HM Government

Aiming high for young people – three years on

Evidence annex

department for
children, schools and families

Contents

1 Introduction

This annex sets out recent evidence about the lives of young people today and explains how policy and practice can help them to gain the skills they need to prosper as adults. The document is organised into five main sections:

- Conclusions from contemporary evidence to set out **the challenge**. This includes an overview of the skills that employers are increasingly demanding from labour market entrants; the nature of the social class gap in outcomes; and the impact development during adolescence has on these gaps.
- The role better **development of social and emotional skills** by young people through their late childhood and adolescence can play in building capacities for success in adulthood and in narrowing the social gap.
- Understanding in more detail the **mechanisms** through which social and emotional skill development produces benefits for young people. The acquisition of these skills appears to help young people in two principal ways: by supporting the development of their cognitive skills, including the gaining of qualifications; and by discouraging their participation in risky behaviours.
- Explaining how **policies and practice** act on these mechanisms, including how social skills are developed, the role of the school and family in discouraging disengagement from learning, and young people's need for support through adolescence.
- Finally, we include some of the **early evaluation evidence** from *Aiming high for young people* and draw out some of the lessons for delivery, which will be incorporated into the remaining years of the strategy.

1.1 The story so far

The growing availability of authoritative, relevant evidence has been a major influence on the development of policy for young people in recent years. For example, in July 2007, when *Aiming high for young people* was published, an accompanying evidence paper provided a 'youth audit' of young people against the Every Child Matters outcomes.[1]

Aiming high for young people is the latest in a succession of Government documents on youth policy and services, its predecessors being *Youth Matters*,[2] *Youth Matters – Next Steps*[3] and, in March 2007, a joint HM Treasury/DfES strategy.[4] These documents have built on each other to take forward policy for young people, and have benefited hugely from the developments in knowledge and understanding that have come from research over this period. Two of the most important pieces of research have been an analysis by Leon Feinstein of the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) on the association between youth activities and adulthood outcomes;[5] and a number of predominantly US evaluations of the evidence that highlight the benefits of structured activities for young people.

Based on the information collected in BCS70, Feinstein showed that youth clubs tended to attract more young people at greater risk of poor outcomes. Controlling for other factors, he found that sixteen year olds who attended unstructured youth clubs in the 1980s had worse outcomes as adults (by age 30), including higher rates of teenage pregnancy, unemployment and criminality. In comparison, young people who attended 'uniformed' or church-based activities, such as scouts and guides, actually had better adult outcomes.

A number of good US studies[6] have evaluated the impact of 'out-of-school time programmes', including 'extended school', 'holiday' and 'youth service' programme models. Overall, these showed significant impacts in school performance, attendance and discipline; preventative effects in relation to risky behaviours; and improved social and emotional skills, including fewer behavioural problems, enhanced communication skills, increased community involvement and greater self-confidence and self-esteem.

In terms of design and delivery, a complementary review by Catalano et al[7] summarises the key characteristics of effective youth development programmes. It highlights the importance of promoting positive youth development as well as focussing on preventing problems. Many US programmes examined in the review offered a mix of unstructured and more structured activities – such as tutoring, drug and alcohol education and leadership groups. Youth programme leaders, however, were clear about the need for there to be incentives for young people to start attending and keep coming along, observing that it was often very difficult to get young people to take part in the more structured programmes on offer. Clearly, there is little point providing an excellent evidence-based structured programme if young people don't find it interesting and fun and either don't try it at all or drop out.

Another review[8] described the most effective interventions to promote adolescent health and well-being outcomes in the following terms:

> *"multi-component programmes that engage youth in thoughtful and enjoyable activities, promote social connections, involve parents, and are long-lasting appear to be the most promising for effecting multiple positive outcomes".*

1.2 More recent evidence

Since *Aiming high for young people* was published three years ago significant new knowledge has been generated by research and by professional experience. This falls into three broad areas:

1. The importance of social and emotional skill development during adolescence is now better described and understood. Although the initial research evidence pre-dates *Aiming high for young people*, it is only in the last three years that a fuller understanding of the impact of social and emotional skills on economic outcomes, their role in social class gaps and the potential for professionals to foster these skills in the young people who need them the most have been brought together and the implications for policy and practice fully drawn out.

Box 1: Social and emotional skills – some working definitions

When it comes to the terminology for describing attributes and characteristics that are not academic qualifications different approaches are adopted by different research disciplines. Originally economists called them **non-cognitive skills**, but since then there have been further insights from psychology and sociology, suggesting this term is too narrow and therefore potentially misleading. **Life skills** is both simple and accurate, since they are abilities, attributes and behaviours that are beneficial for good adult outcomes. These skills can include: **social skills**, **self-regulation**, **motivation**, and **self-efficacy**. Words like these are not very accessible to lay readers – though they seek to describe factors which most people would probably recognise.

Different terminology can sometimes apply to particular life skills and usage continues to vary according to context. Within the context of the labour market for example, employers often simply refer to '**soft skills**', '**wider skills**' or '**personality traits**'.

Social skills are outwardly displayed behaviours that include communication skills, influencing skills and other inter-personal skills, such as rapport, tact and empathy. In addition to being constructive behaviours they can also be negatively scaled to cover destructive behaviours such as aggression or fighting.

Self-regulation skills are behaviours which encompass a wide range of psychological components such as **affective capacity** – moods, feeling and emotions. They also contain the concepts of **self-efficacy** – which is belief in your ability to organise and carry out the actions required to achieve personal goals; and of **locus of control** – the extent to which you believe you have control over the achievement of these goals. Other important aspects are **motivation** and **aspiration**, as well as **application**, and **persistence** in the face of obstacles.

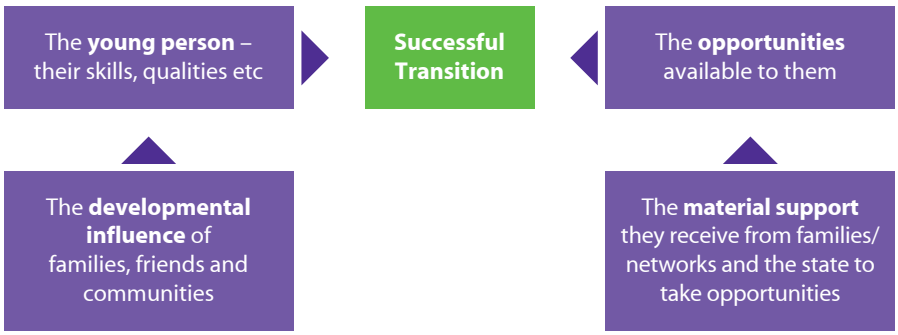
These skills are distinct from cognitive skills, which include functional and technical skills such as literacy, numeracy or subject knowledge as tested by examinations and qualifications. Rather confusingly, self-regulation has cognitive components too, such as the capacity to plan, structure and organise, so life skills and cognitive skills are not quite so separate as it may first appear.

2. New, more contemporary longitudinal data is now becoming available. Although the 1970 British Cohort Study is a rich resource for understanding the relationship between childhood development and adult outcomes, it has limitations as a window into the issues for today's young people. The 1970 cohort members are 40 this year and the picture it offers of teenage development comes from the 1980s. Several newer longitudinal studies started in the last 10-15 years are now providing a modern glimpse of childhood development.[9] The one addressing the oldest cohort of children (the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England – LSYPE) now reports on young people covering the full range of their teenage years.
3. Finally, in the almost three years since *Aiming high for young people* was announced, evaluation evidence of the policies it contained has been gained. Although this activity is at an early stage, it is now timely to feed back some of the lessons learned to support and inform better local delivery.

2 The challenges for young people today

The broader landscape for young people today is provided in an accompanying slide pack.[10] From that narrative we pick out the elements that have most bearing on the direction of youth policy and set out those elements in greater detail here. We also use the conceptual model developed there to articulate how policy can support adolescent transitions. A simpler version of this is captured below (Figure 1). Not surprisingly, the key message is that making a successful transition to adulthood depends on the inter-play between what young people do and the opportunities available to them. These opportunities will include the skills that the labour market rewards, but also a wider set of circumstances that shape young people's life chances.

Figure 1:
Conceptual model of the influences that make a successful transition to adulthood



2.1 Having the full range of skills is more important than ever

It is abundantly clear that a ready supply of skills into the labour force is crucial to secure national economic growth. This is not just an argument from economic theory but is apparent by comparing the fortunes of different developed nations: it is the countries that invest more heavily in skills that have grown fastest.[11]

The case for making this investment is especially critical now, given the rapid growth of industrialising competitor economies and the ageing population, because of the rising dependency ratio the latter brings. The need to recover from the recent, deep global recession strengthens this case still further.

The question that then arises is 'what type of skills does the labour force need?'. Qualifications and the skills that they certify certainly continue to be absolutely critical for young people, and they have the strongest demonstrable relationship with employment and earnings. However, in an increasingly competitive global economy good qualifications are no longer enough; it is also clear that social and emotional skills are highly valued by employers. In fact, looking at the National Employers Skills Survey (NESS), it is these behavioural attributes that employers frequently identify as the area of least satisfaction with the young people whom they take on.[12]

And within the labour market these skills continue to be much sought after by employers, with job advertisements more frequently listing behavioural requirements than formal qualifications.[13] This is particularly true in those occupational sectors that have seen rapid growth in the economy over recent years, many of which are disproportionately filled by younger workers.[14] This underlines the fact that not only has recognition of these attributes grown over recent years, but also that the importance of social and emotional skills in securing economic outcomes has also grown and become better appreciated.

