social attitudes 2005: Perspectives on a changing society*, National Centre for Social Research, 2007

that do so and a strong rationale for the Government to support them. The Government recognises that parents have to take the primary responsibility for bringing up their children. Parents are in the best position to choose how to do so, either playing a direct caring role and/or working to provide financial security. The Government also recognises that families may have the further burden of looking after friends living at the same address and relatives who require care. The Government wants to enable **all** individuals to make choices about work and family commitments and achieve the balance that is appropriate for them.

3.19 Therefore, the key question is **what** role should the Government play in enabling all individuals to achieve this balance? The next section discusses this in detail.

What role should the Government play to enable individuals to successfully balance work and family life?

3.20 This section is divided into two parts. The first part details the Government’s current approach and achievements so far; the second sets out the remaining challenges and addresses how the Government’s role may need to adapt in the future.

What has the Government achieved so far?

3.21 Since 1997 the Government’s approach to enable a balance between work and family commitments has been based around the features of the strategic and enabling state. The Government has:

- tackled insecurity – giving individuals opportunities to work;

- empowered individuals – aiming to allow greater choice to parents about how they care for children; and
- developed rights and responsibilities – enforcing mandatory job-seeking activity for the recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

3.22 To enable a balance between work and family commitments the Government has developed policies to:

- support welfare to work;
- improve childcare; and
- support family commitments.

Each of these three policy themes is discussed in turn.

Supporting welfare to work

3.23 The first challenge in achieving work–family life balance is in giving people the opportunity to work. The Government has introduced a variety of support mechanisms to help both individuals and couples with (and without) children to enter employment, for example through the New Deal for Lone Parents, the New Deal for Partners and the New Deal for Lone Parents Plus pilots (see Figure 7). These programmes help people back into employment (including with childcare costs)⁶² and in return claimants are expected to take steps towards work.

3.24 The Government believes that work is the best route out of poverty. The Government has improved the incentives to work. The National Minimum

Figure 7: The New Deal for Lone Parents Plus

The New Deal for Lone Parents Plus is an integrated package of support for lone parents, which offers:

- a clear gain from work and some protection when work breaks down (In-work Emergencies Fund);
- a guarantee of support in finding appropriate childcare (brokered by Jobcentre Plus childcare managers) and in some cases additional financial support for childcare; and
- a guarantee of ongoing help from professional, well trained and properly supported advisers (more adviser contact outside mandatory Work-Focused Interviews, more training, and support for lone parent personal advisers).

Wage and the Working Tax Credit have boosted in-work incomes, thereby tackling poverty among working families and ensuring that families do not have to work all hours to make ends meet. There are also other financial incentives to enter work – the 2007 Budget announced an extension and, in London, an expansion of the successful ‘In-Work Credit’ for lone parents, which gives parents moving into work an extra £40 per week. This will rise to £60 per week in London.⁸³

3.25 These active labour market policies have made a major difference in enabling parents to work. There has been an 11 per cent increase in lone parent employment since 1997, which has had a significant impact on child poverty.⁸⁴ In 2005–06 there were 600,000 fewer children living in poverty (before housing costs) than in 1998–99.⁸⁵ Instead of having the worst child poverty rate in Europe the UK is now close to the European average.

Improving childcare

3.26 One of the barriers that parents face in balancing work and caring for their children is access to affordable, good-quality childcare. The Government has taken significant steps by investing more than £21 billion in total in childcare and early years services since 1997. The stock of registered childcare places stands at over 1.29 million places (almost double that in 1997). The 10-year strategy for childcare (see Figure 8)⁸⁶ set out a

number of measures to achieve choice and flexibility, availability, quality and affordability of childcare.

