

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Early Education Entitlement for Two Year Olds

Description of the Policy

The primary policy objective is to ensure that around 260,000 (around 40 per cent) of two year olds are able to access free early education from 2014. Eligible children will have a legal entitlement to 570 hours of free early education, equivalent to 15 hours of provision a week for 38 weeks per year.

Since September 2009, local authorities in England have been funded to deliver a targeted offer to 15 per cent of their most disadvantaged two year olds. This will now be extended to around 40 per cent of two year olds, building on the entitlement to 15 hours per week of free early education for all three and four year olds.

The Government plans to take a phased approach to the implementation of the new entitlement. From 2013, around 130,000 two year olds will be able to access the free places. This will extend to 260,000 in 2014. The Government has consulted on eligibility criteria for the first phase, and intends that two year olds who meet the criteria for Free School Meals should be eligible for the free places, as well as two year olds who are looked after by the local authority. In the first phase, the majority of free places will be for workless families; the poorest 20 per cent.

For the second phase, the Government plans that the legal entitlement will extend to the second poorest quintile – chiefly low income working families – and two year olds with special educational needs and disabilities. This will retain the primary focus on economic disadvantage, and extends the free places to almost all two year olds who are classed as being in poverty. Families who would have been eligible under the first phase will be eligible in the second phase. The Government plans to consult on eligibility criteria for the second phase in 2012.

The Evidence Base

There is a strong body of evidence that shows good quality childcare and pre-school provision, especially from age two upwards, has positive benefits on children's all round development and that these benefits last through primary school to age 10/11.ⁱ Most children who are developing well at the end of their early years go on to exceed expectations in reading and in maths at the end of Key Stage 1.ⁱⁱ These results also show that children in the lowest achieving fifth in terms of their learning and development at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) are six times more likely to be in the lowest fifth at Key Stage 1.ⁱⁱⁱ

The benefits of good quality pre-school education are especially important for disadvantaged children, as it boosts their development at start of school helping them to achieve and flourish through primary school.^{iv}

There is an achievement gap between the most disadvantaged children and their peers. For example, in 2009 only 35 per cent of children eligible for free school meals achieved a good level of development at age five, compared to 52 per cent nationally.^v Children in the second poorest quintile are also less likely to achieve a good level of development than better off peers; 54 per cent of children in the second lowest IDACI quintile achieve a good level of development at age five compared to 59 per cent of children nationally and 70 per cent for the most advantaged quintile^{vi}. These achievement gaps persist as children move through the education system. Children's experiences in their early years provide the essential foundations for both healthy development and their achievement through school.^{vii} A 2008 review of research has found^{viii} evidence that early years interventions can narrow the gap between disadvantaged and other children in terms of their cognitive development. This is also the case for social and behavioural development.^{ix}

One way of improving disadvantaged children's educational development is to increase their access to high quality childcare, particularly since they are currently much less likely to attend childcare than their peers^x. The evaluation of the early education for two year old children pilot^{xi} aimed at disadvantaged children (including low income working families) found that for children who attended high quality childcare^{xii} settings at age two, there was a positive impact on language ability and on parent-child relationships. The Effective Pre-School Education Study (2004)^{xiii} provides further evidence of the benefits of early entry into childcare, including greater cognitive gains and peer sociability, particularly where the childcare quality is high. Taken together, the evidence suggests early education could help increase educational attainment in later life. Higher attainment is associated with increased lifetime earnings and employment prospects.

Research also suggests that early education has a positive impact on the cognitive and social development of children with special educational needs or disabilities. The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE) study found that the social and behavioural benefits of pre-school education were higher for children with SEN.^{xiv} High quality early education also has wider benefits for children with SEND; it is one means of facilitating social inclusion and improving their well-being.^{xv}

An analysis of take-up of formal childcare by two year olds at the moment shows that take-up is lower amongst the more disadvantaged groups for whom it is more beneficial (compared to the richest quintile). Emerging evidence from several reports forming part of a series of Government commissioned surveys of parental views on and use of early education and childcare confirmed that the uptake of the three and four year old early education entitlement was lower among more disadvantaged communities, even though these parents clearly attached value to this opportunity^{xvi}. The introduction of free early education for disadvantaged two year olds is likely to boost the uptake by three and four year olds. This, coupled with the knowledge that an early introduction to pre-school education can improve cognitive and social outcomes for children, has made extending access to early education to disadvantaged children a Government priority.

Key Facts

The latest available national data shows that those children at particular risk of low achievement at age five include:

Children from some ethnic groups: At age five, pupils from African, African-Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds perform less well than other pupils. Overall, 50 per cent of all children achieve a good level of development, but for children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds the proportion is around 38 per cent, and those of African and African-Caribbean backgrounds it is around 42 per cent.

Children with special educational needs or disabilities: At age five, only 15 per cent of children with special educational needs achieve a good level of development, compared with 56 per cent of children who do not have special needs. The evaluation of the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) initiative found that parents of disabled children often face higher costs of early education and childcare^{xvii}.

The new early education entitlement for two year olds will be predominately targeted at families with a low household income. Recent research by the EHRC^{xviii} shows there are a higher proportion of families with an adult and/or child with a disability, and ethnic minority households, living with low household income.

We are consulting on the basis that children with special educational needs or disabilities will also receive the free entitlement from September 2014. In advance of 2014, we will suggest in guidance to local authorities that they seek to offer places to these children under local discretion.

Boys: By the age of five, girls' development is more advanced in 11 of the 13 assessment scales on the early years foundation stage (EYFS) profile, which covers social and emotional as well as cognitive areas of development. The gap is greatest in writing – nearly three quarters of girls (72 per cent) reach the expected level, but barely more than half (53 per cent) of boys.