CONCLUSION #1
In addition to gaining qualifications, all young people need to develop good social and emotional skills.

Later, in Section 4, we explore the mechanisms for how these social and emotional skills can be fostered in young people.

2.2 The social gap in skill attainment

Educational attainment has risen rapidly in recent years. Over the last 20 years, the proportion of 16 year olds gaining Level 2 at age 16 has more than doubled, as has the number of young people going to university. However, while those groups starting from a lower base of attainment (and who hence have most to gain) have benefited more, some significant gaps in attainment remain within our society.

Gaps at institutional level are narrow…

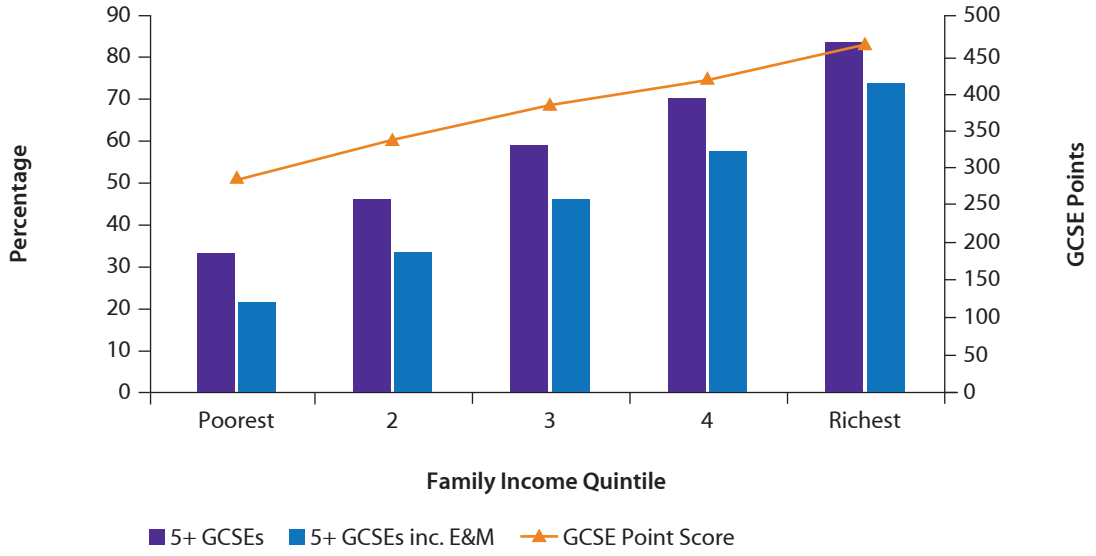
Attainment gaps at school level have narrowed. High-levels of investment in less good schools in predominantly poorer areas have closed some of the gap on the top achieving schools in predominantly richer areas. Just eight per cent of the variation between pupils' attainment is attributable to variation between secondary schools, after controlling for prior attainment.[15] By international standards, variation between schools is low, even when compared with other countries with pre-dominantly non-selective education systems.[16]

…but progress in closing the gaps at individual level has been slower.

Evidence from new longitudinal studies shows that attainment gaps by family income have started to close over the last decade.[17] This is also apparent when comparing the attainment of pupils from low income families eligible for free-school meals (FSM) against pupils not eligible for FSM.[18]

But there remains a long way to go, since the social gaps in outcomes are still large for young people now finishing compulsory schooling at age 16. The gap in GCSE points between the richest and poorest pupils is 179 GCSE points (Chart 1);[19] equivalent to 30 whole grades or to three additional A* GCSE passes. In terms of a ranked distribution, the attainment of young people from the richest families is on average 33 percentile places higher than for those from the poorest homes.[20] Later, in this section (Fig. 2), we break down the factors which are most strongly associated with this gap.

Chart 1:
Attainment at age 16 by family income quintile (Chowdry et al. 2009; Table 3.1)



Using a threshold measure makes the gap appear larger, with a difference in attainment of five or more GCSEs including English and Maths between young people from the richest and the poorest families of more than 50 percentage points.

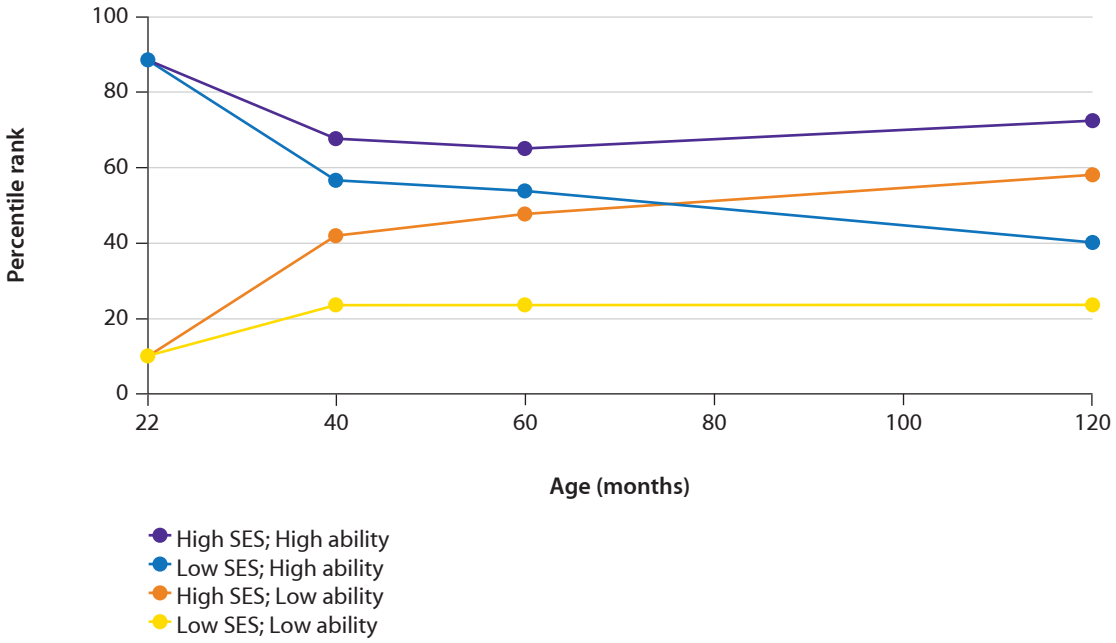
Much of the gap by social class arises early in childhood

We know that effective schools and good teaching are hugely important in driving good outcomes for all.[21] But considering the size of this attainment gap and the significant amount of time young people spend at school, it is perhaps striking that the vast majority of this gap is not associated with school-related factors[22] but is instead more attributable to personal, family and community factors. Wider social forces flow through parents and families to impact on young people, including poverty and inequality. Strong, stable families can help to protect young people from wider social forces such as these, but these wider factors also permeate their lives too. This explains why poverty and disadvantage tend to be transferred from one generation to another.

Much of the gap arises pre-school and shapes adult outcomes

Much of the social gap develops before children even reach school age. Feinstein[23] observed from BCS70 that children of high early ability from low social class backgrounds rapidly fall down a ranked distribution over time, whereas low early ability children from more advantaged families show rapid improvement (Chart 2). The same pattern is now being observed thirty years later in the Millennium Cohort Study although the movement is slightly slower.[24]

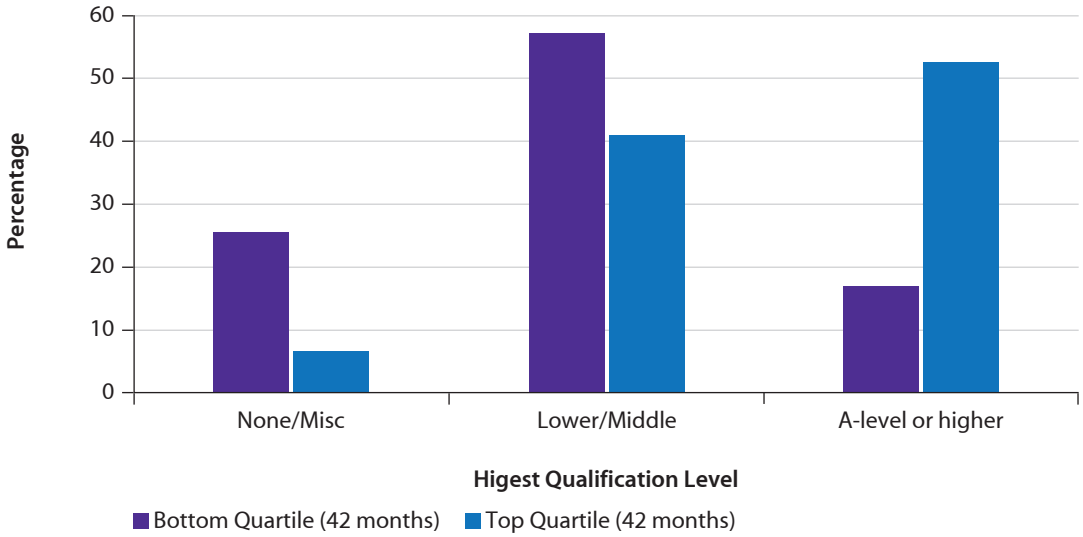
Chart 2:
Relative test ranking of initially high and low ability children from high and low social class families from 22 months to 10 years (Feinstein 2003; Fig. 2)



Put another way, the developmental pathways established between birth and the age of four has more strongly predicted the qualifications an individual will obtain by age 26 than all the changes that can occur to those pathways within the subsequent 20+ years (Chart 3).[25]

These striking findings, together with evidence about the effectiveness of some particular early years approaches, explain the case for investment in the pre-school phase,[26] as has happened for example through Sure Start.