3.27 The Childcare Act 2006 provides the basis for additional improvements to childcare services. From April 2008, local authorities will have a new duty to ensure that there is sufficient childcare in their areas for parents wanting to work; and to improve the well-being of young children and close the gap between disadvantaged groups and the rest by ensuring that early years services are integrated and accessible.⁸⁷

3.28 Furthermore, the Childcare Act 2006 also sets out a number of measures in line with the approach to public services reform⁸⁸ – reducing top down performance management; market incentives to increase efficiency and quality of service; and allowing parents to choose the appropriate care for their children. For example:

- there will be a reformed and simplified regulatory regime for early years services and childcare to reduce bureaucracy and raise quality;
- local authorities will provide new childcare places themselves only if they can demonstrate it is appropriate for them to do so, and will need to publish clear and transparent criteria and processes for determining whether it is appropriate for them to provide childcare

Figure 8: The 10-year childcare strategy

The 10-year strategy for childcare, *Choice for parents, the best start for children*, is:

- establishing a network across the country of multi-agency Sure Start Children's Centres. They build on Sure Start Local Programmes and offer a wide range of early learning, health and parental support, initially to disadvantaged areas. Some 1,250 Centres have been designated, providing services to over 1 million children and their families. By 2010 there will be 3,500 centres, with all families with children under five having access to one;
- establishing extended schools so that by 2010 all schools should offer access to services between 8am and 6pm;
- utilising a new 'transformation fund' of £250 million over two years from April 2006 to support local authorities in developing a high-quality workforce, with an objective that all full-day care settings employ a graduate-level professional by 2015;
- developing the Childcare Affordability Programme, run in partnership by the Department for Education and Skills with the London Development Agency and Greater London Enterprise, aimed at addressing childcare affordability issues in London;
- providing financial assistance through the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit. The support available will cover up to 80 per cent of the costs of childcare subject to a maximum total cost of £175 per week for parents with one child and £300 for parents with two or more children; and
- providing free part-time (12.5 hours) pre-school education for three- and four-year-olds for 38 weeks per year. Nearly 100 per cent of four-year-olds and 96 per cent of three-year-olds are taking up their entitlement. From 2007, this is being extended to 15 hours and the Government will work with local authorities and childcare providers so that where feasible at a local level, this will be delivered flexibly across the working week.

directly. Local authorities must also take steps to involve providers from the private and voluntary sectors in the planning and delivery of early childhood

services, for example when considering the site of any new or replacement Sure Start Children's Centres; and

- local authorities will need to provide appropriate information (through the Children's Information Service, schools, Sure Start Children's Centres and so on) to help parents make decisions on the suitability of childcare providers. This will include information on services for disabled children and the quality of provision, and a brokerage service targeted at parents who have attempted to find suitable childcare services without success. Local authorities will need to consult with parents on their satisfaction with the service and review the content of information to ensure it remains appropriate and useful.

36 *Flexible working legislation has been a success, contributing to a cultural shift in British workplaces.*

Supporting family commitments

3.29 The Government is committed to helping families find an appropriate balance between work and family life. Changes to employment law allow greater choice for individuals with caring responsibilities to meet the demands of raising children and looking after friends living at the same address and relatives.

3.30 The Employment Act 2002 extended paid maternity leave, introduced paid paternity and adoption leave and

introduced the right to request flexible working for parents of young or disabled children. The Work and Families Act 2006 has extended these rights further. From April 2007 **paid** maternity leave is 39 weeks and overall mothers are entitled to one year of maternity leave; this is regardless of how long a mother has worked for an employer. Statutory Maternity Pay and Maternity Allowance has increased to £112.75 a week.⁸⁹ Maternity pay is met by the employer and refunded by the Government. Depending on the size of the organisation, the Department for Work and Pensions repays between 90 per cent and 105 per cent of the figure to the employer. Employed fathers can take up to two weeks' paid paternity leave and for the first time adoptive parents have similar rights to leave and pay as birth parents. It is estimated that the maternity pay changes will benefit around 400,000 mothers each year; and around 400,000 fathers can benefit from the new rights to paternity leave and pay.⁹⁰

3.31 Since April 2003, parents of children aged under six or of disabled children aged under 18 have had the right to apply to work flexibly and their employers have a duty to consider these requests seriously. This right was designed by the Work and Parents Task Force, which included people from large and small businesses, the private and public sectors, and unions

and family groups, to ensure that this right would work for business and individuals.

3.32 It is not only parents who need to balance work and family life. Individuals may have elderly or disabled family members for whom care is needed. Therefore, from April 2007 this right to request flexible work has been extended to the carers of adults.

