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Child Poverty Strategy for Wales

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Information

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Child Poverty Strategy for Wales

Audience	Local authorities, public bodies, Children and Young People's Partnerships, voluntary and third sector organisations, UK Government and devolved administrations.
Overview	This document sets out the Welsh Assembly Government's new Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. It aims to give a clear account of what the Welsh Assembly Government can achieve in helping to reduce poverty – particularly in the areas of improving the health, education and economic outcomes for children in low-income families during the next three years (2011–14).
Action required	None – for information purposes only.
Further information	Enquiries about this document should be directed to: Child Poverty Unit Communities Division Welsh Assembly Government Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ Tel: 01685 729312 e-mail: childpovertyunit@wales.gsi.gov.uk
Additional copies	This document can be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills
Related documents	The Welsh Assembly Government has published a summary of the consultation responses received on the draft Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. This was issued for a three-month period of public consultation on 12 May 2010. The <i>Summary of responses</i> can be accessed from the Welsh Assembly Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/consultations

DCELLS would like to thank Youth Friendly for the use of images on the front cover.
www.youthfriendly.co.uk

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Ministerial foreword

The Welsh Assembly Government aspires to the eradication of child poverty by 2020. This is an ambitious challenge at a time when public spending is contracting. However, since its inception, the Welsh Assembly Government has consistently made it clear that reducing child poverty is a fundamental element of its social justice agenda and also part of its key priorities to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

I am very grateful to the many individuals and organisations who responded to the consultation and attended events across Wales. We know that in order to make progress on reducing child poverty it is imperative that we galvanise and draw on the experience of a whole range of public bodies, the third sector and other partners in Wales.

The new duties in the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 will add a new impetus to the process as each local authority and Welsh public body will be required to develop a strategy to tackle child poverty that will complement the Welsh Assembly Government's own approach.

This strategy aims to give a clear account of what the Welsh Assembly Government can achieve in helping to reduce poverty, particularly in the areas of improving health, education and economic outcomes for children in low-income families during the next three years 2011–14.

The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that achieving this aim is also dependent upon the UK Government's continuing contribution to eradicating poverty in the non-devolved areas of tax and welfare payments, employment support and the continued recovery of the wider economy.



Huw Lewis AM
Deputy Minister for Children

Summary

The strategy is arranged into four sections.

Section 1 outlines the methodology used to define and measure poverty, as well as the responses to our consultation, and explains our three strategic priorities for the eradication of poverty.

Section 2 focuses on the twin goals of helping people enter paid employment and helping them progress to better paid jobs. We describe a range of initiatives which are underway that target youth unemployment. We also highlight the importance of improved-quality childcare facilities to promote children's development and help individuals enter the labour market and address household poverty. We conclude with a summary of our initiatives to ensure jobs growth.

Section 3 focuses on the goal of reducing inequality so that the outcomes for the poorest do not worsen and that they are able to close the gap with their better-off peers. We describe how this can be best achieved by focusing on multi-dimensional interventions, especially those that are taken early in children's lives.

Section 4 summarises those actions being taken by the Welsh Assembly Government to ameliorate the effects on children living in poverty, especially those steps that have been taken to increase household income such as increasing benefit take-up, tackling financial exclusion and improving financial literacy.

Section 1: Consultation, aims and measuring progress

Consultation and strategy

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 placed a duty on the Welsh Assembly Government to publish a Child Poverty Strategy for Wales. The Annex on page 43 outlines the 13 broad areas covered by the Measure. In recognition of the key role played by other partners in the shared fight against child poverty the Measure made action to eradicate child poverty a statutory requirement across local authorities, Local Health Boards, and a range of public bodies in Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government's rights-based approach to children and young people in Wales has become increasingly child and young person centred, holistic and integrated with a focus on the rights enshrined in the UNCRC. Since 2004 the Welsh Assembly Government has made a commitment to formally adopt the UNCRC as a basis for children and young people's policy-making. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure will strengthen this rights-based approach and embed consideration of the rights and obligations contained within the UNCRC and its protocols across the Welsh Assembly Government's work.

The Welsh Assembly Government's Child Poverty Strategy for Wales was subject to consultation from May to August 2010¹ and more than 150 responses were received. There was widespread support for the strategy but many respondents suggested that the Welsh Assembly Government's response to tackling child poverty should be more tightly-focused on a smaller number of more strategic actions across Government.

This strategy has been revised to focus on how the Welsh Assembly Government's policies collectively contribute to the three strategic objectives.

- (i) To reduce the number of families living in workless households.
- (ii) To improve the skills of parents/carers and young people living in low-income households so they can secure well-paid employment.
- (iii) To reduce inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest.

¹ www.wales.gov.uk/consultations/childrenandyoungpeople/cpstrategy/?lang=en

The strategy also responds to the changing UK fiscal climate and sets out a distinctive Welsh approach to the provision of public services that can address the long-term root causes of poverty and alleviate some of the more damaging impacts of poverty in the short term.

The impact of fiscal consolidation along with rapid changes in UK Government policy means that inevitably some of the detailed policy actions and commitments set out in the Delivery Plan published in May 2010 have in part been overtaken by events. The Delivery Plan will therefore be developed further. Over the next few months it will become a living document available on the internet that can be regularly updated and accessed by children's groups, local authorities and the third sector. In this way it will provide the most up-to-date information, promote the development of complementary projects and foster stronger working partnerships.

In recognition of the fact that tackling child poverty requires action across public agencies, the living Delivery Plan provides the opportunity to highlight initiatives taken to eradicate poverty by local authorities and other public bodies as a result of their new duties under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010.

Defining poverty and measurement

By poverty we mean a long-term state of not having sufficient resources to afford food, reasonable living conditions or amenities or to participate in activities (such as access to attractive neighbourhoods and open spaces) that are taken for granted by others in their society.

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the UK Government to achieve the following poverty targets by 2020.

- Relative poverty: less than 10 per cent of children living in relative low-income poverty.
- Material deprivation: less than 5 per cent of children living in combined material deprivation and low income.
- Absolute low income: reduce the proportion of children who live in absolute low income to less than 5 per cent.
- Persistent poverty: percentage of children living in relative poverty for three out of four years (target level to be set by 2015).

While recognising the importance of the UK targets, the Welsh Assembly Government, by using the policy levers at its disposal, aims to eradicate child poverty by 2020. To deliver against this aspirational target would mean that Wales would match the lowest child poverty rate in Europe. The lowest rate ever achieved has been 5 per cent before housing costs².

In Wales child poverty decreased between 1997–98 and 2003–04 to 28 per cent but has now started to rise to 32 per cent compared to 31 per cent for the UK. This equates to approximately 200,000 children in Wales.

Figure 1: Percentage of children living in households below 60 per cent of median income after housing costs

	1997–98 to 1999–00	1998–99 to 2000–01	1999–00 to 2001–02	2000–01 to 2002–03	2001–02 to 2003–04	2002–03 to 2004–05	2003–04 to 2005–06	2004–05 to 2006–07	2005–06 to 2007–08	2006–07 to 2008–09
Wales	36	35	34	34	32	31	28	29	32	32
UK	33	33	31	30	30	29	29	30	30	31
Scotland	31	32	32	30	28	26	25	25	24	25
N Ireland		30	29	28	28	27	27	26	26	26

Source: Department for Work and Pensions HBAI data

Alongside direct measures of poverty, the Welsh Assembly Government also annually reports against a set of proxy indicators³ in the areas of early years, income and work, education, health, housing and community. These indicators seek to measure those factors that often correlate with poverty and poor outcomes for children. Interim milestones and 2020 targets have been set for each of these indicators.

Of the indicators assessed, half show a clear improvement against the baseline year. Where there has been a deterioration, or little change, the Welsh Assembly Government will continue to monitor these targets and seek to speed up progress, such as in the area of teenage pregnancy, with the introduction of new pilots.

To measure progress against the three new objectives of this strategy the following key indicators are proposed.

- Percentage of children living in workless households.
- Percentage of working age adults with no qualifications.