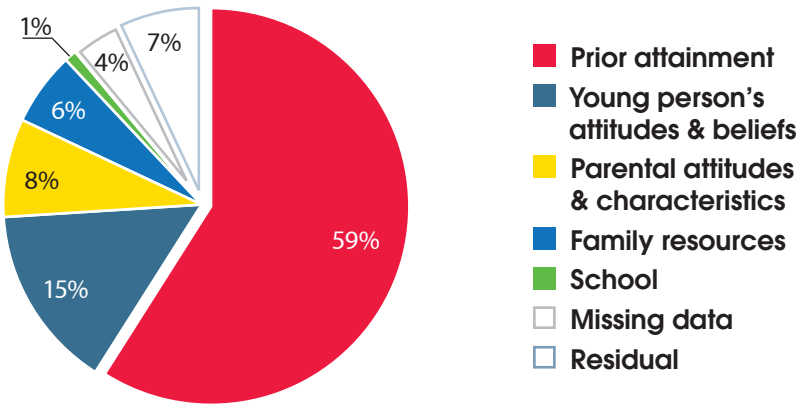
Chart 3:
Percentage of 26 year olds attaining different levels of educational and vocational qualifications by early development scores at 42 months (Feinstein 2000; Table 4)



The gaps are maintained or widened through childhood…

However, what happens before children start school is only part of the story and the gaps are maintained or widened through later stages. To illustrate this, the pie chart below provides a breakdown of the factors associated with the 33 percentage point gap in GCSE attainment between young people from the richest and the poorest families (Figure 2). It shows that the biggest single factor explaining GCSE attainment is prior attainment (as measured by Key Stage 3 results) two years earlier. Overall, prior attainment is associated with three fifths of the gap observed.

Figure 2:
Decomposition of how different sets of LSYPE factors during Key Stage 4 are associated with the attainment gap observed at age 16 (IFS, 2010[27])



…which means there is significant scope for progress in adolescence

What is most striking in Figure 2 is that over the relatively short two year period of Key Stage 4, perhaps as much as one quarter of the gap is associated with the actions of young people, and the range of influences on those actions. These are the other filled in elements of the pie-chart, and they underline the fact that at this stage in a young person's life what they do, how they think and how they behave all have an important bearing on their life chances.

Arguably, some of the parental and family factors that impact on young people at this time did not only arise during Key Stage 4, but reflect prior developmental activity from earlier stages that is not expressed through prior attainment of Key Stage 3 results. For example, most variables that capture parental characteristics and family resources will have been largely pervasive throughout a young person's childhood. This means that in practice, the contribution to the gap of what happens during these teenage years is likely to be rather less than one quarter of the total.

However, a large part of the gap is undoubtedly associated with the attitudes and behaviours of the individual young person through Key Stage 4. If these associations were directly causal and if young people from the poorest families had the attitudes and behaviours observed of their peers from the richest families that would narrow the GCSE attainment gap by five percentage points (15 per cent of the total 33 percentile place gap).

These are big 'if's – and they would also be big effects. Indeed, in approximate terms they would be large enough to increase attainment of 5+ GCSEs on either measure by about seven percentage points, independently of the gap in attainment prior to Key Stage 3.

Of course, we know that such associations will not be entirely causal, but this illustration shows that the contribution to the gap in outcomes from what happens during this part of a young person's adolescence is of real significance. This in turn suggests that there is an important opportunity to promote young people's life chances by fostering their life skills, as well as their functional and cognitive skills, over this period.

3 How better social and emotional skills can reduce the social class gap

It is clear from the above that even in late childhood, young people from more advantaged families are getting an extra boost in their educational attainment from their parents, their home backgrounds and their inherited advantages. This is likely to be equally true for their other outcomes, such as their social and personal development and how well prepared they are for further learning or successful entry to the labour market.

Targeted policy approaches can try to help young people who would not otherwise get this boost from their own backgrounds, helping to level the playing field. Indeed, *Aiming high for young people* set out the case for various targeted interventions of this kind. An important challenge for any targeted policy though is the ability to target resources sufficiently tightly to match support to need – and to achieve this in ways that are non-stigmatising.

However, as is set out in this section of the paper, there is evidence to support the idea that a policy approach undertaken on a universal scale to enhance young people's social and emotional skills might be able to reduce at least some of the social class gap. Although there is a gap in these skills too, improving skill levels for all by the same amount could actually reduce some of the subsequent differences in adult outcomes. The difference in social skills doesn't have to close, but if everyone moves to a higher level, less advantaged young people stand to gain the most.

3.1 A social gap exists with social and emotional skills as well as with cognitive skills

There is an appreciable social gap with regard to both cognitive and social skills for younger children. Taken on its own, family income has been found to be a pretty good predictor of the skill levels that children from those families will go on to possess (Chart 4) – although it must be stressed that findings of this kind apply to the population of young people when taken as a whole, with many individual children overcoming adverse circumstances to go on to do well. Data from BCS70 show that although the correlation between family income and the ability of sons is strongest for cognitive skills (typically 0.35-0.45), correlation coefficients of up to 0.3 are also observable for social and self-regulation skills.

Ideally, we would have measures of how family income is associated with social and emotional abilities for an older, more contemporary cohort, but in birth cohort studies this information is typically only collected for younger children.[28] However, while formal psychological assessment instruments were not part of the LSYPE, a range of questions capture self-concepts and values[29] (Chart 5). They show that young people from poorer families tend to be less confident in their own ability, to have less positive views about school and to perceive less of a connection between their own individual actions and their achievement of future goals. Some of the differences between young people from the richest and poorest families in this regard come to around 0.2 standard deviations, which is equivalent to up to eight percentile places in a ranked distribution.[30] This is quite a significant difference.

Chart 4:
Regression coefficients of selected scales of cognitive and social ability on family income (Blanden et al. 2006; Table 3; BCS70). All significant at p<0.01

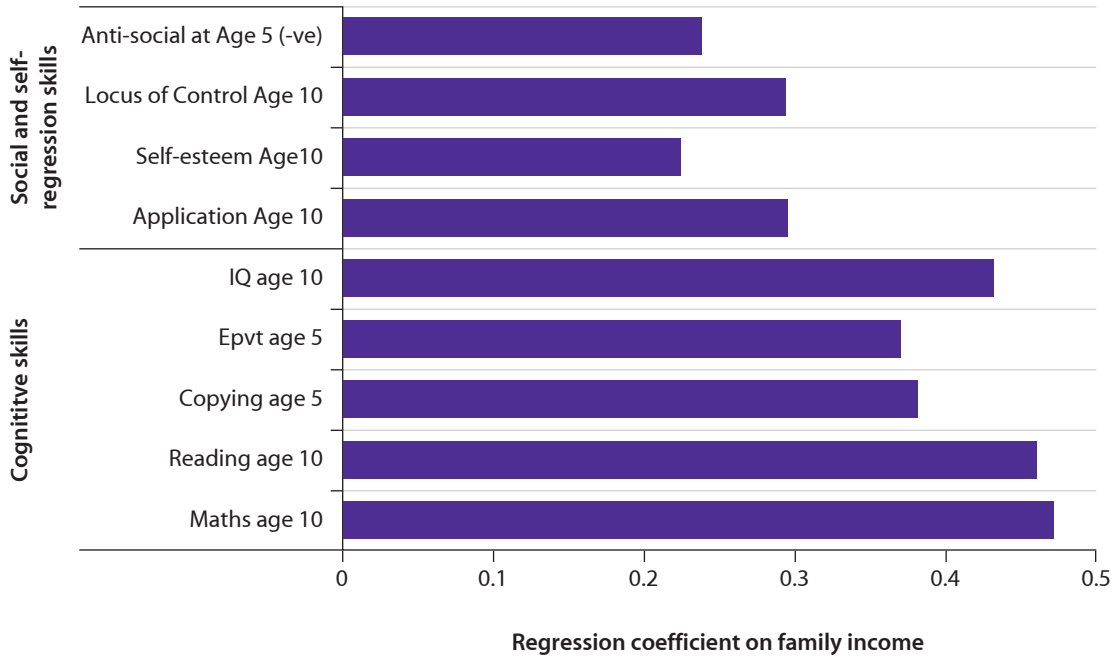
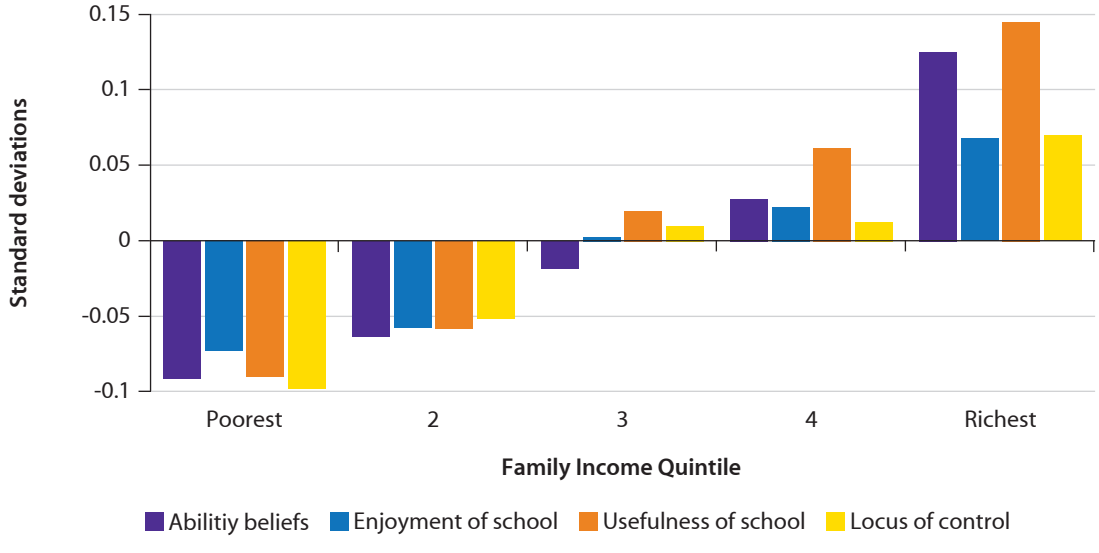