3.33 The Government recognises that satisfying requests for flexible working can be difficult for businesses. It also recognises that there can be difficulties for such businesses in accommodating the absences of critical employees during periods of maternity or paternity leave. That is why the Government has supported businesses in implementing family-friendly working (see Figure 9).

3.34 Flexible working legislation has been a success, contributing to a cultural shift in British workplaces. Flexible working is now the norm, rather than the exception. Since 2003 there has been an increase in the provision and availability of flexible working arrangements, and a more gradual pick-up in the proportion of employees making a formal request to work flexibly. There is also evidence of a high level of informal and short-term flexible working arrangements in British workplaces, with over half the workforce (56 per cent) saying that they had worked flexibly in the last 12 months. Only 7 per cent of

employees now report that no form of flexible working is available to them.

3.35 Almost a quarter of employees who were eligible to make a request had done so in the past two years. Four in five employees who made a request to change their patterns had their request either fully or partly accepted. Figure 10⁹¹ highlights the benefits of encouraging flexible working for a small company.

Future policy directions

3.36 As outlined above, the Government has made significant progress in enabling families to balance work and family commitments. But there are some areas where policy needs to be adapted for the future. Again the three policy themes of enabling a work–family life balance (supporting welfare to work, improving childcare and supporting family commitments) are discussed in turn.

Supporting welfare to work

3.37 Part of the New Deal for Lone Parents' success has been that it has taken into account individuals' job-seeking **and** parenting needs.⁹² Other jobseekers do not necessarily have their parenting responsibilities taken into account when they take part in welfare to work programmes – parents are not automatically offered help with finding childcare or a job that fits with their caring commitments. Levels of take-up

Figure 9: Support available to employers

Flexible working

- Businesslink.gov.uk provides an interactive tool to help employers work out how flexible working can work for them.
- User-friendly forms to help employers and employees through the steps involved in an application for a flexible working arrangement are available from the DTI website.
- The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) provides a free online training module on working parents laws.
- The ACAS helpline gives free confidential advice.

Maternity, paternity and adoption leave

- A new Pregnancy at Work leaflet gives employers and employees the information they need to know at an early stage in a pregnancy.
- Interactive tools are available on the Businesslink.gov.uk website to help employers work out how the maternity, paternity or adoption leave and pay apply for them and their employee.
- Interactive tools are available from the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) website along with a CD ROM to help employers calculate Statutory Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Pay.
- Practical advice and help are available from HMRC's Employer's Helpline, and they will calculate Statutory Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Pay.

of financial support (Childcare Assist and Childcare Subsidy) for childcare via Jobcentre Plus are low.⁹³

3.38 Therefore, in future, all parents on welfare to work programmes will be asked about their childcare needs. Jobcentre Plus will also extend advice about the Children's

Information Service to all parents. As part of the Childcare Act 2006, from April 2008 local authorities will be required to run a more comprehensive information service for parents, including helping parents to find the childcare they need. To further improve support for couple families (not just lone

Figure 10: Encouraging work–life balance

The TYF Group is an adventure, education and leisure business. Managing director Andy Middleton explains how flexible working arrangements help the company to boost staff motivation and meet its business goals.

Make a strategic decision

‘We run four divisions with a year-round staff of 15, growing to around 55 during the busy summer season. We made a strategic decision to introduce flexible working several years ago. We also talked to staff about their goals and expectations. We decided to re-think and adapt our policies to meet employees’ needs rather than expecting staff to fit their lives around us.’

Introduce policies

‘We use several methods of flexible working, varied according to individual needs and business priorities. Part-time working, flexible hours, home working, shift swapping and sabbaticals have all been successful for us, although it’s been a process of trial and error. You have to accept that it’s not a ‘one size fits all’ solution and modify arrangements that aren’t working as you go along.’