Challenges and Opportunities

In the light of the evidence base set out above, this policy has significant potential to reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children from low income households and their more affluent peers, and to support the cognitive and social development of children with special educational needs or disabilities.

A higher proportion of ethnic minority households have a low household income. This policy is therefore also likely to remove barriers and provide better access to early education for children with disabilities and/or special educational needs and children from lower performing ethnic minorities.

Additional funding for the two year old places was announced in the Autumn Statement 2011, in recognition of the costs of extending the free places to around 260,000 children by 2014. The funding allocations gradually increase up to 2014-15; in advance of the new entitlement starting, local authorities can choose to use this funding to prepare for the new entitlement, for example by supporting quality improvements, and building up the number of free places.

The Government will fund ten local authority trials in 2012-13, in which free places will be delivered to all eligible children at a sub-local authority level, a year in advance of the first phase of the entitlement starting. The lessons learned – for example, around effective ways to expand provision and improve quality – will be disseminated to other local authorities. In addition, the Government will fund a National Support Contract from 2012-13, to support local authorities and providers to deliver the free places.

From September 2011, early years providers must complete a check of two year olds' development. This, coupled with the expansion of free early education places for two year olds is expected to help identify children with disabilities and special educational needs earlier. In addition, the Government plans to introduce single education, health and care plans for children with special educational needs or disabilities from 2014, to help coordinate additional support for these children.

Equality impact assessment

A positive impact is explicitly intended and very likely.

The extension of the free entitlement to early education has been designed to improve the development and educational attainment of disadvantaged two year olds, and – in the second phase – children with special educational needs or disabilities. Evidence suggests that targeting children from a low-income household is also disproportionately likely to reach children from an ethnic minority background, having a positive impact of their development and educational attainment. The potential of the policy to have a positive impact will be maximised by coordination with other key Foundation Years policies, such as the development check at age two and the intention to introduce single care plans for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The policy is also likely have an indirect positive impact on inequalities by:

- Improving opportunities for parents, particularly mothers from disadvantaged communities, to enter employment; and,
- Improving the capacity and quality of early education and childcare provision in deprived areas, creating employment opportunities for minority communities in those areas.

Next steps

The high level implementation timeline is as follows.

Year one (2011-12)

Consultation on two year old entitlement published
Impact Assessment and Equalities Assessment published
Funding for local authorities to improve capacity and quality

Year two (2012-13)

National Support Contract begins, and local authority trials.
Regulations laid in parliament

Year three (2013-14)

First phase of the entitlement comes into force: around 130,000 two year olds eligible for the free places.

Year four (2014-15)

Second phase of the entitlement comes into force: around 260,000 two year olds able to access the free places.

The impact of the policy will be reviewed as part of the (non-statutory) post legislative review of the Education Bill.

For the record

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ⁱ Sylva, K et al. The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project: Findings from the Early Primary Year. November 2004(b)

ⁱⁱ Department for Education (DfE) (2010) *Achievement of children in the EYFSP*, RR-034 London: DfE. To note that 94 percent of children who achieved a good level of development at the end of the EYFS in 2007 – as shown by their EYFS Profile results – went on to exceed expectations in reading and in maths at the end of Key Stage 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ DCSF (2008) *How strong is the relationship between Foundation Stage Profile (2005) and Key Stage 1 (2007)*, DEP2008-1634, Deposited in House of Commons Library

^{iv} Sammons, P et al. Effective pre-School and Primary Education 3-11 (EPPE 3-11): Influences on Children's Development and progress in Key Stage 2; Social/ behavioural Outcomes in Year 6. DCSF Research Report RR049. 2008

^v Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2010a. Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Achievement by Pupil Characteristics, England 2008/09. Statistical First Release 03/10

^{vi} <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000979/index.shtml>, p5

^{vii} Dyson, A. Hertzman, C. Roberts, H. Tunstill, J. and Vaghri, Z. (2009) *Childhood development, education and health inequalities, Report of task group, Submission to the Marmot Review*

^{viii} Springate, I., Atkinson, M., Straw, S., Lamont, E. and Grayson, H. (2008) *Narrowing the gap in outcomes: early years (0-5 years)*, Slough: NFER

^{ix} Springate, I., Atkinson, M., Straw, S., Lamont, E. and Grayson, H. (2008) *Narrowing the gap in outcomes: early years (0-5 years)*, Slough: NFER

^x Smith, R., Poole, E., Perry, J., Wolny, I. Reeves, A., and Bryson, C., with Coshall, C., d'Souza, J. (2009), 'Childcare and early years survey of parents 2009', DfE Research Report

^{xi} Smith, R., Purdon, S., Schneider, V., La Valle, I., Wollny, I., Owen, R. and Bryson, C. (2009), 'Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children Evaluation', DCFS Research Report RR134

^{xii} No impact was detected for childcare as a whole.

^{xiii} Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. (2004), 'The effective provision of pre-school education (EPPE) project: final report', DfES

^{xiv} K Sylva et al. The Effective Pre-school and Primary Education 3-11 Project (EPPE 3-11). 'Report from the Primary Phase: Pre-school, School and Family Influences on Children's Development during Key Stage 2 (Age 7-11)'. DCSF Research Report 061.

^{xv} 'Aiming High for Disabled Children', HM Treasury/ DfES, 2007

^{xvi} Fitzgerald et al. (2002); Bell and Finch (2003)

^{xvii} D. Abbott, 'Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH): a qualitative evaluation', Department for Education Research Report, 2010.

^{xviii} 'How Fair is Britain? The First Triennial Review', Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010