² It is generally agreed that reaching zero is an unrealistic target since there are always likely to be people with low incomes as a result of leaving employment, or individuals with negative incomes for instance due to business loss.

³ www.wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/eradicating/?jsessionid=jX6MCXpw1TJ9HPCfNymWTNX1qT5HDNpMrTz10TDB1N4j9vk6N6N!889367152?lang=en

- Percentage of learners eligible for free school meals who achieve the Level 2 threshold including English/Welsh and mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- Percentage of live births weighing less than 2,500 grams.
- Percentage of looked-after children per 10,000 population under 18.
- Percentage of children living in workless households/low-income families reaching health, social and cognitive development milestones when entering formal education.

The Welsh Assembly Government intends to review the full range of indicators to ensure that the data collected are consistent and appropriate for future monitoring of the revised Child Poverty Strategy for Wales.

Alongside statistical monitoring, each major Welsh Assembly Government programme is also subject to its own specific evaluation. These evaluations include an assessment of its impact on eradicating child poverty. The policy gateway process of the Welsh Assembly Government also includes an assessment of the impact of all new programmes on child poverty.

The severity and duration of poverty has been shown to have the greatest continuing impact on children's and young people's life chances and this information is not easily captured by the point-in-time measurements described above. It is therefore important, as raised during the consultation, to supplement an analysis of poverty with additional qualitative analysis and longitudinal research to ensure that measurements used do not mask the position of individuals and families with increasingly complex needs or those of children living in severe and persistent child poverty.

Section 2: Helping more people into paid work, and helping them to progress into higher-paying jobs

In this section we outline how the Welsh Assembly Government is helping more people gain paid work and helping them to progress into higher-paying jobs in order to tackle poverty. We highlight the importance of providing more childcare opportunities in order to help more people enter the labour market and to enable parents/carers to spend a smaller percentage of their income on childcare. We then summarise the way we are working with the public and private sector to create more jobs and better jobs.

The Welsh Assembly Government's strategic aims in this area are to:

- reduce the number of families living in workless households
- improve the skills of parents/carers and young people living in low-income households so they can secure well-paid employment.

According to the Labour Force Survey in December 2010, 26.3 per cent of the working age population in Wales are economically inactive while 8.6 per cent are classed as unemployed⁴. This means that more than one-third of the adult population in Wales are not in paid employment. The lack of parental employment is a clear causal factor leading to child poverty. Long periods of being out of work lead to material deprivation and increase the likelihood of intergenerational worklessness as children living in workless households are also more likely to become poor and workless adults.

Changes in employment patterns have occurred both as a result of the recent recession and of longer-term economic trends. One significant aspect of the current recession is the high level of unemployment among young adults. Another is the large-scale reductions in employment that are expected across the public sector as result of fiscal tightening.

A robust recovery by the wider private sector is therefore vital to helping people into work and to tackling child poverty. The availability and quality of job opportunities across the skills and income distribution spectrum is key to tackling child poverty. Over the last few years, people at the lower end of the skills spectrum in Wales have suffered worse labour market outcomes than people with qualifications⁵. For the less highly-skilled, the best prospects will

⁴ 'Economically inactive' is a term used to describe people of working age who are either not available to start work immediately (owing for instance to a caring responsibility or ill health) or who are not looking for work. 'Unemployed' is a term used for those who are available for and actively seeking work.

⁵ The employment rate for people with no qualifications, already low at 47 per cent before the recession started, had fallen five percentage points to 42 per cent by 2009. Those with few qualifications (NVQ 2 or below) also suffered a five percentage point decline in their employment rate. The employment rate for working-age people with qualifications up to NVQ 4 or above (and obtained since 2001) in 2009 – when the labour market was at its weakest – was 86 per cent, down just one percentage point from its pre-recession rate.

continue to be in the service sector, particularly business activities and finance, personal services and recreation.

Initiatives to reduce worklessness

Control over the tax and benefit system and the main programmes that support access to employment rest with the UK Government. The Welsh Assembly Government is actively working to make sure that the new approach by the Department for Work and Pensions, to welfare benefits and employment services operates effectively in Wales alongside our devolved services and that negative impacts are minimised. Our programme to help those people who have been out of work for a long time or have become economically inactive focuses on:

- simplifying and integrating programmes and return to work services
- removing duplication and identifying gaps in current employment provision
- improving the quality of advisor support in Wales
- improving information around return to work services
- developing approaches that provide in-work support, progression and sustained employment
- simplifying arrangements with employers to maximise vacancies across Wales
- supporting youth engagement and youth employment actions.

The European Social Fund (ESF) enables the Welsh Assembly Government to provide additional employment support not offered by other employment services to target specific client groups and help them address multiple barriers into employment. A forthcoming review will consider the alignment of these programmes with the recently announced UK Government welfare reforms, and in particular the new Work Programme⁶.

The Welsh Assembly Government also continues to press for safeguards within the current benefit reforms and the reassessment of incapacity benefits to ensure that some of the most vulnerable groups in our society are not adversely affected by the reforms.

⁶ The Work Programme is the UK Government's new national work programme. It will supersede programmes such as the Flexible New Deal.

Case study: Improving the quality of adviser support across Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government is working to improve the quality of adviser support across Wales by making employment support more effective, accessible and better targeted. The four pilot areas of Caia Park Wrexham, Llwynhendy Llanelli, Penlan Swansea and Duffryn Newport have been selected to trial locating Jobcentre Plus advisers in Integrated Children's Centres. Working closely with Communities First Partnerships, advisers have engaged with 404 parents/carers, resulting in 151 customers receiving regular face-to-face support, with a further 25 moving into work. The centres report increasing numbers of referrals via word of mouth from families and friends. Regular meetings also enable delivery partners to review progress, share experiences and good practice.

Childcare plays a vital role in helping families and is much more than somewhere that a parent/carer can leave their child while they work. We appreciate the benefits that childcare can provide for children, but also recognise the wider support that it can provide for families by enabling parents/carers to train or work. Indeed the sector itself can be a route for parents/carers back into training and employment.

We want to develop high-quality childcare that gives the child the best experience, but we also want to make childcare affordable and accessible. We want parents/carers to be able to access childcare when they need it and where they need it. We will be taking forward a number of actions, to be set out in a policy statement on childcare including supporting childcare enterprise, developing a wider and more diverse childcare infrastructure and improving the information that is available to parents/carers to enable them to make the best choices for their children.

One significant issue raised during the consultation is the increased proportion of households in poverty even where someone is working. Recent estimates suggest that more than half of all children living in poverty are now in households where at least one person is working. Most of these individuals are either self-employed or working part-time.

The recession has resulted in much greater loss of full-time over part-time employment and the latter has been growing much more rapidly than the former. It may also be the case that wage cuts and pay freezes have pushed some below the poverty line leading to in-work poverty.

The Welsh Assembly Government aims to help address in-work poverty by enabling individuals to work more flexibly, by ensuring that childcare provision is affordable and accessible and by providing sustainable routes out of poverty through genuine career paths that have the chance of progression. Income maximisation initiatives such as debt advice and help with rising costs of fuel outlined in Section 4 can also help these families.

Case study: School Gates Employment Initiative and in-work poverty

Many non-working parents are not aware of the training and employment support provision in their area. To improve the information services around return to work services the Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil: School Gates Employment Initiative targets second potential earners in and around their children's primary school. The project delivers a package of advice, guidance and support alongside informal training and childcare provision.

In five months of delivering school gates in the two local authorities in Wales, there were a total of 326 parents engaged in the programme, of which 59 parents have entered employment, 9 started their own business, 15 have started volunteering and 59 have entered further education.

Initiatives to improve skills

In addition to encouraging potential second earners to increase the number of hours worked in a household, thus lifting some families out of poverty, it is also important to ensure individuals are able to secure well-paid jobs, that offer in-work support, progression and sustained employment.

This is particularly so given the deteriorating labour market position of poorly educated or poorly-trained workers.

Case study: Joint skills health check

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended the development of a more integrated system of employment and skills. The Welsh Assembly Government in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales is piloting joined-up approaches to help individuals into sustainable work more quickly by identifying their skills needs by means of a skills health-check tools and processes.