Embrace the concept

‘We plan flexible working arrangements at management level and line managers monitor performance against targets, but it has to become part of the company culture in order to work really well. There are cost implications, but the payback is definitely worthwhile. We now have a highly motivated work force who, through good communication, understand the impact of their actions on the company balance sheet and take responsibility for their working hours.’

parents) the New Deal for Lone Parents Plus pilots will be extended in London to offer effective elements of the package to **all couple families** on benefits.⁹⁴

3.39 While the Government has successful policies for moving benefit customers into work, those who have a working partner

do not receive benefits. As such they are not customers of the Department for Work and Pensions and are not automatically offered support if they want to enter employment. However, there is an aspiration to work among this group. One in five is looking for work and around half

intend to look for work in the future.⁹⁵ The Government wants to ensure that poor couples have the same ability to fulfil their work aspirations as better-off couples. The Partners Outreach pilot for second earners (which targets ethnic minority partners) started in February 2007 in six cities and will allow an evidence base to be built on how best to engage with and support this group, who wish to work.⁹⁶

3.40 The Government is also considering whether it is time to increase the responsibilities of lone parents with older children. The Freud report,⁹⁷ an independent review commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions, recommended:

- regular discussions between the lone parent and their adviser, with increasing frequency as the child grows up;
- at an appropriate point (Freud suggests when the youngest child is 12), the lone parent should move into an active job-seeking regime with a fortnightly job search review supported by training or employment support at the appropriate point (after a year of claiming JSA).

3.41 The Government also believes that there is now scope to consider increasing the responsibilities of the partners of JSA recipients. Partners of JSA recipients who have children are not required to meet the same requirements as those without children (childless couples are subject

to JSA joint claims). For this group the Government plans to introduce mandatory Work-Focused Interviews every six months.⁹⁸ This will keep them in touch with the world of work.

Improving childcare

3.42 Significant improvements have been made to childcare services since 1997 and many policies of the 10-year childcare strategy are coming to fruition. However, further progress needs to be made if the Government is to enable a successful balance between work and family commitments.

3.43 Ensuring suitable childcare in the transitions to and from work can be difficult. Parents need to settle their children into a new childcare placement before they take up employment, and they may face short gaps in income while moving between jobs. Jobcentre Plus's new duty to ensure **all** parents on welfare to work programmes are asked about their childcare needs will assist with this transition. The 2007 Budget also announced an offer of free childcare places for up to 50,000 workless parents to enable them to undertake training in preparation to return to work.⁹⁹

3.44 There is a perceived shortfall of formal childcare places (41 per cent of parents said they felt places were not available). However, the evidence that lack of available childcare places is a barrier to

using childcare or to working is mixed. It is not often cited unprompted as a reason for not using childcare or not working, although there appear to be significant levels of unmet demand for formal childcare services during less traditional times such as school holidays, weekends and evenings.¹⁰⁰ Survey evidence also suggests that it is hard to find childcare for disabled children. In one survey of 54 providers and 254 parents, 69 per cent of parents said it was hard to find appropriate childcare.¹⁰¹

3.45 At a national level, the availability of childcare places does not appear to be an issue. In summer 2005 there were 88,400 vacant day care places, 71,500 vacancies among out-of-school providers and spare capacity among childminders.¹⁰² However, there could be discrepancies in supply in different areas. As part of the Childcare Act 2006, local authorities will need to map supply and demand and ensure there is sufficient childcare in their areas for parents wanting to work from April 2008. This should help to resolve any local supply issues.

3.46 The Government has stated its long-term goal of 20 hours' free early years education entitlement for all three- and four-year-olds – helping children's development and giving families more choice about how they balance other commitments. The Government is also testing how best to overcome the barriers

to take-up experienced by some of the country's most disadvantaged families – for example through the free early education entitlement for two-year-olds being piloted in 30 local authorities. **The Government should learn the lessons from these pilots in rolling out the free entitlement to 15 hours and beyond.**

3.47 The Government is also ensuring childcare provision is of high quality by introducing the voluntary childcare register. The Vetting and Barring Scheme comes into force in September 2008 to provide additional reassurance on child safety.