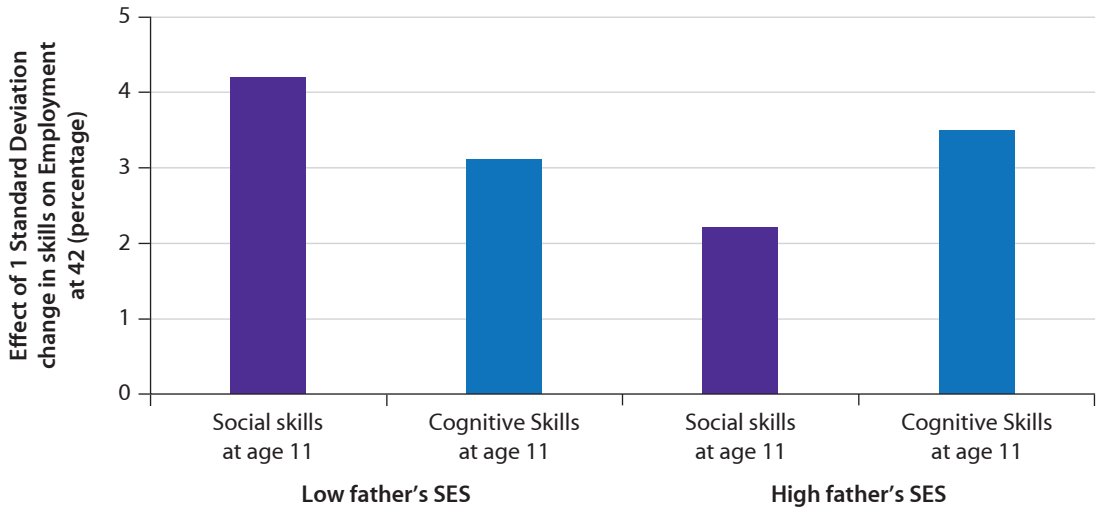
Chart 5:
The social gradient in young people's attitudes: self-concepts and values towards school by family income quintile (Chowdry et al. 2009; Table A2.5; age 13/14; LSYPE)



3.2 Securing improvements in their social and emotional skills does not further advantage children from high social class backgrounds

While social gaps exist in both cognitive and social skills, improvements in these abilities appear to benefit different social groups in different ways. Carneiro et al.[31] investigated the association between both cognitive and social skills at age 11 with later adolescent and adult outcomes. The effect of improvement by one standard deviation[32] in either cognitive or social ability for 11-year olds from different families in their statistical model is set out below (Chart 6). It shows that an equal improvement in cognitive skills might confer greater benefit for children from high social class families than for low social class families, in terms of their employment prospects. However, an equal improvement for all in social skills is associated with greater gains for children from lower social class families.

Chart 6:
Percentage point impact on age 42 employment of a one standard deviation improvement in skills (Carneiro et al. 2007; Table 9; NCDS)



Carneiro et al. examined a wide range of adult outcomes. Not every outcome shows this effect; for example, an equal improvement in social skills does not seem to be associated with higher wages for adults from low social class backgrounds, whereas it does for those from higher social class backgrounds[33]. It would also be useful to have a more contemporary analysis of such effects. However, improving social and emotional skills for all certainly appears to offer a way of improving outcomes without widening social class gaps.

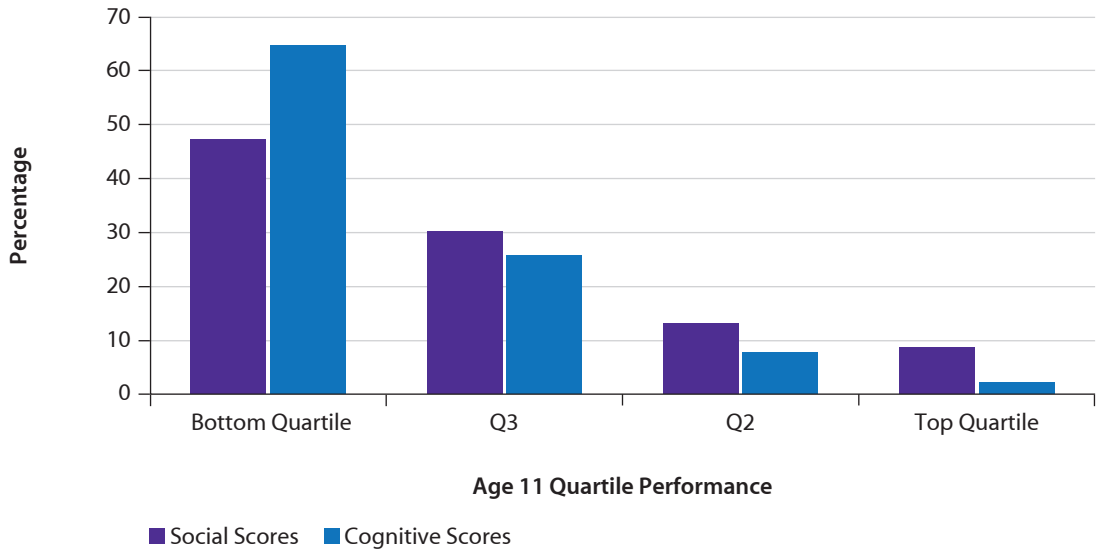
CONCLUSION #2
Improving social and emotional skills for all could help to narrow some social gaps.

3.3 There is more potential for improving social and emotional skills in adolescence

Neurological science suggests that social and behavioural skills continue to be more malleable into adolescence than academic skills.[34] Whereas educational attainment clearly builds on early achievement ('learning begets learning' is the phrase used by Heckman), the development of social and emotional skills appears to be less dependent on children's prior development.

Carneiro et al. found that between the ages of 7 and 11 just over half of those who were initially in the lowest quartile for social skills were no longer in the lowest quartile when tested again at age 11 (Chart 7). There was less movement for children in terms of their cognitive skills, with two thirds of those in the bottom quartile at age seven continuing to be assessed as in the bottom quartile at age 11.[35]

Chart 7:
Distribution in age 11 tests of children who were in the lowest quartile at age 7 (Carneiro et al. 2007; Tables 18 & 19; NCDS)



Although the evidence is not as complete as we would like, these observations from very different disciplines have shaped the consensus view that adolescence presents real opportunities to help young people to develop improved social skills, which in turn are likely to be of great benefit to them throughout their adult lives.

CONCLUSION #3
Social and emotional skills may be more malleable than cognitive skills in terms of response to policy intervention.

The challenge for policy and for practice is to capitalise on this opportunity.

4 The mechanisms by which development of social and emotional skills improve outcomes

In the previous sections of this paper we set out the evidence for how the development of young people's social skills can improve their outcomes in both absolute and relative terms. We have also set out the evidence which suggests that the level of social and emotional skills in young people remains susceptible to positive influence during their adolescence. This section looks at the transmission mechanisms which may explain these relationships, as a necessary step towards the development of policies that can help narrow the gap for young people and improve their life chances.

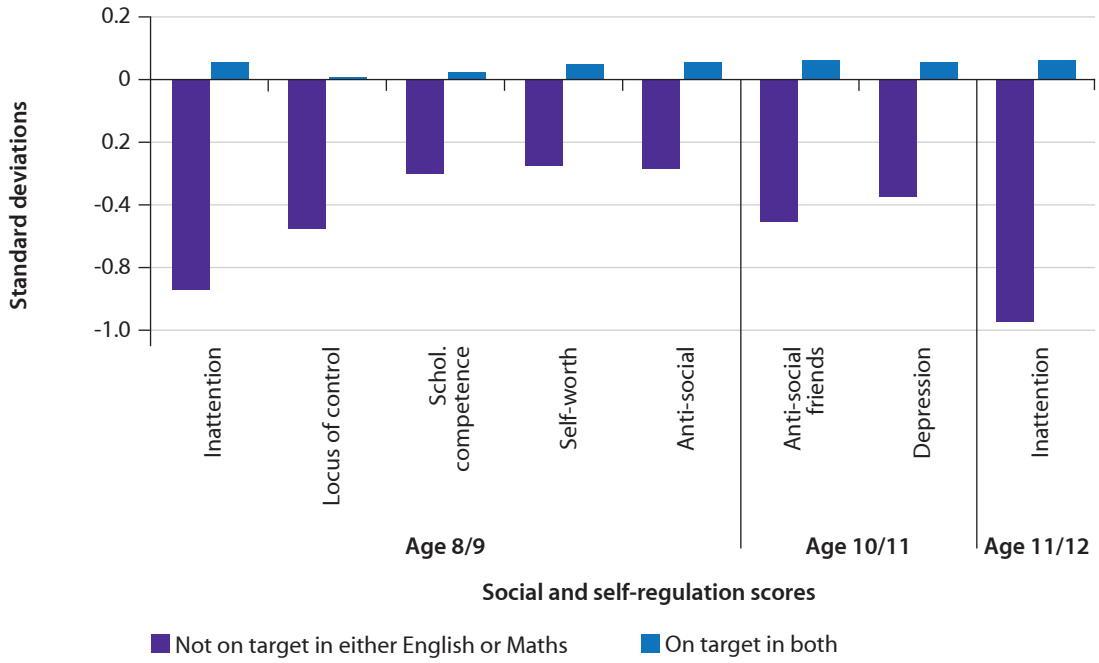
Social and emotional skills acquired in childhood and early adolescence support better outcomes in two measurable ways. These are by mediating educational attainment directly; and by being associated with fewer of the risky behaviours that otherwise tend to undermine achievement.