The pilots were introduced in January 2010 in Wales and will test the following.

- The Skills Health Check model and links between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Service support for those individuals in receipt of Jobseekers Allowance.
- The potential for engaging individuals facing redundancy in the skills health check process prior to them becoming Jobseekers Allowance claimants, linking to the ReAct programme.
- The potential for improving joint working to engage offenders and ex-offenders in the skills health check process through engagement in the prison environment.
- The use of a Wales specific diagnostic Skills Health Check tool as part of the overall skills health check process.

An evaluation report will be available in March 2011.

We aim to improve basic skills in the workplace, through delivery of the Employer Pledge programme and the work of the Wales TUC Learning Services and the Wales Union Learning Fund programme. The Employer Pledge seeks to raise levels of basic skills in the employed workforce through increased and enhanced basic skills support within the workplace. Working in partnership with employers, the projects will raise awareness of the benefits of a skilled workforce and will provide additional support to address identified basic skills needs.

The Welsh Assembly Government plans to invest £17.5 million over the next four years on basic skills for the workplace as part of the Employer Pledge programme. This programme has been positioned

to act as a first step to further workforce skills development. Robust performance indicators have been set and an initial evaluation of the programme will be undertaken in late 2011.

In addition to the wider work of the Wales TUC Learning Services the Wales Union Learning Fund programme aims to support skills in the workplace and enables the Wales TUC to deliver specific activity to support the delivery of the Employer Pledge within unionised workplaces.

Supporting youth engagement and employment

High levels of youth unemployment are a result of the recession and also of longer-term trends in the labour market. This has led to a fear of a lost generation as young people drop out of the labour market and are discouraged from returning. Evidence supports the view that being in work, training, or on education courses helps young adults, even if their households remain in poverty.

In October 2010, the Welsh Assembly Government established its Youth Engagement and Employment Unit to drive policy and lead activities that support disengaged young people into education, training and employment opportunities in Wales. The Unit will ensure coherence in the overall departmental approach to youth engagement and employment in Wales. It will also deliver and strategically lead the activities within the *Youth Engagement and Employment Action Plan 2011–2015*⁷.

The successor programmes to Skill Build (Traineeships for young people aged 16–18; and Steps to Employment for adults who are 18-plus) will be introduced for unemployed people in August 2011. They have been developed taking into account policy legislation and commitments contained in the Welsh Assembly Government's *One Wales, Skills That Work for Wales*, Learning Pathways 14–19 policy development and the NEETs plan – *Reducing the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Wales*.

The European Social Fund also enables the Welsh Assembly Government to provide additional support through offering young people skills and learning opportunities for future employment including a range of projects targeting young people aged 11 to 19 years of age who face a range of disadvantages. For instance, disabled young people, those who are care leavers, those who have special needs, those from a black or minority ethnic or Gypsy Travellers backgrounds.

⁷ www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills (go to the 'Guidance' area of the 'Publications' section)

The Welsh Assembly Government has introduced a range of measures to support the continuation of apprenticeship training during the current economic downturn and specifically to target young people. The Welsh Assembly Government has made £20 million available, subject to European Structural Funds approval, to ensure young people aged 16 to 24 leaving school or college can access quality training through the Pathways to Apprenticeships and Young Recruits Programmes.

The Pathways to Apprenticeship Programme aims to provide a flexible route for young people to acquire the underpinning skills and knowledge that would be required for successful completion of the full apprenticeship framework. Under the pilot individuals can spend up to a year on a full-time intensive training programme to build up the skills required for a full apprenticeship once the training has been completed. In 2010–11 there will be 2,000 places available in the programme being delivered by 17 further education institutions across Wales.

The Young Recruits Programme supports employers by offering a financial incentive to recruit additional apprentices. Targeted support is available to create additional opportunities for young people (16 to 24-year-olds). Funding is available to support a contribution towards the wage costs for apprentices under this scheme, which will amount to a £50 per week wage subsidy paid to the employer (the wage subsidy is not available to public sector employees).

The Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy (YES) for Wales has been revised to help support young people to realise their potential. The Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Action Plan and Big Ideas Wales Campaign aims to support young people in Wales to realise their potential, whether it is setting up in business, working for someone else or doing something in the community.

The Welsh Assembly Government is maintaining Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) in Wales and is currently considering proposals to extend EMAs to learners on the successor programme to Skill Build for young people (i.e. Traineeships) from 2012.

Initiatives to ensure jobs growth

In addition to helping more people into sustainable employment and helping people get the skills to progress into higher-paying jobs, the Welsh Assembly Government is also seeking to facilitate private sector jobs growth by improving the overall business environment and helping create the conditions and framework for the private sector to flourish.

The Welsh Assembly Government's economic development strategy, *Economic Renewal: a new direction*, seeks to create the conditions in which businesses can thrive through:

- investing in high-quality and sustainable infrastructure
- making Wales an attractive place to do business
- strengthening and broadening the skills base and encouraging innovation.

Direct business support is being focused on six key sectors that have historically shown above-average growth and in which Wales has particular strengths and advantages.

A commitment to ensure the availability of next generation broadband to businesses in all parts of Wales by 2016 will ensure that Welsh business has twenty-first century infrastructure to place the country at the forefront of the digital economy.

Support for enterprise, especially business start-ups, continues to be vital in developing a strong economy. It contributes to the stock of innovative, new businesses and changes motivation and attitudes about entrepreneurship by providing a route out of unemployment.

We will work with the Department of Work and Pensions to deliver in Wales the planned New Enterprise Allowance. This will be rolled out nationwide from the autumn 2011 to help unemployed people set up their own business.

We will be reviewing the **start-up service** during 2011 to meet further the priorities of Economic Renewal. We need to encourage start-up and productivity, particularly in the Heads of the Valleys and Western Valleys where business birth rates remain low. While there are a number of reasons for this situation, such as the industrial and economic legacy, appropriate intervention is required to help raise the next generation of quality, sustainable, growing businesses, underpinned by a culture of entrepreneurship particularly among young people.

The start-up service supports individuals or groups of individuals across Wales wishing to start-up in business. The service is divided into a number of strands with several key target groups for delivery. It includes support for self-employment for growth and graduate growth, for new starts and support (in specific areas) for trade testing a business idea (Taste of Enterprise). The whole service is underpinned by a strong inclusion approach designed to maximise equality of accessibility and overcome barriers experienced by some clients.

Case study: Taste of Enterprise

The Taste of Enterprise element of the start-up service is delivered in two geographical areas – the Heads of the Valleys and Môn Menai. The concept sits in the Early Stage Intervention and 'Pre Start' stages of developing entrepreneurship. It is based on the premise that providing opportunities for individuals to try out running a real business (especially people with additional barriers related to being economically inactive) will increase the likelihood that they will progress to full start-ups or to develop the capacity to become economically active in other ways. It is an intervention aimed at enabling people to progress along the entrepreneurial journey, especially people who would be unlikely to do so without such support.

Since 2008, 304 individuals have been assisted; 170 have started trading and 181 have entered employment.

Sustained, collaborative investment programmes such as those in our seven regeneration areas are designed to stimulate private sector investment by both demonstrating public sector commitment and by actual physical and other improvements funded by these programmes. Through involving private sector organisations in regeneration Area Partnerships and activities we can ensure that they have input into investment decisions, and can encourage them to deliver local regeneration benefits through job creation.

Case study: Maximising Public Sector Investment – the Welsh Housing Quality Standard (WHQS)

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to improving existing social housing up to the WHQS. The estimated overall cost to meet WHQS is in the region of £3 billion. The Welsh Assembly Government is encouraging local authorities and housing associations to use this opportunity to stimulate the economic regeneration of communities. This could be achieved by creating training and employment programmes aimed at providing the economically inactive among local communities with real skills and employment prospects.

Investment programmes aimed at achieving WHQS will also significantly improve the energy efficiency of the existing social stock and, as a result, reduce tenants' heating bills.

Targeted recruitment and training requirements have resulted in job creation and training opportunities. A recent independent study of 12 housing organisations found that 487 training and employment opportunities have been created.