Supporting family commitments

3.48 Despite the success of flexible working, challenges remain. Parents of older children (six and over) do not have a right to request flexible working. Parents remain a major influence on their children's success during the school years. In particular, parents need to read to and with their children; show an interest in what their child is doing outside the home; visit places of interest together; and reinforce the importance of doing homework.¹⁰³ The Government consulted about extending the right to request flexible working to parents with older children in 2005 and came to the conclusion that at the time the priority was to extend it to those caring for older people. The Government recognises that flexible working policy is evolving and that many companies go beyond the

minimum requirements. The Government should consider the current practices and impact in the workplace before proposing further extensions. After reflecting on the evaluation of extension to request flexible working for carers and considering what is happening to employer practices in the light of the legislative changes, **the Government should keep under review the case for a gradual extension of the right to request flexible working for parents with older children.**

3.49 The introduction of the right to request flexible working has particularly benefited women returning to work from pregnancy, and almost triple the number of new fathers now work flexibly. However, there appears to be a gender divide in requesting flexible working (women are more likely to request flexible working than men, and mothers with dependent children under six are three and a half times more likely to request flexible working than fathers) **and** a bias of acceptance of women over men in the private sector (men are almost two and a half times as likely as women to have their request rejected).¹⁰⁴ **The Government should look further into the reasons for the marked gender divide both on rates of requests for flexible working and the likelihood of employer refusal and then explore methods to reduce this divide.**

3.50 A recent independent report¹⁰⁵ for the Department for Work and Pensions highlights some further issues with flexible working:

- Many parents are deterred from working because they do not feel they can find a job that will fit with their caring responsibilities, and in reality parents who are out of the labour market are least likely to be able to negotiate their working hours.
- Parental employment rates are unlikely to increase significantly unless there are more opportunities for parents to work hours that are compatible with their caring responsibilities.

3.51 Therefore, the Government will ensure that Jobcentre adverts clearly state where flexible working opportunities are available and that personal advisers inform customers about their right to request flexible working.

3.52 As mentioned above, the Government recognises that satisfying requests for flexible working and managing maternity and paternity leave can be difficult for businesses, especially small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). **The Government should continue to support businesses in implementing flexible working, and seek to identify ways in**

which it can meet the specific needs of SMEs. This might include more actively promoting the practical, easy-to-use guidance that is available.

3.53 The Government has made significant progress in allowing mothers and fathers more paid time off work when they have newborn babies. The Government is already taking this to the next stage by aiming to introduce a year of **paid** maternity leave by the end of this Parliament. At the same time, the

Government will allow greater choice for mothers and **fathers**¹⁰⁶ who care for a baby in the second six months of his or her life. Fathers will be able to take a new entitlement of a maximum of six months additional paternity leave during the first year of a child's life, some of which can be paid at the statutory flat rate, when the mother returns to work. This would allow both parents to support a child's development in the first year and remain close to the labour market.

At a glance: policy recommendations to enable work–family life balance

- The Government should learn the lessons from pilot schemes that are extending free provision to two-year-olds in rolling out the free entitlement to 15 hours and beyond.
- Following the evaluation of the extension of the right to request flexible working for carers, and considering what is happening to employer practices, the Government should keep under review the case for a gradual extension of the right to request flexible working for parents with older children.
- The Government should look further into the reasons for the marked gender divide both on rates of request for flexible working and the likelihood of employer refusal and then explore methods to reduce this divide.
- The Government should continue to support businesses in implementing flexible working, and seek to identify ways in which it can meet the specific needs of SMEs.

A small minority of families face multiple and entrenched problems. They require different and tailored approaches to turn parents' lives around and to protect and raise the life chances of their children.

4. Addressing the hardest to reach families

Introduction

4.1 As previous chapters of this paper have highlighted, there has been considerable progress in improving outcomes and life chances for the majority of families. These successes mean that the Government is now in a better position to increase its focus and resources on the small number of families left behind. A small minority of families face multiple and entrenched problems. They require different and tailored approaches to turn parents' lives around and to protect and raise the life chances of their children.

4.2 This chapter is therefore focused on achieving the second of the Government's objectives in family policy: to improve equity, by focusing on the outcomes for the most disadvantaged individuals.

Who are they?

4.3 The worst child outcomes are associated with multiple disadvantages in the child's wider family, including parental problems such as poor mental or physical health, substance and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, learning disabilities,

Children from the 5 per cent most disadvantaged households are more than 50 times more likely to have multiple problems at age 30 than children from the top 50 per cent of households.