4.1 Social and emotional skills support educational attainment

Cognitive and social skills often work together in mutually reinforcing ways to generate better outcomes for young people. This seems to apply particularly to how good self-regulation skills support strong educational attainment.

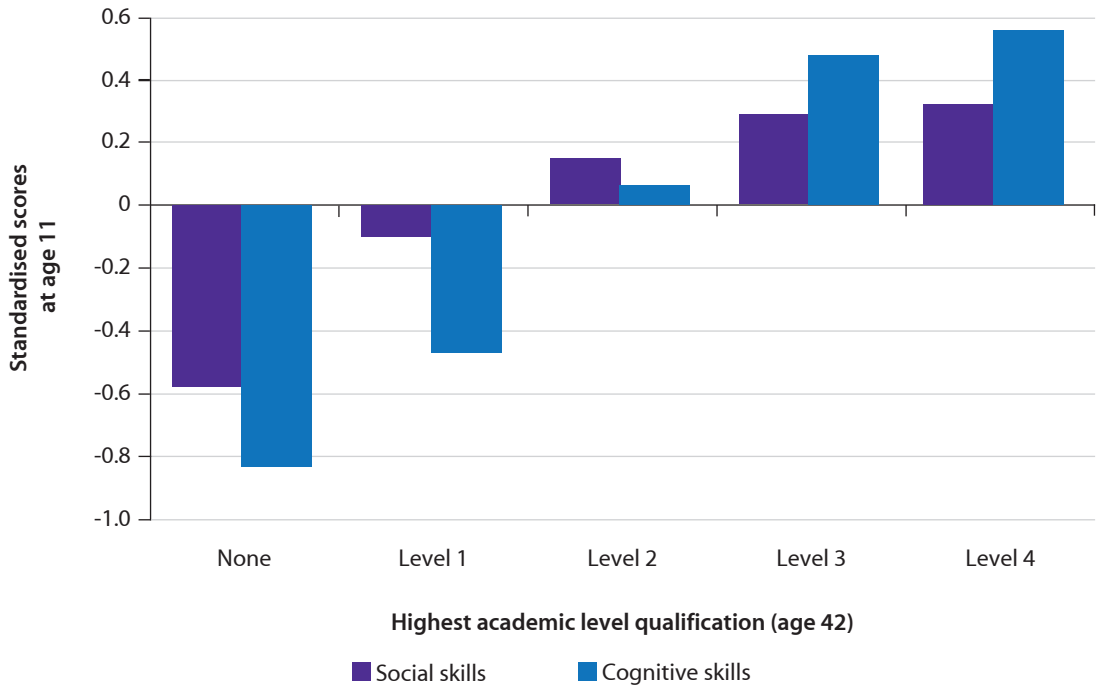
Those young people with poorer social and self-regulation skills attain less well than their peers (Chart 8). The differences observed here are very significant, with those who do not attain well at Key Stage 3 in both tests having attentiveness of about 30 percentile places less than those who do well on both tests. This is not very surprising, given that the ability to concentrate is central to being able to get the most from learning.

Chart 8:
Standardised social and self-regulation scores of children by whether they are meeting the Level 5 target at KS3 in English and Maths (ALSPAC internal analysis)



The relationship between poor social skills and attainment is visible beyond the Key Stage tests. Well into later adulthood it is those individuals who had poor social skills as children who are most likely to have the lowest qualifications (Chart 9). Although understandably not as good a predictor as for cognitive tests, teacher-assessed social skills at age 11 are strongly indicative of adult qualification level. Adults who have degree-level qualifications had almost one whole standard deviation better social skills at age 11 than those adults with no qualifications.

Chart 9:
Both social skills and cognitive skills at age 11 are good predictors of highest academic qualification at age 42 (Carneiro et al. 2007; Table 6; NCDS)



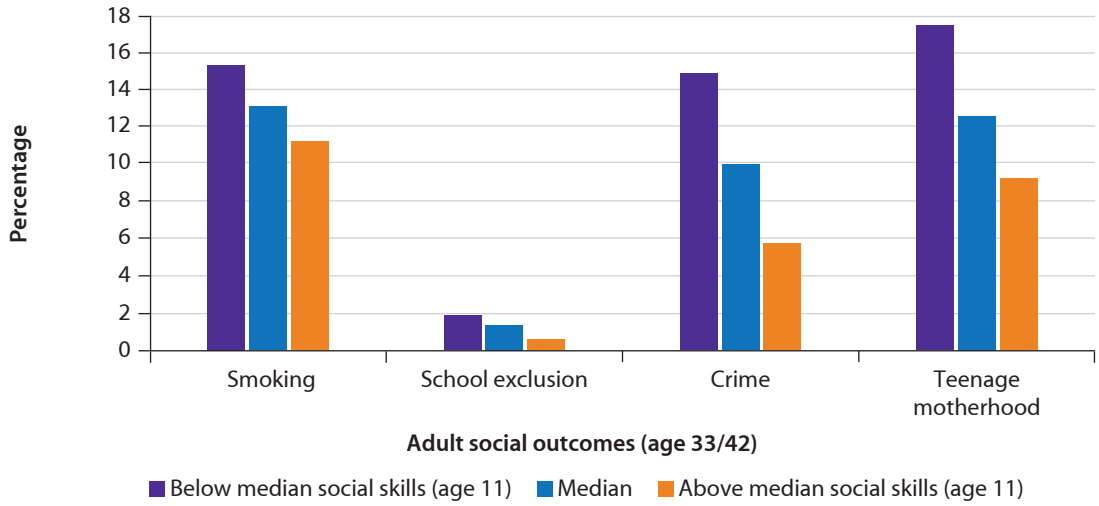
Research based on the cohort studies also demonstrates that there are clear relationships between young people's social skills and their adult outcomes, beyond their academic attainment. Adults with below average social skills as children are not only less likely to gain higher qualifications, they are also more likely to experience unemployment and to earn less.

POLICY IMPLICATION #1
All young people need to develop the full range of social and emotional skills throughout childhood, both in and out of school.

4.2 Social and emotional skills may protect against engagement in risky behaviours

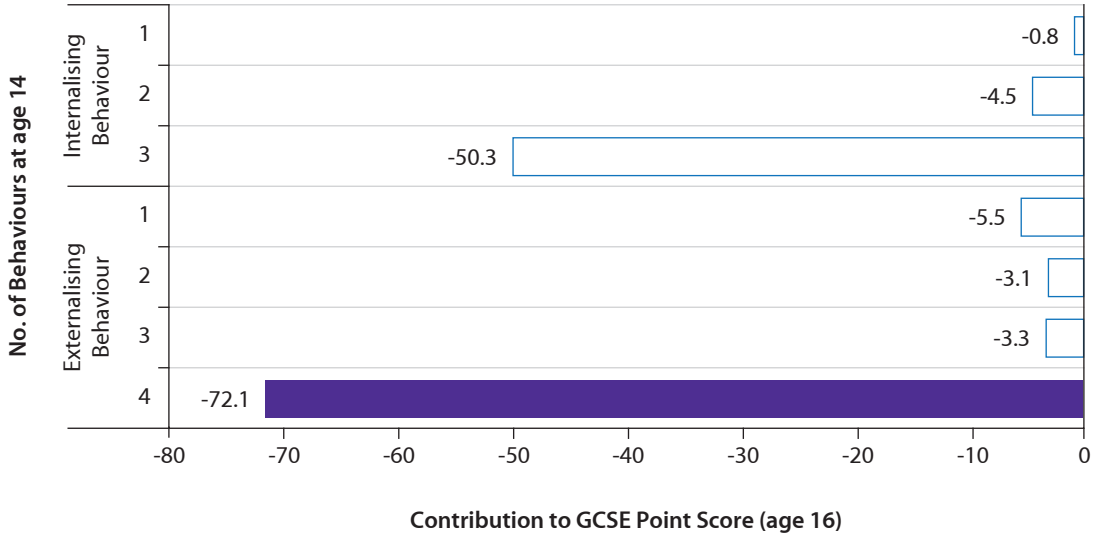
Below average social skills in young people are associated with a higher prevalence of certain risky behaviours that can harm their development. These include smoking, exclusion from school, engagement in criminal activity and being a teenage mother (Chart 10).