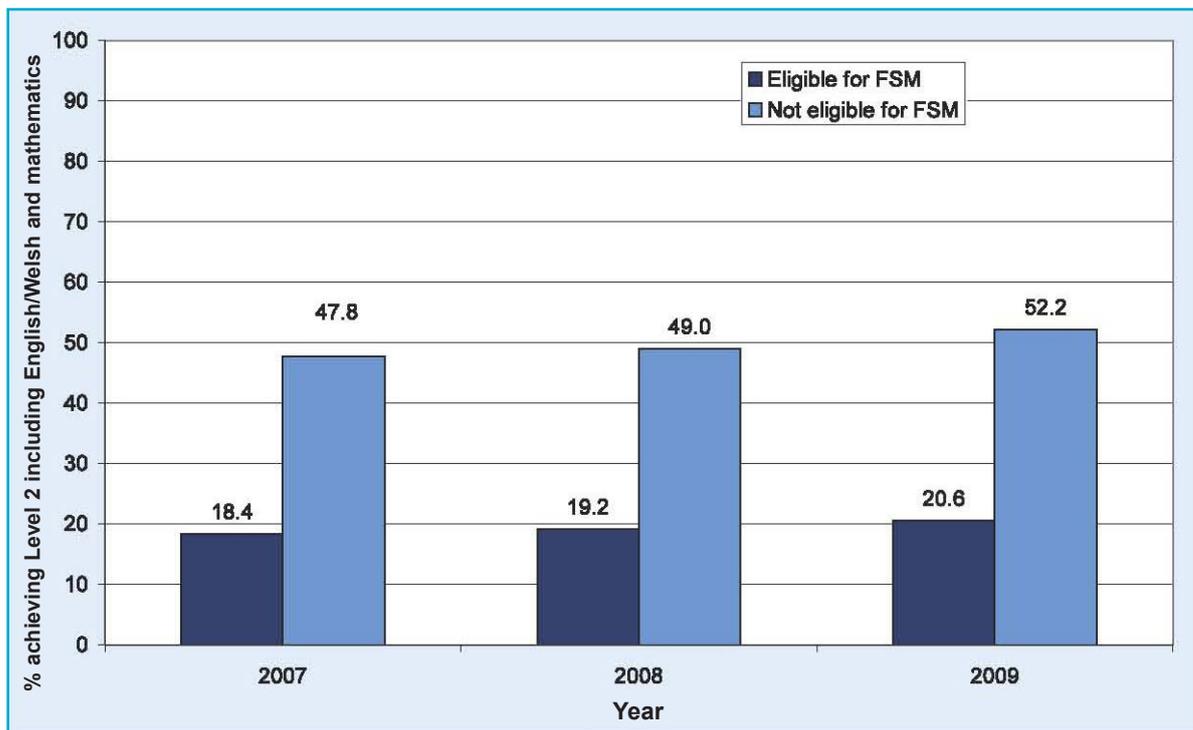
Section 3: Reducing inequalities that exist in health, education and economic outcomes of children and families by improving the outcomes of the poorest

Why inequality matters

The Welsh Assembly Government wants every child to have a flying start in life and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. However, the evidence shows that there are significant differences in outcomes for children depending on the socio-economic position of their family.

The chart below showing the proportion of learners achieving the Level 2 threshold (5 A*–C GCSEs including English/Welsh and mathematics) demonstrates positive progress for all learners. However, the performance of non-free school meal learners has improved at a faster rate than free school meal (FSM) learners, thus the gap in performance between the two groups at a national level has increased.

Figure 2: Learners achieving the Level 2 threshold, including English/Welsh and mathematics, by free school meals eligibility, Wales



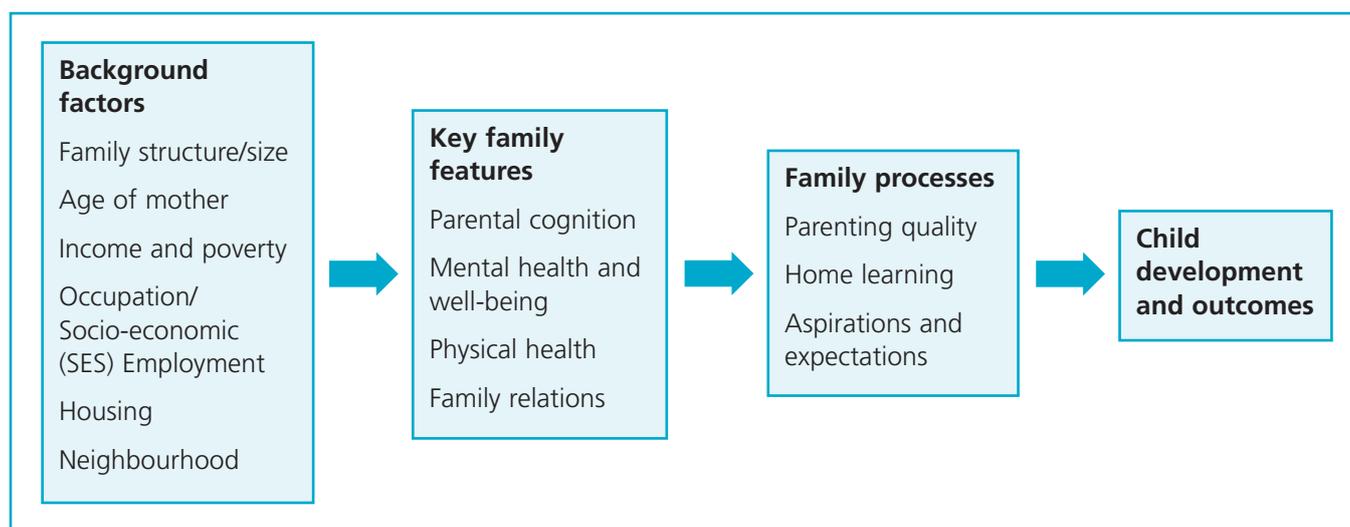
Source: The Welsh Examinations Database and the Schools Census.

Children not gaining qualifications at school are more likely to be dependent on benefits as adults and there is strong evidence that those with disadvantaged backgrounds fare badly in terms of earnings and employment chances as young adults, even up to the age of 33.

How poverty affects a child's life chances

Children's life chances are influenced by the experiences and circumstances that they are exposed to from before birth and throughout their childhood. There are a range of factors that can impact on outcomes for children, for example:

Figure 3

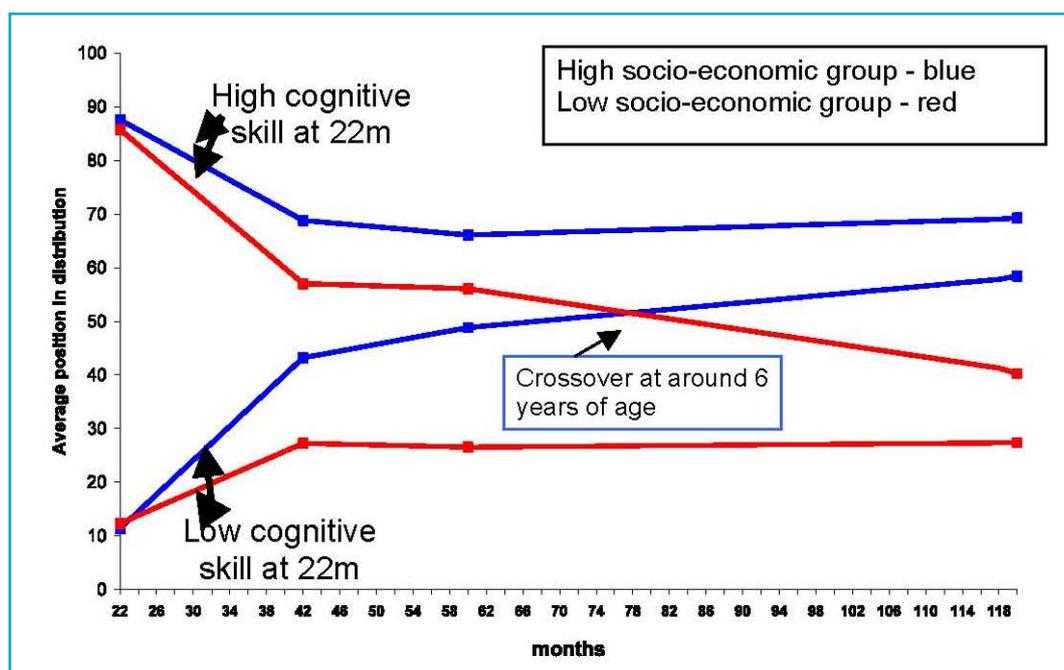


Source: 'A Model of the Inter-Generational Transmission of Educational Success', Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education. Feinstein, Duckworth and Sabates (2004)

Low income and living in a workless household are key factors associated with poor outcomes for children. Evidence demonstrates that income mediates with other factors that affect child development such as parental education and the home learning environment, and therefore low-income children experience poorer environments in terms of factors that would otherwise promote their cognitive, social and health development. They are more likely to begin school with deficits in their learning ability and social behaviour. As a result, they progress more slowly than their more affluent peers and achieve fewer educational qualifications, even in circumstances in which schools serve all learners equally.