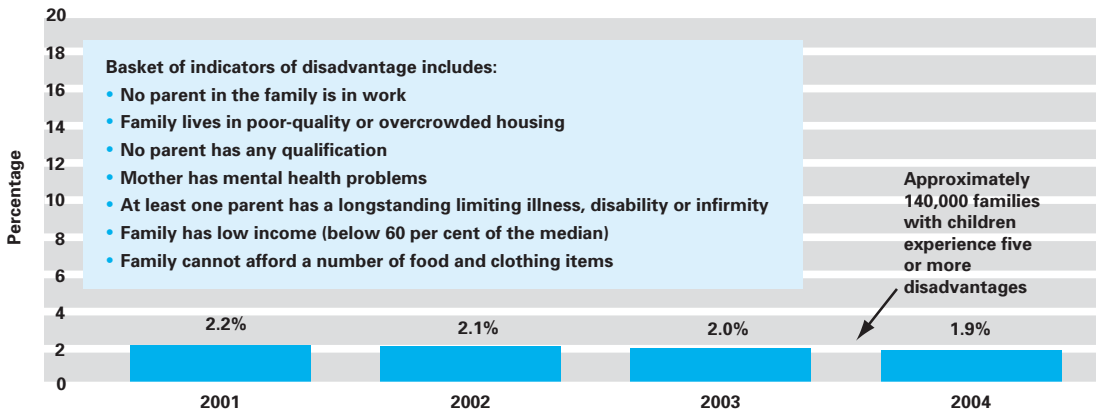
crime, financial stress and worklessness.¹⁰⁷

There are around 2 per cent of families with children in Britain who experience five or more disadvantages. This represents around 140,000 families and this figure has remained stable over time (see Figure 11).¹⁰⁸

Why should government be concerned?

4.4 The consequences of deep-seated exclusion can inflict huge costs on individuals, families, the economy and society. Children born into families facing multiple and entrenched problems are at increased risk of experiencing poor outcomes in later life. For example, we know that children from the 5 per cent most disadvantaged households are more than 50 times more likely to have multiple

Figure 11: Families with children experiencing five or more disadvantages



Source: *Families at risk: Background on families with multiple disadvantages*, Cabinet Office, 2007

problems at age 30 than children from the top 50 per cent of households.¹⁰⁹

4.5 Expenditure on these families is very high. Excluded families are often in contact with several different services. This is not just because of the sum of the individual problems. Multiple problems can often interact and exacerbate each other, leading to more harmful and costly outcomes, especially for the children in the family. Families experiencing five or more disadvantages can cost the state between £55,000 and £115,000 per year.¹¹⁰ The costs of failure are also borne by society more widely, for example through lost economic contribution, poor health and the effects of anti-social behaviour and poor social cohesion.

4.6 Despite the high levels of expenditure on families with multiple problems, many still face severe difficulties. All too often the different agencies working with these families are fragmented and public services fail to develop coordinated and tailored packages of support to tackle the root causes of problems. Individual agencies focus on specific problems without necessarily recognising how these are interrelated with other issues that the families face. While the Children Act 2004 provided clear accountability for the well-being of children, there is no comparable accountability for the well-being of their parents. Professionals frequently lack the incentives to take a proactive and assertive approach to engaging families and persisting with them until things begin to improve.

What has worked so far?

4.7 The Government has recognised the importance of addressing the challenges faced by disadvantaged families. Delivering a strong economy, improving public services and additional financial support to families have made major contributions. However, it is also important to tackle the causes and consequences of social exclusion within families more directly. Many of the policies mentioned above, such as *Every Child Matters*, will be particularly beneficial to the most disadvantaged. Additional policies aimed at this group include:

- the establishment of **Sure Start Children's Centres** – with 1,250 already open and 3,500 centres to be operational by 2010 – offering access to a range of services for parents and children including integrated early learning, health and parental services;
- a series of programmes aimed at improving **parenting skills** as set out in the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) publication *Every Parent Matters*.¹¹¹ These include:
 - £14 million invested in Early Learning Partnerships to support parents of 1–3-year-olds who are at risk of learning delay. The projects will be delivered by voluntary and community sector groups linked to Sure Start Children's Centres;

- £10 million invested in Transition Information sessions to make parents more aware of how they can support children during transitions from pre-school to primary school, and from primary to secondary school; and
- £20 million invested in Parent Support Adviser pilots in nearly 1,000 primary and secondary schools in the most deprived areas. These advisers will work with those families where children's learning and achievement are being hampered by parental problems or a lack of support at home;

- the **National Academy for Parenting Practitioners**, which will operate as a centre of excellence in training, development and support for the parenting workforce.