Chart 10:
Average adolescent social outcomes of those with above/median/below social skills at age 11 (Carneiro et al. 2007; Table 1; NCDS)



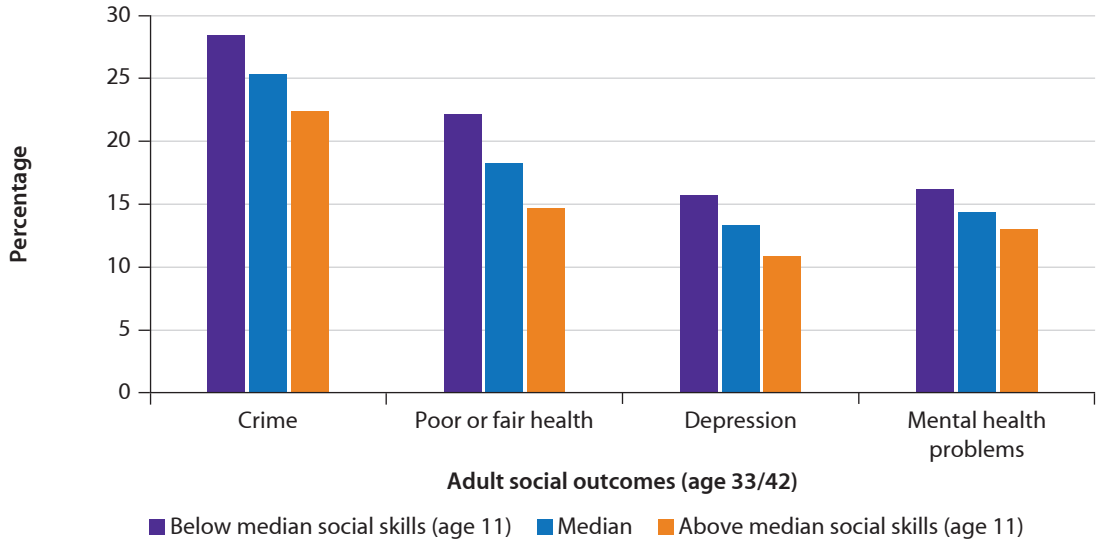
Engaging in multiple risky activities is associated with impaired progress in terms of young people's educational attainment. Chart 11 below measures the association between the number of externalising[36] and internalising[37] risky behaviours that a young person engages in at age 14 and the associated reduction in GCSE attainment, controlling for other factors, at age 16. All other things being equal, multiple engagement in risky behaviours is associated with up to a 20 per cent reduction in GCSE points, or a loss of 8-12 entire GCSE grades.[38]

Chart 11:
Relationship between number of risky behaviours at age 14 and GCSE attainment at age 16 (Cebulla & Tomaszewski 2009; Fig 4.1; LSYPE)



In addition to the damage to life chances that poor social skills have via their association with risky behaviours, there is evidence that poor social skills have an association with other measures of reduced well-being in adult life. Chart 12 shows how social skills measured at age 11 were quite predictive of whether an individual would be involved in criminal proceedings, be in poor health, show signs of depression or exhibit psychological distress as an adult.

Chart 12:
Average adult (age 33/42) social outcomes of those with above/median/below social skills at age 11 (Carneiro et al. 2007; Table 1; NCDS)

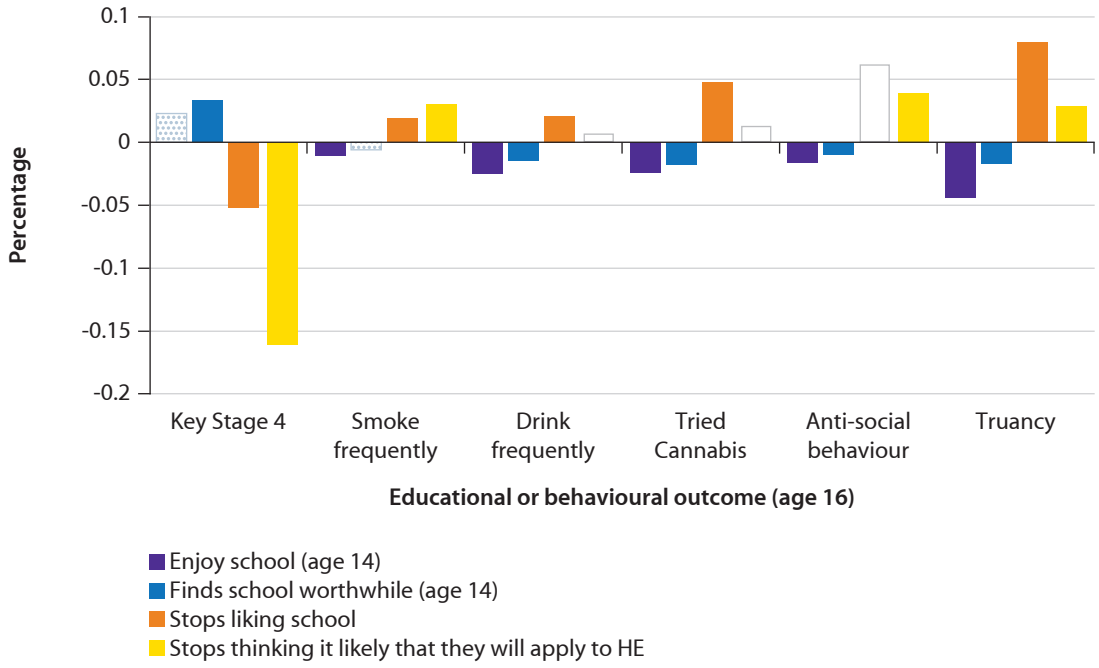


POLICY IMPLICATION #2
In addition to supporting young people to gain qualifications, there is good reason to believe that improving their social and emotional skills will reduce their involvement in risky behaviours and improve their well-being.

5 Policy can improve social and emotional skills and behaviours

The evidence points to there being several key drivers in improving outcomes for young people. Continued engagement by young people in their learning is clearly a critical factor, with those who stop liking school between the ages of 14 and 16 showing much worse outcomes across a range of measures than those who continue to find school worthwhile (Chart 13). Understandably, those young people who continue to enjoy school make better progress at GCSE, whereas those who stop liking school (having been previously positive until age 14) show relatively weak progress as a result of their disengagement. The opposite relationship is found with risky behaviours, with those stopping liking school more likely to engage in harmful or illegal behaviours. Continuing to like school may therefore function as a protective factor, for readily understandable reasons.

Chart 13:
The relationship between attitudes during KS4 and outcomes at age 16. (Chowdry et al.; Table 5.6; LSYPE). Solid filled bars are significant at p<0.01, stippled bars at p<0.05 and unfilled bars n/s



5.1 Preventing disengagement

The associations shown in Chart 13 demonstrate the importance of preventing young people from disengaging from learning. A recent review of research evidence[39] explored in detail the causes of disengagement and potential solutions. The causes of disengagement which were identified were often many and interrelated, encompassing both school-related and external factors. Examples of school-related factors included curriculum and learning style, workload and coursework, and relationships with teachers. External factors included those relating to the family, peer groups, aspirations and other life events. Being bullied at school was particularly strongly associated with subsequent disengagement and underachievement,[40] with important implications for both policy and for practice. Many of the policy solutions the report identifies point towards the need for early intervention through good communication and information sharing between schools and parents. Helpful approaches were found to include supervising homework to ensure it is completed, and providing extra tuition to prevent young people falling behind if they encountered difficulties,[41] and thus losing heart and disengaging as a result.

Extra-curricular activities appear to play an important role too, though there may be issues about whether these factors are causative or correlative. Young people who used sports facilities outside lessons at least once a week were less likely to be disengaged. And those who participated in a school club or society were half as likely to be disengaged as those who did not.

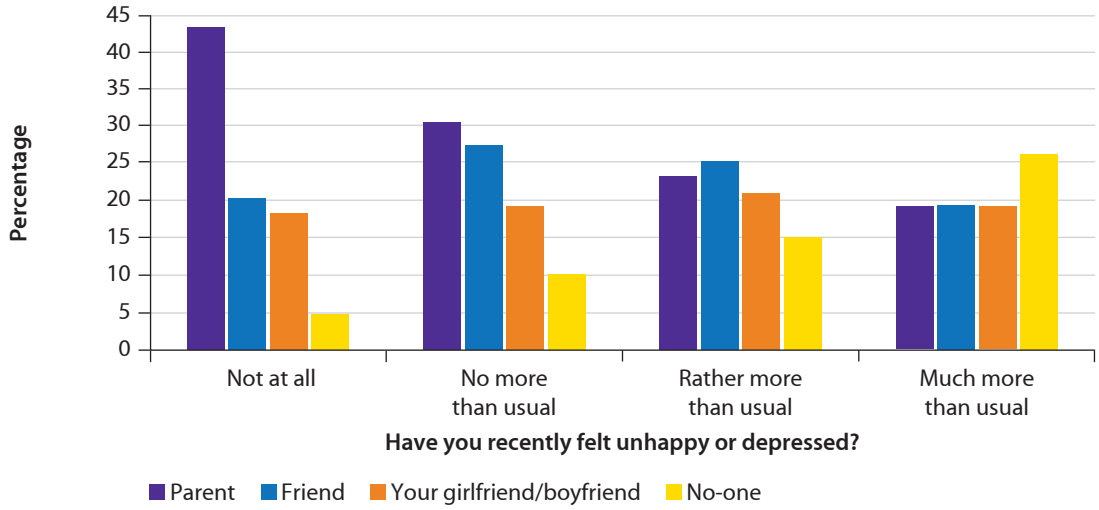
Empowering young people through 'pupil voice' by enabling pupils to play a more active role in shaping the education they receive has been shown to help engage learners from deprived backgrounds. It can have positive effects on a range of social and emotional skills including confidence, a sense of efficacy, communications skills and behaviour.[42]

5.2 Providing support at school and in the family

The provision of support figures highly as a protective factor in preventing disengagement. Within school this could take the form of study support, where there is good evidence of a substantial positive impact on motivation, behaviour, school attendance and attitudes towards learning.[43]

What parents do to support their son or daughter's education and their relationship with them also emerges as highly significant. The LSYPE shows that young people who do not get on well with their parents are less likely to attain well or to remain in learning beyond age 16. As a measure of general well-being, young people who are happy are much more likely to be able to talk to a parent about something that troubles them than those showing risk of depression (Chart 14).[44]

Chart 14:
"Who are you most likely to tell your problems to?" by whether recently felt unhappy or depressed. (DCSF 2009; Table 2.1.1; LSYPE Wave 4 (age 16/17))



5.3 Fostering social and emotional skills

Efforts are currently underway to improve the social and emotional skills of young people through school-based programmes about social and emotional learning. These include Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL); Behaviour & Attendance Pilots; Personal, Learning & Thinking Skills (PLTS); and, Personal, Social, Health & Economic (PSHE) teaching. Evaluation results for SEAL in secondary schools are not yet available and the evidence on the impact of such programmes in general is as yet inconclusive.[45]

Beyond school lessons, encouraging participation in positive activities is widely believed to encourage the development of social and emotional skills. Evidence from the US (cited earlier) was influential in determining the initial direction of policy here too. It showed that when activities were structured, had a self-developmental objective and were generally led by adults they were most likely to help young people to achieve good outcomes.