We also know that differences in outcomes for children as a result of poverty begin to show themselves at a very early age. The chart below shows that differences in cognitive ability as a result of parental background show themselves from as early as three years of age. It also shows that social class gaps in attainment open early, and continue to widen as children get older.

Figure 4: Average rank of test scores at 22, 42, 60 and 120 months by SES of parents/carers and early rank position



Source: 'Inequality in the Early Cognitive Development of British Children in the 1970 Cohort', *Economica*, Feinstein (2003)

The Welsh Assembly Government has made increasing family prosperity a priority as this is a necessary condition for improving outcomes for children and families. However, family prosperity alone is not sufficient. Public services, communities, the third sector all have a vital role to play in shaping the life chances of children.

Our approach to tackling inequalities

Our approach to tackling inequalities is based upon the following priorities.

- The early years are fundamental to children's development.
- We need to address the needs of families as well as the needs of the child.
- That building resilience is critical because prevention is more effective than cure.
- Schools should be focussed on literacy, numeracy and breaking the link between educational attainment and poverty.

- We must raise aspirations and maintain a ladder of opportunity for young people.
- Working together with local partnerships.

Our approach is underpinned by our commitment to the UNCRC and the progressive realisation of children's rights.

The early years are important

It is now well recognised that the early years of a child's life represent a period of rapid development, and that the quality of experiences during these formative years play a significant role in shaping the life chances and abilities of the individual in later life.

These experiences contribute, in particular, to the acquisition of non-cognitive skills, such as socialisation and the ability to play and concentrate. These are crucial, not only to a child's subsequent ability to learn, but also to participate effectively in groups, whether in the classroom, the labour market or society. Such early experiences therefore provide the foundations on which all future development will be built.

Research has shown the potential rewards of investing in the early years, not only as a path to improve the life chances of children, but also as an economic strategy. International evidence is that intensive intervention in the early years can make a real difference to outcomes, if the detail of delivery is right. It is therefore possible that the cost of providing effective interventions can be returned many times over if a disadvantaged child grows into a healthy adult with good skills and the potential for increased earnings.

A Flying Start

Flying Start is targeted at the 0–3 age group in the most disadvantaged communities in Wales and aims to influence positive outcomes in the medium and long term. The core entitlement of this programme is prescriptive based upon evidence of the most effective approaches to improving child development.

- Free quality, part-time childcare for 2 to 3-year-olds.
- An enhanced Health Visiting service (where the Health Visitor caseload is capped at 110 children).
- Access to parenting programmes.
- Access to language and play sessions.

The programme's long-term aims are to reduce the number of people with very poor skills; to reduce rates of criminal behaviour truancy and drug use; and to foster higher employment, increased earnings and better qualifications at the end of schooling.

In the medium term, significant savings can be made through earlier identification of needs, through the avoidance of reception into the care system, and through the avoidance of other crisis remedial systems such as youth offending teams or substance misuse services.

Funding for Flying Start will increase from 2012–14 and will enable further support to those children and parents/carers who need it most, so that more children and parents/carers can benefit from the support it provides. We will also be implementing an outcome-focused monitoring system for the programme to ensure the continuing focus of Flying Start is on improving the life chances of disadvantaged children.

Flying Start works closely with practitioners and families in its target areas to help ensure children are ready for the next level of provision. This helps ensure a smooth transition into the Foundation Phase.

From the age of three all children have access to a free Foundation Phase place and are able to benefit from a skills-based curriculum that is designed to meet the developmental needs of the individual. The Foundation Phase provides a progressive framework that spans four years (3 to 7-year-olds) and which meets the diverse needs of all children, including those who are at an early stage of development and those who are more able. It provides children with the skills base from which they can develop into lifelong learners.

There has been a significant investment in the Foundation Phase with more than £170 million already made available in the first three years of roll-out and a further £290 million in the draft budget for the next three years.

A healthy start

It is well understood that the foundations for health and well-being start in pregnancy. From heart disease to obesity, educational achievement and economic status, the months before and the years immediately after birth are crucial to the life chances of the mother, her child and her family.

Healthy preparation for pregnancy that supports the mother and the development of her child is vital. Smoking, alcohol and substance misuse during pregnancy are significant risks and our policy approaches are designed to reduce those risks.

The health and happiness of future generations can be enhanced through the provision of world-class maternity services. A document *Strategic Vision for Maternity Services in Wales* will shortly be issued for consultation.

Midwives work in partnership with women during pregnancy, birth and the post-natal period and provide care in hospitals, birth centres, midwifery-led units, health clinics, and community-based care including home births. Some midwives will take on specialist roles, for example some Flying Start teams will have a midwife specialising in teenage pregnancy. *Midwifery 2020, Delivering expectations* which sets the direction of travel for the midwifery profession was launched on 9 September 2010 (www.midwifery2020.org/).

The role of the health visitor is the promotion of health and the prevention of illness in all age groups. However, in most parts of the UK the focus of their work is with young children (0–5) and their families. In the child's early months and years, health visitors are instrumental in supporting and educating parents/carers on:

- preventative services such as immunisation
- the nutritional needs of infants, children and parents/carers
- coping with minor illnesses
- behavioural issues, e.g. establishing good sleep patterns
- a child's developmental milestones.

Health visitors provide specific support for those families who experience difficulties, especially important when families experience mental illness such as post-natal depression, substance misuse or poor social/economic circumstances. They play a vital and pivotal role in Flying Start. A review of the role of the Health Visitor is underway.

The Welsh Assembly Government supports a national breastfeeding programme to promote breastfeeding and increase rates in Wales, particularly among those who are least likely to breastfeed. More than 60 volunteers have now been trained as peer supporters to provide a network of support to new mothers and pregnant women with a particular focus on Flying Start areas and the youngest mothers.

The Healthy Start Scheme provides a nutritional safety net to children under the age of four and to pregnant women who are in receipt of certain benefits. All pregnant women under the age of 18 are also eligible for this scheme. Vouchers are provided to more than 23,000 Welsh families who can exchange them for fresh fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula, in addition to free vitamins being provided.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to reducing the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases in Wales through the provision of effective and efficient vaccination programmes. To give children a healthy start in life, we routinely offer protection against 11 vaccine-preventable diseases – diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, Hib, meningitis C, measles, mumps, rubella, pneumococcal infection and Human papillomavirus. In line with World Health Organisation recommendations, the outcome for the routine childhood immunisation programme is uptake of at least 95 per cent in Wales.

Putting families first

Children grow up in families. Better outcomes for children and tackling inequalities means supporting families.

Families do not come in neat packages, and they do not have identical needs. Accordingly, that variety of needs cannot always be met through one-size-fits-all solutions. Rather, children and families often require a broad range of help and support, pitched at different levels, throughout life.

There is emerging consensus, and evidence from Flying Start, that the best way of supporting families, particularly those families in poverty, is through an integrated, whole-family approach. This means that we must find better ways of designing support systems and interventions, at both the national policy and local levels, and ensure their effective and efficient delivery.