4.8 The report *Reaching out: An action plan on social exclusion* announced a series of pilot programmes aimed at providing personalised and intensive services targeted at individuals and families facing multiple problems:¹¹²

- The highly successful Nurse–Family Partnership¹¹³ model has provided the basis for the **health-led parenting** project launched at the beginning of April 2007. This is providing intensive and structured support during pregnancy and the first two years of childhood for the most disadvantaged families.

- The Government is launching a series of pilots to test the effectiveness of **multi-systemic therapy** (an intensive intervention that combines family and cognitive behavioural therapy strategies with a range of other family support services) in tackling mental health and conduct disorder problems among adolescents.
- The **‘adults facing chronic exclusion’** pilots will be announced this year and will be used to build the evidence base on what works for adults with chaotic lifestyles and who experience negative outcomes despite large public expenditure and contact with multiple services.

4.9 The Respect Action Plan includes the establishment of **50 family intervention projects (FIPs)** across the country based on the successful model developed by NCH, the children’s charity, in Dundee.¹¹⁴ These projects aim to stop the anti-social behaviour of a small number of highly problematic families and to restore safety and stability to their homes and to the wider community. The projects employ a twin-track approach, combining help for families to address the multiple causes of their problematic behaviour, with intensive supervision and enforcement to provide families with the incentives to change.

4.10 The joint HM Treasury/DfES Children and Young People Review was set up to

examine the progress made in improving outcomes for children and young people and what further action needs to be taken as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review and beyond (see Figure 12).

The next stage

4.11 *Reaching out: An action plan on social exclusion* sets out five key principles that will drive the Government’s future approach to tackling social exclusion:

- **Better identification and earlier intervention:** Families experiencing or at risk of the most complex problems must be targeted and prioritised. Incentive structures and staff themselves will often prioritise clients who are easier to help. Professionals need to be equipped with the necessary tools and support to identify problems early and to take a proactive and persistent approach to working with the most complex families.
- **Systematically identifying what works:** Local commissioners need to know what works, for whom, and in what circumstances. The Government is currently examining options for a Centre of Excellence in Children and Family Services to identify, evaluate and disseminate best practice for working with socially excluded groups.

Figure 12: The Children and Young People Review

In January 2007 the Children and Young People Review published a discussion paper setting out the evidence collected and the analytical findings.¹¹⁵ Under the umbrella of this review, four sub-reviews cover the following priorities:

- prevention and early intervention;
- a strategy for youth services;
- support for disabled children to improve their outcomes; and
- support for families caught in a cycle of low achievement.

The strands of work on prevention and helping families caught in a cycle of low achievement reported in March 2007,¹¹⁶ with publication of the ten year youth strategy and the disabled children review to report later this spring. Conclusions to date include a new emphasis on building resilience, greater personalisation, and proactive support for those who need it. Specifically, the review has recommended:

- significant additional funding for Sure Start Children's Centres, childcare and early years of at least £340 million by 2010–11;
- roll out to all primary and secondary schools of the successful Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning programme by 2010–11;
- funding so that by 2010–11 schools can offer two hours of free extended activities a week during term time, with two weeks a year of part-time holiday provision for children eligible for free school meals;
- more support to help parents – new investment in an advice and guidance service for all parents and more intensive support for up to 30,000 parents who most need parenting support, focusing in particular on fathers; and
- DfES will now lead cross-government work to consider how parents' aspirations can be raised and what further parenting support can be offered.