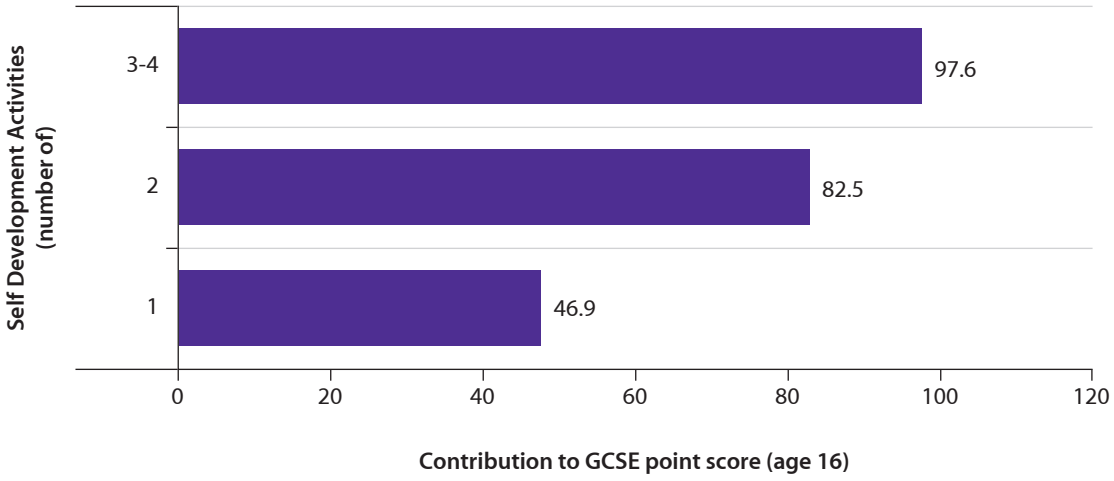
Recent evidence from the LSYPE supports the original policy hypothesis of *Aiming high for young people*. Young people who undertake more self-development activities[46] outside lessons engage in fewer risky behaviours (Chart 15). Just as with Feinstein et al's analysis of BSC70,[47] participation in unstructured socialising activities[48] such as 'hanging out with friends' is associated with greater exposure to risky behaviours. A young person who participates in four or five of the unstructured socialising activities captured in LSYPE is on average also likely to exhibit an externalising risky behaviour and an internalising risky behaviour. The reverse also applies with young people who get involved in more self-development activities displaying fewer risky behaviours.

Having said this, it is, of course, entirely natural for young people to want to enjoy being with their friends, including 'hanging out'. This evidence does not challenge this, but it suggests that those young people who only do this and who have disadvantages to overcome are missing out on useful help if they don't get involved in other kinds of activities that could help foster their social and emotional skills.

Chart 15:
Relationship between number of risky behaviours displayed and the type of activities in which young people engage (Cebulla & Tomaszewski 2009; Fig. 3.2b; LSYPE Wave 3 (age 15/16))

In terms of how these activities relate to outcomes, on average young people who engaged in self-development activities, achieved 10-20 per cent higher GCSE point scores (Chart 16).

Chart 16:
Relationship between engagement in self-development activities at age 14 and GCSE attainment at age 16 (Cebulla & Tomaszewski 2009; Fig 4.1; LSYPE)



Many positive activities that young people engage in outside school are supported by their families. However, the recent Tellus[49] survey showed that many young people do not participate in any structured activities at all outside of school lessons, and a big challenge remains in encouraging more young people to want to start participating. Overall, about a third of young people had not taken part in an adult-led group activity outside of lessons in the previous four weeks, with young people in families on low incomes and from some minority ethnic groups least likely to participate in positive activities.

LSYPE shows that those most likely to engage in unstructured social activities are White young people, young people with negative school attitudes and those living in less cohesive families.[50] Influencing these young people to take up activities that will support their development via school or through the encouragement of their families is clearly very challenging. This illustrates the need for a different set of approaches that work in ways that young people find stimulating and engaging – including those that put them in the lead when it comes to the design and delivery of activities.

6 Delivery challenges: early evidence from implementing *Aiming high for young people*

The largest evaluation of an *Aiming high for young people* policy yet published is that of the **Empowering Young People Pilots** (EYPP).[51]

The aim of the pilots was to make funds available so that the most disadvantaged young people in nine pilot areas could access positive activities. The Pilots aimed to test the hypothesis that: 'Empowering individual disadvantaged young people to take part in positive activities of their choice through access to spending power increases their participation in such activities and contributes to educational engagement and other beneficial outcomes'.

The nine year long pilots were launched in 2008 and the research, which was undertaken between November 2007 and June 2009, had a mixed methods design. This included a detailed quantitative study to assess the relative impact of the EYPP on the take-up of positive activities, together with a qualitative study to gain further understanding of the operation of EYPP and to gather the views of Local Authority staff, activity providers and young people.

The evaluation found that the EYPP significantly increased young people's participation in some positive activities. Most young people said that the EYPP had enabled them to participate in at least one activity that they would not have otherwise taken up. The evidence from the case-study visits was that young people were participating in a number of activities, some of which they had done before and others of which were new. However, the EYPP had no significant impact on young people's participation rate for any other types of positive activities.

Young people who participated in EYPP activities increased their knowledge of positive activities and experienced other positive benefits too, such as gaining new interests and skills. The young people enjoyed participating in the activities because it gave them opportunities to do activities they liked and to meet their friends.

The qualitative research found some evidence of non-measurable outcomes such as increased confidence and social benefits. Young people's confidence increased because they tried new activities and learned new skills. The survey showed that the EYPP did not have a significant impact on young people's educational engagement or attitudes to school; as the pilot was only one year this finding is not surprising. Nonetheless, encouragingly, it did provide opportunities for them to develop new interests and skills which they could use in the future, and it raised the career aspirations of some young people.

This evaluation and other latest evidence shows that many of the barriers highlighted in *Aiming high for young people* do apply and are very real to young people. EYPP could not always address the issues beyond finance that influence young people's participation. The other reasons the interviewees identified which they felt had an impact on the take-up of the target group included:

Non-financial barriers to participation – interviewees noted that money was not the only barrier to participation in positive activities. Other barriers included transport, lack of awareness, provision not matching the needs or preferences of young people and the age appropriateness of the activities. Local Authorities had tried to overcome these other barriers by adapting activities and by offering additional key worker support.

The nature of the target group – the target groups included young people who were difficult to engage and who often lacked confidence. Lack of motivation, and low self esteem and aspirations could have been barriers to young people's participation in EYPP. Furthermore, the target groups included young people who may well have been reluctant to engage with formal agencies and who could have been wary of EYPP.

Intensity of support needed by young people – Many Local Authorities had underestimated the time, resources and intensity of support necessary to engage young people in the pilot and to keep them coming along. Other suggestions that were made that could have improved the support for young people in some pilot areas included a better understanding of the need for trained and key workers experienced in working closely with young people.

The evaluation also generated some useful information about what is likely to be successful in engaging young people:

One-to-one interaction – One-to-one interaction was used, in varying degrees, in all the pilot areas and there was a strong perception amongst interviewees that this enabled trusting relationships to be established and that this was crucial in raising awareness amongst young people.

Working with schools – All five of the areas that achieved the highest percentage of registrations had successfully engaged schools in the pilots to some extent and more so than three of the four areas that were less successful in achieving registrations.

Working with other key professionals – At least three Local Authorities specifically mentioned deliberately focussing efforts on making use of relevant existing professional networks to communicate information about the pilot.

Peer to peer approaches – One Local Authority which had set up a group of 'champions'; young people who were heavily involved in the pilot themselves and who were tasked with raising awareness and increasing participation amongst other young people, had deliberately tried to include a young person from each school in the group.

Involving parents – Some of the pilot areas recognised that for some young people, parents had been an important source of information with regard to both raising awareness of the pilot and encouraging them to participate.

Promotional materials – All the pilot areas used promotional materials (including posters, leaflets) and chose a local brand name for the pilot. Staff in many areas felt it was important that this local brand was recognised by young people and that they associated it with positive activities.

The EYPP evaluation also generated three other kinds of insight which are directly applicable to other programmes:

Listening to young people and putting them in the lead – Activity providers varied in the extent to which they actively engaged with young people. Some larger providers, such as leisure centres, had rarely liaised with young people about the activities they put on offer for them. However, where providers had consulted with young people, particularly smaller providers and those in the private sector, they felt this had improved their relationships with them and that this was a 'key success factor' in providing activities that were young-person led. Local Authority staff were keen for EYPP provision to be young-person led and encouraged discussion with the target group to ensure the EYPP offer was as appealing to young people as possible. For example, one manager commented on the benefits of having young-person led provision and reported that, 'sometimes [the Local Authority's] expectations of what young people should be doing are over-structured. There's a balance there that needs to be looked at'.