A clear message of emerging policies and programme is that a whole family approach built around integrated service to provide holistic support to children and families at very level of need is the way forward. Traditionally children and family services have been organised around four tiers of need from universal to specialist. Research emphasises the importance of a range of services along the continuum of prevention, protection and remedial. At any one time families may need to access any number of services or interventions.

A report by the Efficiency and Innovation Board's New Models of Service Delivery group set out the diverse approaches developed across Wales and identified the need for a systemic approach to supporting families that encompassed prevention, protection and remediation.

- **Prevention:** interventions aimed at building resilience and supporting families to develop the skills and attributes associated with more positive child outcomes – for example, promoting positive parenting or supporting family learning.
- **Protection:** approaches aimed at early identification and action to support families well before they reach crisis point. These typically involve looser, multi-agency approaches towards meeting identified needs (e.g. team around the child approaches).
- **Remedial:** approaches aimed at supporting families that are at or near crisis point, involving a fully integrated approach to service delivery (e.g. Integrated Family Support Services).

It is vital that in addressing the broad range of family needs, we develop a continuum of support with the emphasis on prevention and protection so that we can reduce the need for remedial action.

Integrated Family Support Services (IFSS) is the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship policy to support vulnerable families with complex needs where substance misuse, domestic violence, mental health and learning disabilities. For these families there is an increased likelihood that the child's physical, social and emotional development will be impaired and for some children there will be repeated or long term episodes of being looked after by the local authority.

IFSS aims to promote change in the delivery services by improve the quality of service experience and outcomes for children and families when they meet health and social services professionals. Since 2010, local authorities and Local Health Boards in four pioneer areas; Merthyr, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Newport and Wrexham are required to operate IFSS for complex families with substance misuse.

Families First is the Welsh Assembly Government's key programme for designing better integrated support for families living in poverty. Its principal focus is on supporting families through interventions at the preventative and protective stages (as above). The programme

aims to drive improvements to family support design and delivery and, in so doing, reduce the numbers of families developing more complex needs and thus requiring more intensive and costly interventions.

Families First was established in 2010, when the selection was announced of two Families First pioneer consortia (Wrexham, Denbighshire and Flintshire Local Authorities in the north, and Rhondda Cynon Taf, Blaenau Gwent and Merthyr Tydfil in the south). Three of the pioneer areas are also acting as pioneers for the Integrated Family Support Team pilots to address the needs of families at or near crisis point. This provides a real opportunity to consider the broad range of family needs and how integrated services can best support families to build resilience.

The work of the consortia looks to build further on increasing family resilience and self-sufficiency, providing key, appropriate information to families and professionals, and to developing community-led solutions to local issues; £1.35 million was made available for the consortia in 2010–11.

Further consortia, to be active in 2011–12, will be announced later this spring, and will be asked also to explore ways in which support for families with disabled children and young people can be improved.

Families First will be rolled out on an all-Wales basis from April 2012. The Welsh Assembly Government will expect to see significant movement toward system change, with family-centred services delivering effective and efficient support to families living in poverty, thus reducing the inequities that they experience.

It is vital that in addressing the broad range of family needs, we recognise that there are families with particular and increased vulnerabilities. Disabled children are more likely than non-disabled children to be more susceptible to bullying and to mental health disorders and their families are more susceptible to higher levels of stress, lower levels of parental wellbeing and higher levels of poverty. It is therefore particularly important that disabled children and their families are able to access a wide range of services and that services are inclusive and provide the necessary support to enable parents/carers of disabled children to work or engage in education or training.

Narrowing the attainment gap; improving educational standards

Education is the route out of poverty and the key to social mobility. There is a great deal of evidence to show the powerful links between poverty and educational underachievement⁸, but the evidence shows that while this link is powerful it can be broken.

Schools can make a difference and do have an influence; there are schools and local authorities in Wales who achieve beyond expectations and succeed despite facing challenging circumstances. Benchmarked comparisons of estimated to actual performance by local authority shows that some schools and some local authorities seem to 'buck the trend'⁹. In considering the difference in performance between FSM and non-FSM learners within schools it is interesting to note that in five schools in Wales in 2009 FSM learners actually outperformed their non-FSM counterparts. However, there is too much variation in performance and not all schools are supporting their more disadvantaged pupils effectively – even within the 'high performing' authorities there are large variations between schools.

In its reform agenda, the Welsh Assembly Government has identified three interrelated priorities.

- Improving literacy levels.
- Improving numeracy levels.
- Reducing the impact of poverty on educational attainment.

We are looking for improvement in every aspect of the education system and we are working with schools and local authorities to refocus on higher standards. This will require a new approach to accountability, strong leadership, clearer expectations and monitoring of progress at every level.

We recognise the importance of using data effectively and that is why we have introduced the all Wales Core Data Sets and statistical families to support robust self-evaluation and comparative analysis. In line with Estyn's increased focus on the performance of learners from socio-economically deprived background the 2010 All Wales Core Data Packs have been extended to include analyses of performance of FSM-eligible learners versus their non-FSM counterparts. In this way we are increasing the focus on performance of these specific groups of learners within the context of school self-evaluation and development planning.

⁸ *Tackling Low Educational Achievement* Cassen R and Kingdon G (Joseph Rowntree Foundation/LSE, 2007)

⁹ Statistical Bulletin 13/2010 March 2010

There is a broad consensus that the educational attainment of looked-after children and care leavers is unacceptably low in comparison with their peers. Many children entering the care system already experience a range of risk factors associated with poor educational attainment, including growing up in poverty and experiences of abuse. Since 2006–07, the Welsh Assembly Government has provided £1 million of additional annual funding to local authorities in the form of a RAISE (Raising Attainment and Individual Standards in Education) LAC grant, funding that will continue through the provision of the School Effectiveness Grant. Outcome improvement has been significant since the injection of this focused grant, although there is some way still to go to narrow the attainment gap between looked after children/care leavers with that achieved by their peer group.

Over the five years of the grant, three broad strands evolved and this has led to the significant improvements in educational outcomes. These are:

- addressing immediate educational needs, such as the provision of resources, coaching, mentoring, counselling and one-to-one study support
- planning for sustainable development by training the staff who work directly with young people in care, foster carers, designated staff in schools and social workers
- promoting the need for improved corporate parenting, better monitoring, data collection and joint analysis by education and children service colleagues in the local authority.

Basic skill enhancement has also been a significant feature of the RAISE LAC grant as the nature of frequent school and placement changes often results in gaps in attainment and a loss of newly acquired skills and knowledge.

Raising aspirations – the ladder of opportunity

All our young people should have the opportunity to be the best they can be and to fulfil their potential – that means for more young people the opportunity for further study so that there are no barriers to their ambitions and no professions that are ‘off-limits’. The document *For Our Future*, emphasises the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) as corporate citizens, engaging with and enriching communities, and helping build aspiration and access to higher

education. In *For Our Future* we have set out our expectation that higher education providers will work more strategically and coherently with each other and with further education colleges. Among other things, this will open up more local access to higher education and sustain progression to higher levels of study, from school, work and further education.

Widening access is a strategic priority in the *For Our Future* action plan. The Reaching Wider initiative aims to increase participation in higher education in Wales by raising aspirations, and creating new study opportunities and learning pathways to higher education amongst those who are currently under-represented. This includes engagement activities aimed at school learners.

To ensure higher education providers are proactive in engaging learners from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, we expect the following targets to be achieved in the coming years.

- Higher education participation in the Heads of the Valleys to grow to match the Welsh average by 2015.
- The proportion of higher education student intake in Wales from Communities First areas to rise to 17.2 per cent of the total student intake by 2013 (a real increase of more than 1,500 more students from the most disadvantaged communities in Wales).

The Welsh Assembly Government is also putting in place the necessary measures to ensure delivery on the One Wales commitment to mitigate the effects on students domiciled in Wales of the decision taken by the UK Government to increase the current cap on fees. The Welsh Assembly Government will provide additional financial assistance to students domiciled in Wales to meet the cost of higher tuition fees for those students entering higher education from September 2012 onwards.