- **Multi-agency working:** The complex nature of social exclusion means that many families experience problems that reach beyond the scope of any one agency or service provider, cutting across the divide between adults' and children's services. Services need to be integrated in order to tackle the root causes of problems. Such families are often known to several agencies and a holistic approach to assessment and effective sharing of information would ensure that intervention planning is based on a complete picture of the family's situation.
 - **Personalisation, rights and responsibilities:** A one-size-fits-all approach does not work for families with multi-faceted problems. Because the pattern of problems varies significantly between families, there is a particularly strong case for tailored solutions and support. Often families are involved with a large number of agencies – a key worker can ensure access to services and the coherence of the support package, as well as ensuring that families engage and stick with the support on offer. There need to be clear expectations between the family and the key worker, setting out what changes are expected of the family as well as the support that will be provided to facilitate that change.
 - **Supporting achievement and managing underperformance:** The Government will support and challenge local areas in the targeting and delivery of successful services to improve the life chances of at-risk and excluded families. The Local Government White Paper strengthened the role of Local Area Agreements to enhance multi-agency working, which will be particularly important for the most excluded.
- 4.12** Despite the progress that has been made in supporting the most disadvantaged families, more still needs to be done and the Government is taking a series of actions aimed at further improving policy in this area:
- **The Social Exclusion Taskforce is leading a cross-government review of policy on families at risk**, which will be published in summer 2007. The review will set out a vision of an effective family support system for at-risk families; identify barriers and practical solutions to the provision of a coherent 'whole family' approach for these families, with a key focus on how adult services respond to their clients as parents; and agree action to better integrate adult, child and community services around the needs of excluded families in order to tackle the drivers of deep-seated exclusion.

- The Children and Young People Review announced £13 million over the Comprehensive Spending Review period to enable a significant number of local areas to **set up pathfinders delivering intensive and tailored family support to families caught in a cycle of low achievement**.
- **The Government should look for opportunities to identify excluded families early. A particular focus should also be given to identifying families that are likely to suffer, at some future point, from problems associated with family breakdown.** This should build on work outlined in the Children and Young People Review, which has already announced plans to develop the electronic enablement of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to help services including schools and health services to assess risks better.
- The Government should examine ways in which services can be more effectively coordinated and personalised. For example, it may be possible to **make more use of the model whereby a single professional leads and coordinates services from several agencies** in order to develop an approach tailored to a family's specific needs.
- Where multiple agencies (including both adults' and children's services) are involved with a family, the Government should **examine ways to ensure that individual service providers are accountable through their performance management frameworks for the well-being of the family as a whole**.
- The Government should also examine ways of **enhancing the incentives for and skills of local commissioners of public services to target and tailor support for the most disadvantaged families**.

At a glance: policy recommendations to address the hardest to reach families

- The Government should set up pathfinders delivering intensive and tailored family support to families caught in a cycle of low achievement.
- The Government should look for opportunities to identify excluded families early. A particular focus should be given to identifying families that are likely to suffer, at some future point, from problems associated with family breakdown.
- The Government should investigate where it can make more use of the model whereby a single professional leads and coordinates services from several agencies.
- The Government should seek ways to ensure that individual service providers are accountable for the well-being of families as a whole.
- The Government should also examine ways of enhancing the incentives for and skills of local commissioners of public services to target and tailor support for the most disadvantaged families.

The broad policy directions outlined here will be developed into more detailed proposals in the course of the cross-government review on families at risk, led by the Social Exclusion Taskforce.

5. Next steps

5.1 Since it was announced last October, the Policy Review has touched on virtually all major areas of policy and has involved the entire Government. After 10 years in power, it has provided a real opportunity to reflect on what has worked (and what has not), what should be intensified and what new directions should be pursued.

5.2 While the Government recognises that the success of families is, first and foremost, down to the commitment and behaviour of those within them, this paper has argued that the Government still has a role to play in many areas affecting families. In particular, the Government has sought to enhance the outcomes of family members and to ensure that all families are treated fairly. This paper has taken forward this vision for the coming decade by setting out a number of practical steps to:

- **support families** to exercise their rights to manage their own affairs while living up to the responsibilities they have;

- **enable work–family life balance**, by helping people move from welfare into work, improving childcare and supporting family commitments; and
- **address the hardest to reach families**, by tackling the causes and consequences of deep-seated social exclusion.

5.3 This paper is one of several strands of the Government’s Policy Review. There are also a number of other pieces of long-term work being undertaken across government, including the Comprehensive Spending Review, and the Capability Reviews of government departments. Together, these reviews will inform the broad approach the Government takes across policy areas over the coming decade.

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