Taking a friend – one of the barriers to young people who received EYPP funds participating in positive activities was the fact that 'none of my mates have got [EYPP]'. It became increasingly apparent that young people didn't want to go on their own. Staff in four Local Authorities said that a key lesson learned was the need for a mechanism that enabled young people to 'bring a friend' to participate alongside them.

Giving more time for the programme to embed – staff in two Local Authorities observed that more time was needed for the programme to embed, to benefit from word of mouth promotion and because with more time, young people began to diversify the nature of the activities in which they participated. This may have been because they became more familiar with the opportunities available and gained confidence and trust in the pilot and the provision.

Endnotes

1 Research information to accompany *Aiming high for young people* was published here: **www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u015143/index.shtml**

2 DfES (July 2005). *Youth Matters – Green Paper*. **http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=Cm6629**

3 DfES (2006) *Youth Matters – Next Steps*. Something to do, somewhere to go, someone to talk to. **http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DFES-0260-2006&**

4 *Aiming high for young people for children: supporting families*. HMT & DfES (March 2007) **www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/cyp_supportingfamilies290307.pdf**

5 Feinstein, L., Bynner, J. & Duckworth, K. (2005) *Leisure contexts in adolescence and their effects on adult outcomes*. Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre-RR15.

6 For a review of 27 experimental and 11 quasi-experimental evaluations see: Harvard Family Research Project (2003). *A review of out-of-school time program quasi-experimental and experimental evaluation results.*

7 A meta-analysis of 77 evaluations of youth programmes in Catalano, R.F., Berglung, M.L., Ryan, J.A.M., Lonczak, H.S. & Hawkins J.D. (2004) *Positive youth development in the United States: research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs.* AAPSS, 591, 98-124.

8 Zaff et al. (2002) *Promoting well-being among America's teens*. Knight Foundation.

9 The main cohort studies are Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC); Effective Pre-School & Primary Education (EPPE) study; Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS).

10 **http://publications.everychildmatters.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00336-2010&**

11 See Fig. 7, p 18 in OECD (2010) *The high cost of low educational performance*. After Hanushek, E.A. & Woessmann, L. (2009) *Do better schools lead to more growth? Cognitive skills, economic outcomes and causation*. National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 14633, Cambridge, MA.

12 The most recent survey, NESS09, is: UKCES (2010) *National Employer Skills Survey for England 2009: Key findings report*, available here: **www.ukces.org.uk/upload/pdf/NESS%20Key%20findings%202009_2.pdf**. However, more detail about skill expectations by employers of young people is provided in the NESS07 report here: **http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/lsc/National/natnessurvey2007mainreport-may08.pdf**

13 Jackson, M., Goldthorpe, J.H. and Mills, C. (2005) *Education, Employers and Class Mobility*, Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 23, pp. 3-34.

14 Particularly service sectors of the economy; including sales and personal services, hospitality and retail, and leisure, entertainment & travel.

15 This is less than 20 per cent of the total *explained* variance. See DCSF (2004) 'Variation in pupil progress' bulletin (Table 7.7) at **www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000481/index.shtml**. Current level of between-school variation for 2009 GCSE results can be calculated from the Achievement and Attainment Tables, here: **www.dcsf.gov.uk/performancetables/schools_09/documents.shtml**

16 McKinsey & Co. (2008) *Excellence and Equity: Making England's Schools System World Class* DCSF Research Brief RBX-12-08.

17 Gregg, P. & MacMillan, L. (2009) *Family Income and Education in the Next Generation: Exploring income gradients in education for current cohorts of youth.* CMPO WP-09/223.

18 For 2003-2007 see DCSF (2009) *Deprivation and education: the evidence of pupils in England, Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4*. DCSF-RTP-09-01.

19 Chowdry et al. (2009), *Drivers and Barriers to Educational Success – Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England*. DCSF-RR102.

20 The gap in GCSE point scores between richest and poorest quintiles is 1.15 standard deviations or 33 percentile places (average position for poorest = 34th percentile; richest = 67th percentile).

21 All other things being equal a good teacher is associated with an improvement at GCSE of about almost half a grade in that subject. See Slater et al. (2009) *Do teachers matter? Measuring the variation in teacher effectiveness in England.* CMPO 09/212.

22 As mentioned above, eight per cent of pupil-level variation is associated with school-level factors after controlling for prior attainment.

23 Feinstein, L. (2003) *Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort*. Economica, p73-97.

24 Given the current data released for the MCS cohort, the full Feinstein BCS70 chart can only be replicated to age five at this stage, but it shows the same pattern: See Gregg and Macmillan (2009) *Family Income and Education in the Next Generation: Exploring the income gradients in education for the current cohorts of youth.* CMPO Working Paper 09/223.

25 Feinstein, L. (2000) *The relative economic importance of academic, psychological and behavioural attributes developed in childhood*. Centre for Economic Performance Discussion Paper 443.

26 A policy direction strongly supported by OECD and in accord with the optimum investment strategy for human capital development (see OECD (2009) *Doing Better for Children* and Heckman, J. (2000) *Policies to Foster Human Capital.* Research in Economics, 54, 3-56).

27 Presentation to 2010 DSCF Research conference, from Chowdry et al. (2009), *Drivers and Barriers to Educational Success – Evidence from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.* DCSF-RR102.

28 Equivalent contemporary information to that in the BCS70 is now available from ALSPAC.

29 A 'locus of control' measure was constructed from eight LSYPE questions, such as the level of agreement to the statement "Working hard at school now will help me get on later in life".

30 Unfortunately there is not a readily meaningful metric to instantly demonstrate the magnitude of these gaps. This is because these variables are scales derived from multiple attitudinal questions, and are not something more tangible like GCSE points total.

31 Carneiro, P., Crawford, C. & Goodman, A. (2007). *The Impact of Early Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills on Later Outcomes.* Centre for Economics of Education DP0092.

32 1 Standard deviation is a big change. In ranked order, it is equivalent from moving from 69th percentile to 31st percentile – an improvement of 38 percentile places.

33 The authors speculate that this is a reflection of the different types of jobs each group performs.

34 Blakemore S-J. & Choudhury, S. (2006) *Development of the adolescent brain: implications for executive function and social cognition.* Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.

35 The authors note that measurement error could also produce such a result – a fair concern, since quantifying social and emotional skills is a less well-developed area of testing. However, if measurement error is a factor it acts equally in the opposite direction to understate the general importance of social skills in driving outcomes.

36 Externalising behaviours are those that harm or impact on others. Four behaviours were recorded in LSYPE: graffiti; vandalism; shoplifting; and, fighting/public disturbance.

37 Internalising behaviours are those that mostly harm the individual himself. Three behaviours were recorded in LSYPE: truanting; smoking cigarettes; and, drinking alcohol.

38 Cebulla, A. & Tomaszewski, W. (2009) *Risky Behaviour and Social Activities*, DCSF Research Report 173.

39 Ross, A. (2009) *Disengagement from Education among 14-16 year olds.* DCSF-RR178.

40 Green, R., Collingwood A. & Ross, A. (2010) *Characteristics of Bullying Victims in School.* DCSF Research Report – forthcoming.

41 See DCSF (2010) Evaluation of *Making Good Progress Pilot* (DCSF-RR184) for examples of delivery.

42 Halsey, K., Murfield, J., Harland, J. & Lord, P. (2007) *The voice of young people: an engine for improvement?* Scoping the evidence. NfER. CfBT.

43 E.g. MacBeath, J. et al (2001) *The Impact of Study* Support DfES Research Report 273 or MORI (2004) Study Support Survey. DfES Research Report 591.

44 DCSF (2009) *Youth Cohort Study and Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 17 year olds: England 2008.* Statistical Bulletin B01/2009.

45 Evaluation reports are available on the DCSF Research Portal website. The reason for inconclusiveness of impact is attributable to a range of factors including bedding-in factors, such as initial variability in implementation of policy design and insufficient duration to yet be able to measure outcomes.

46 Four self-development activities were recorded in LSYPE analysis: playing a musical instrument; doing community work; attending religious classes; and, reading for pleasure.

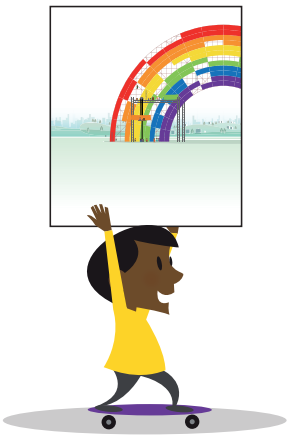
47 Feinstein, L., Bynner, J. & Duckworth, K. (2005) *Op. cit*.

48 Five socialising activities were recorded in LSYPE analysis: hanging around in town centre; meeting friend outside the home; going to a party; going to a pub; and, going to an amusement arcade.

49 DCSF (2010) Local Authority Measures for National Indicators supported by the Tellus4 Survey 2009-10. DCSF-OSR04/2010

50 Cebulla, A. & Tomaszewski, W. (2009) *Op. cit.*

51 Bielby G. et al. (2010) *Empowering Young People Pilots Evaluation: Final Report.* NfER. DCSF RR206. **www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/programmeofresearch/projectinformation.cfm?projectid=15314&resultspage=1**



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