Welsh institutions charging tuition fees above the basic fee rate will be required to draw up fee plans for approval by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) to ensure equality of opportunity under the new fees regime. These plans will include measures to be taken to attract increased applications from prospective students from under-represented groups as well as the provision of financial assistance to students.

Our Healthy Future

Our Healthy Future and the Fairer Health Outcomes for All Plan build on two principles. Firstly, we need a life course approach to improving health and reducing inequities in health. Secondly, prevention and early intervention to 'avoid the avoidable' is key with action across society as a whole.

Development of the Fairer Health Outcomes for All Plan includes:

- the social determinants of health
- healthy behaviours
- health literacy
- access to health and social services
- evidence, intelligence and monitoring.

Development work on the plan also reflects Professor Sir Michael Marmot's review (*Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, 2010) and will reflect an approach that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage: 'proportionate universalism'.

The Welsh Assembly Government has already strengthened the focus on the child poverty targets relating to infant mortality, low birth weight and teenage conceptions. As part of the NHS Annual Quality Framework, each Local Health Board (LHB) must demonstrate clear progress with achieving these targets by the end of 2011–12.

Approaches that support the health outcomes of children and young people

The use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs by young people impacts on their health in the short and long term and is also associated with anti-social behaviour, crime and drop-out from school. Many of the factors that protect young people from misusing drugs and alcohol, or put them at greater risk of doing so, are linked to family life and parenting. The Global Commission on Social Determinants of Health also recently identified substance misuse, social exclusion, and poor education as key drivers of poor health, premature mortality and social inequalities in health.

The Welsh Assembly Government has a programme of measures to discourage young people from starting to smoke, support smokers who want to give up and promote smoke-free environments, but will particularly aim to protect children and reduce inequities in health.

One of the key objectives of the Welsh Assembly Government's Sexual Health and Well-being Action Plan is to reduce the rates of teenage pregnancy. A new teenage pregnancy grant scheme has been launched which includes targeted intervention for those most vulnerable to teenage pregnancy, and addresses the wider determinants of teenage pregnancy through the reduction of child poverty, raising the standard of education and the provision of good-quality youth services.

The Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales gives a high priority to tackling alcohol misuse and the implementation plan includes a range of actions specifically targeted at tackling alcohol-related harms. The Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) is a UK-wide programme, part-funded by a Welsh Assembly Government grant, which addresses substance misuse within the broad context of family functioning, parenting and young people's skill development. It will not on its own make a major impact on any one disease, but will potentially impact on a range of health and social outcomes.

The Welsh Assembly Government funds Youth Mental Health First Aid which is a training programme for those working or living with young people to provide them with the knowledge, skills and confidence to help a young person in mental distress. The programme recently commenced roll-out and will provide training for a wide range of staff working with children and young people, including youth workers, teachers and voluntary workers.

Case study: Healthy Working Wales and in-work support

Healthy Working Wales, launched in July 2008, provides support to individuals, employers and health professionals on health and work issues. This programme is impacting on around 25 per cent of people employed in Wales and has been shown to make a significant difference at an organisational level. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency reduced its sickness absence by one-third, saving £2.6 million and providing an additional 130 staff in work each working day by implementing activities to improve health and well-being. We have also been successful with engaging health professionals in this agenda with 70 per cent of GPs already accessing resources as part of Healthy Working Wales to support their patients.

Working with schools

Work is well underway to deliver the One Wales commitment to have one school nurse per secondary school in Wales by March 2011 and 99 per cent of maintained schools are now involved in the Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes. Actions centre around promoting good health behaviours for children and families – related to nutrition, physical activity, sexual health, mental and emotional health and well-being, substance use and misuse, safety, and hygiene. We can track achievement against other indicators of poverty, e.g. free school meals, via our healthy schools' database.

The A Stop Smoking in Schools Trial (ASSIST) smoking prevention programme targets secondary schools in the more deprived areas of Wales through a peer-support programme. ASSIST has undergone a randomised controlled trial with results showing that smoking prevalence continues to be lower in the intervention schools, and that there seems to be a more pronounced effect in schools in the south Wales valleys.

Communities First

This Child Poverty Strategy is for children and families in the whole of Wales experiencing poverty, regardless of where they live. It is focused on reducing child poverty and improving outcomes and narrowing inequality for low-income families. Evidence suggests that the strongest influences on children's outcomes are found in their parental and family circumstances rather than where they live. However, in Wales many communities experience multiple disadvantages that can compound the problems faced by those families living in poverty in these areas.

The concentration of deprivation in the poorest communities in Wales can necessitate a focus on place, and offers opportunities for higher levels of community engagement and innovation in service delivery. Factors affecting deprived communities include a high demand for services, high crime rates, poor housing and low aspirations – which can make it more difficult for families to take steps out of poverty.

The need to provide whole community approaches to tackling the wider effects of poverty in areas of multiple deprivation and support communities themselves in tackling child poverty is crucial – particularly in terms of raising community aspirations. Furthermore,

communities need to be supported to develop their own solutions to local issues in partnership with key service providers. In Wales, this work is being taken forward through our Communities First programme. The needs of families and children living in Communities First areas and suffering multiple deprivation are complex. In tackling these complex issues, policies are likely to have the greatest impact when they:

- deliver tailored support to the most disadvantaged people with minimal complexity
- reflect local needs and priorities
- are shaped through active engagement with stakeholders including service users
- are supported by the local community.

The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to the continued support of our most disadvantaged communities and narrowing the inequality gap in outcomes for people living both in these deprived communities and elsewhere. We will develop the Communities First programme to move further towards the delivery of key outcomes, including those in this strategy, and ensure communities continue to have a say in the services that affect them. We will ensure that close working takes place between Communities First and the Families First initiatives.

The Welsh Assembly Government is working together to identify opportunities for integrating our work, reducing duplication and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of our interventions. This will help ensure that we work collectively to benefit our communities, specifically those that are the most deprived, including impacting on children in poverty.

Children and young People in the Youth Justice System

While living in poverty is not a necessary cause of offending behaviour among children and young people, there is a large body of research that indicates an association between economic and social exclusion. If a young person does offend and enters the criminal justice system, there is a heightened risk that this will lead to disengagement from education, reduced opportunities to learn vital

skills and decreased employment opportunities. Those with a criminal record are often debarred from employment, despite having made amends for their offences and worked hard to increase their skills and qualifications.

Although responsibility for youth justice is currently the responsibility of the UK Government, we are committed to addressing the needs of all children in Wales, including those in the criminal justice system. The Welsh Assembly Government distributes £4.5 million to community safety partnerships across Wales to pursue the objectives of the All Wales Youth Offending Strategy. Community safety partnerships and youth offending teams use this money for targeted prevention to help keep children and young people free from crime and to provide access to education, accommodation and other mainstream provision for those who have offended.

The Welsh Assembly Government is working to more closely integrate the operation of youth justice services in Wales with our approach to whole family interventions. We have recognised that youth offending teams should be closely linked to IFSS and to ensure that all families living in poverty are helped, including those with involvement in the criminal justice system.

Section 4: Making poverty less damaging for children

Given the nature and complexity surrounding poverty, our aim of making the experience of poverty less damaging for children is being pursued through a variety of projects, each of which target different facets of this complex situation.

As set out above, absolute and relative child poverty is predicted to rise in the next three years. Parental employment provides the surest route out of poverty for most. It is for this reason that our first priorities focus on the reduction of worklessness and the development of the skills required for well-paid employment. However, it is important to recognise that there are groups such as people with disabilities, carers, the sick or older people for whom the labour market is not a viable option.

Measures that seek to directly alleviate the effects of poverty and which can make the experience of living in poverty less damaging for children are all the more important at this time. Due to the multi-causal nature of child poverty many of the measures can also act to prevent people falling into poverty, for instance by addressing homelessness. Below we summarise our current initiatives that contribute to this aim.

Reducing pressures on children and families through greater awareness of and access to rights and legal protection

In addition to duties placed on Welsh public bodies by the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, the Rights of the Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure will get the UNCRC integrated into law. Following enactment, Wales will become the first country in the UK and one of the few in Europe to have a statutory commitment to the Convention and to protecting the rights of children and young people in law.

Under the Measure, Welsh Ministers will in future be subject to a duty to raise awareness, promote understanding of the UNCRC and to give due regard to the UNCRC when discharging their functions. Children, young people and their families who know more about their rights are more likely to claim them and enjoy them.

The right to play and its contribution to children's development and resilience

One such right is expressed in Article 31 of the UNCRC, which states that children and young people have the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts

The Welsh Assembly Government sees play as being a vital element in children's development and something that can provide a strong protective factor in children's lives. It can, to an extent, shield children from the negative aspects of poverty and allow them to develop their inner resources and build resilience to difficulties and uncertainties in their home and other part of their lives. Play contributes towards children's personal and social development, their physical and mental health, and their ability to learn and engage with education.

To support this understanding, the Welsh Assembly Government has placed Play Opportunities in Part 1: Child Poverty, Play and Participation, of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010. This will place a duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient play opportunities for children in their areas as far as reasonably practicable. The regulations, standards and guidance to local authorities in complying with this duty will be issued during 2011.

Income maximisation

The Welsh Assembly Government provides additional funding to the third sector and local authorities to provide debt and benefit take-up advice. This includes providing direct start-up support to Citizens Advice Cymru's advice line and ongoing funding for the Consumer Credit Counselling Service's Housing Debt Helpline, the Better Advice: Better Health, and Disabled children's benefit up-take schemes and to local authorities to increase awareness and take-up of council tax benefit.

Credit unions are financial cooperatives owned and managed by the members who use them. The Welsh Assembly Government has provided significant support to credit unions in Wales in their role as affordable credit providers, often to families on low incomes. There are currently 26 credit unions in Wales which provide all-Wales coverage, making it possible for anybody living or working in Wales to join a credit union.

Rising fuel costs are a significant and growing proportion of people's incomes and the long-term trend is one of increasing fuel prices. Taking action to help people reduce their energy use, make their homes more energy-efficient and maximise their income is, therefore, key to making fuel bills more affordable and reducing the number of people in Wales at risk of fuel poverty.

Our Fuel Poverty Strategy 2010, which was published in July 2010, confirmed our commitment to taking action to eradicate fuel poverty, as far as is reasonably practicable, in all households in Wales by 2018. One of the most direct ways in which we can support people is to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and the strategy set out our proposals for a new, improved Fuel Poverty Programme to replace the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) from April 2011.

HEES has been very successful in helping vulnerable and low-income households to reduce their fuel bills by providing free insulation and heating measures but it has been less successful in targeting fuel-poor households. Since the scheme was established in 2000, it has assisted more than 124,000 households at a cost of more than £134 million.

The new Fuel Poverty Programme will better target fuel-poor households and will ensure that Welsh Assembly Government funding for energy improvement measures is focussed on those people most in need and living in the most energy-inefficient properties. The programme will also provide a central coordination point for advice and support which will ensure that everyone has access to some advice and support to help them reduce their fuel bills.

Case study: Arbed programme

The Arbed programme aims to retrofit housing stock with energy efficiency and micro-generation measures. It was originally carried out in the Heads of the Valleys as part of a suite of measures to carry out the low-carbon zone, and is now being rolled out across all the regeneration areas. This is helping to meet the 3 per cent CO₂ reduction targets as well as tackle fuel poverty in poorer communities.

The Arbed programme is working with housing associations and suppliers to enable businesses based in Wales to take advantage of the opportunities Arbed provides. This involves working with training providers to ensure local people have the right skills to benefit from the investments.

Safeguarding essential services in Wales

The Welsh Assembly Government continues to take a distinctive Welsh approach, built on the foundations of social justice and equality of opportunity, to safeguarding essential services in Wales. We remain committed to the provision of free swimming during school holidays and at weekends, free breakfasts for primary school children, and access to high-quality arts provision in deprived localities.

Homelessness

Tackling homelessness makes a major contribution to tackling absolute poverty for adults and children alike. The effects of homelessness extend beyond having a stable home to the ability to access services and advice and support, all of which can affect the opportunities that people have.

Case study: Nightingale House

Nightingale House hostel was opened in 2005 as a joint project between Cardiff County Council and Cadwyn Housing Association to provide safe, temporary accommodation for homeless families who need support to resolve issues, and enable them to manage their own accommodation within the community when they move on. It also reduces the number of families being temporarily housed in B&Bs. During the first five years the hostel has helped more than 500 families be rehoused into their own permanent accommodation.

Community safety and community cohesion

Although policing and criminal justice are not devolved, the Welsh Assembly Government is committed to delivering safer communities in Wales including integrated strategies to tackle substance misuse and youth offending.

The experience of poverty and social exclusion can be linked to lower levels of cohesion within economically deprived communities. The experience of poverty and social exclusion can lead children and young people to be vulnerable on a number of levels including from violent extremism. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to providing guidance to schools, colleges and universities on how to improve cohesion and to prevent violent extremism. It has provided funding (2009–12) to enable local authorities to form local cohesion partnerships. These partnerships are well placed to identify local cohesion issues and a number of projects have been funded that support children and young people from economically deprived communities.

Domestic abuse and violence against women

The Welsh Assembly Government published *The Right to be Safe* – an all Wales domestic abuse strategy in March 2010. The document sets out the integrated strategy for tackling all forms of violence against women. It has the following four key priorities of:

- preventing and raising awareness of violence against women and domestic abuse
- providing support for victims and children

- improving the response of criminal justice agencies
- improving the response of health services and other agencies.

We are committed to ensuring that these vulnerable families and children receive the support that they need.

There are gender issues associated with incidence of child poverty; over half of families living below the poverty line are headed by a lone parent/carer and more than 90 per cent of lone parent/carer families are headed by mothers. Labour market disadvantage coupled with other barriers mean that it is often women who have to manage a family's experience of poverty. In some cases the effect of domestic violence in the homes can be a trigger that tips a family into poverty.

In March 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government revised the booklet entitled *Information and Guidance on Domestic Abuse: Safeguarding Children and Young People in Wales* to reflect the new domestic abuse strategy *The Right to be Safe*. The booklet was produced to raise awareness about domestic abuse among school-based staff and other persons who work with children and young people. The document can be found on our website (www.wales.gov.uk/educationandskills).

An information leaflet has been produced around the issues of consent and sexual violence. Young people have developed the characters in the leaflet so that they have more relevance to their age group. This leaflet is being reproduced at the moment and will be issued to all organisations and outlets that have interaction with young people.

Rural communities

The reform of the Common Agriculture Policy, and the consequential changes to governing European regulations provides an opportunity for the Welsh Assembly Government to review how it provides support through those elements of the Rural Development Plan that are targeted at the development and regeneration of rural areas. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to ensuring that the funding that will be available to support the development and regeneration of rural areas contributes to the achievement of our key objectives, including measures that either directly or indirectly help to lift children and their families out of poverty and give them a safe and secure future. The Rural Health Plan published in December 2009

aims to ensure that the future health needs of rural communities are met in ways which reflect the particular conditions and characteristics of rural Wales.

Conclusion

These income-maximisation and support programmes offer the best short-term measures to alleviate poverty. They will run in conjunction with longer-term interventions such as early years, educational, employment and health programmes, which are most likely to be successful in countering the long-term and intergenerational effects of poverty.

Annex

The 13 broad aims of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 are to:

- work with the UK Government to increase the income of families with children
- ensure that, as far as possible, children living in low-income families are not materially deprived
- promote and facilitate paid employment for parents/carers in low-income families
- provide low-income parents/carers with the skills needed to secure employment
- help young people take advantage of employment opportunities
- support the parenting of children
- reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children and young people
- help young people participate effectively in education and training
- reduce inequalities in health between children and between their parents/carers, so far as necessary, to ensure children's well-being
- reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities between children and between children's parents/carers, so far as necessary, to ensure children's well-being
- help young people participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their community
- ensure that all children grow up in decent housing
- ensure that all children grow up in safe and cohesive communities.