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Foreword

By The Right Honourable Jack Straw MP



Jack Straw MP

Supporting Families sets out the Government's proposals for a package of practical measures to increase the support available to families.

The document looks at five key areas in which the Government could make a real difference.

These were:

- *better services and support to parents*
- *better financial support to families*
- *helping families balance work and home*
- *strengthening marriage, and*
- *better support for serious family problems.*

We received over 1,000 responses to the consultation exercise from a wide range of interests. I am pleased to say that the majority of responses were generally supportive of our proposals to strengthen family life. It was clear that a large proportion of respondents had first hand experience of the pressures facing families on a daily basis, and were drawing on many years of practice and expertise in their responses to the proposals.

Increasing the services and support available to families is not something which the Government can achieve on its own. The reaction to the document underlines the enthusiasm and commitment of all those with an interest, from parents to health professionals, to work with the Government to develop a coherent policy on family support.

My colleagues and I have been delighted with the tremendous written response to the consultation exercise and with the many individual responses we have personally received from families in our constituencies and throughout the country.

This publication gives an overview of the responses we received and provides a valuable insight into the excellent work that is already being undertaken to support families across the country. Many responses included detailed and thoughtful suggestions about how best the Government could implement the proposals in *Supporting Families*. We plan a conference on 15 June to discuss some of the issues raised by the responses and the Ministerial Group on the Family will take forward further work on these proposals. Our work on family policy is not complete, *Supporting Families* was a beginning and there is much more to be done.

In the meantime thank you to everyone who took the time and trouble to respond to the consultation document.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jack Straw', with a stylized, cursive script.

The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP

Home Secretary and Chairman of the Ministerial
Group on the Family

Introduction

1. *Supporting Families* was published in November 1998. It is the work of the Ministerial Group on the Family which was set up by the Prime Minister in September 1997 to develop a coherent Government strategy to increase the support and help available to families. **The consultation did not extend to Scotland.**

2. *Supporting Families* outlines the progress which had already been made in implementing this strategy, for example, by improving financial support available to families and in establishing a legislative framework for family-friendly employment rights. The consultation asked for views on twenty questions under the themes of better services and support for parents, helping families balance work and home, strengthening marriage, and better support for serious family problems.

3. Over 6,000 copies of the full document were sent to local authorities, local education authorities, relevant health and social services bodies and professional organisations, national and local voluntary and community organisations involved in family support, relevant criminal justice agencies and professionals and individuals. Over 3,000 people accessed *Supporting Families* on the Home Office website, and 150,000 summary leaflets were distributed to local Citizens' Advice Bureaux, libraries, surgeries, post offices and community centres. As promised in *Supporting Families* we have quoted in this summary of responses only from those responses where there was not a specific request not to do so.

4. *Supporting Families* states that the Government wants to build on existing family support and to

strengthen the capacity of existing organisations to provide services to families. The responses show that there is already a great deal of good work being carried out across the country. For example:

■ *In areas such as Belfast and Liverpool, midwives have developed impressive outreach projects which use shop fronts and other community settings to offer maternity services to young, homeless and/or drug using women.*

Royal College of Midwives

■ *Portsmouth City Council funds a local 24 hour domestic violence helpline which provides an immediate point of contact and information and is staffed by female volunteers. A highly successful radio advert campaign over the Christmas period which publicised the helpline number resulted in a doubling of calls to the helpline.*

Portsmouth City Council

■ *Pen Green Family Centre in Corby has worked with fathers and mothers showing how children learn through 'schemas' which are repeated patterns of play. Some Pen Green parents have become very engaged in discovering the way in which their children learn, and this has made them acutely aware of their child's needs.*

The Children's Society

■ *CARE has recently launched a Remand Fostering project which seeks to provide young people with a stable environment that is designed to facilitate positive*

development. This is achieved through the provision of short-term placements within families to support young people remanded to local authority accommodation.

Christian Action Research Education

- Several of the responses say that the 'Baby Doll' project which helps young people become more aware of the demands of being a parent is very effective.

Camden Youth Service has been working with the Camden and Islington Community NHS Trust to develop work with young people on parenting. This includes using realistic 'dolls' that cry and require regular attention. The young people are required to care for the dolls over a weekend period and experience the realities of caring for a young child. So far none of the young people have wanted to keep the baby! and have reported a much better understanding of the responsibilities of parenting.

The London Borough of Camden

- Other responses mention Age Concern's TransAge Action project which encourages older people to contribute to the lives of children and young people.
- A number of responses from a variety of professional backgrounds praise "Brief Encounters" - a training programme run by One Plus One to equip professionals working with families to respond effectively and appropriately when relationship difficulties are disclosed by a client.

- Several responses from health visitors mention that the Edinburgh postnatal depression score programme is used effectively in their area to help identify new mothers who need extra support and to provide appropriate help.

Overview

5. We received over 1,000 responses to the consultation.

Responses to Supporting Families by category:

Health professionals/NHS Trusts	266
Local Authorities/Councils	51
Education professionals/LEAs	20
Voluntary organisations	170
Local Authorities/Registrars	72
Faith Groups	48
Trade Unions	7
Criminal justice agencies/professionals	18
Employers	8
Individuals	416
Lawyers	1
TOTAL	1077

6. The consultation exercise was welcomed by many of those who responded. The following are comments from a few:

*The **Methodist Church** very much welcomes... the document's realism, which does not suggest family life is easy... the sensitivity to the shifting boundaries between the public and the private, and the awareness that not all intervention is appropriate, but the identification of five areas where it is appropriate for the government to intervene.*

*The **Family Proceedings Committee of the Magistrates' Association** applauds the Home Office in this new initiative and welcomes the recognition that the family is the 'nub' of society, and in some instances particular families need as much support and encouragement as it is possible to provide. Parenting is a skill which forms the basis of happy and secure members of society and from which the next generation will develop.*

***Parent Network** is delighted that the Government has published a paper giving such a positive message about the need to support the family. It is also pleased that the initiatives described in the paper aim to meet parents' needs in a more holistic way than has been possible previously.*

Key messages

7. Some of the key messages from the responses are:

- Those who responded welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the

Government's family policy. Support for families is a sensitive area which requires careful consideration, but the responses identify plenty of areas in which Government action would be beneficial.

- The majority of the responses welcome the establishment of a National Family and Parenting Institute and a national helpline for parents. A number of the responses say it will be important for the Institute and helpline to work closely with existing providers of family support and to avoid the danger of duplicating work.
- The vast majority of those who responded agree that health visitors have a valuable role to play in providing support to families. Health visitors in many parts of the country are already providing numerous elements of the expanded service proposed in the consultation document. A number of responses also highlight the valuable work of school nurses in supporting families with school-aged children.
- The key role that grandparents and other older people can play in helping young families is welcomed, although a number of the responses warn about generalising in this area, since relationships between parents and grandparents vary considerably between individual families.
- Many of the responses recognise that family-friendly employment practices need to be encouraged in the interests of both businesses and their workforce. Some of the responses give examples of the ways in which a long working hours culture makes it difficult for both

men and women to spend quality time with their families. Some give examples of how their employer's flexible approach to working conditions allows them to overcome these problems.

- There was widespread support for the proposal to introduce a statement of rights and responsibilities for those planning to marry or cohabit. Many of those who responded agree it would be helpful for registrars to provide information to couples choosing a civil ceremony, but that registrars should refer couples to other sources of advice, rather than developing a counselling role.
- There was general support for the proposals on information meetings and the division of property on divorce, although some people express the hope that work to implement these provisions would not lead to delays in the implementation of the provisions in Part II of the Family Law Act 1996.
- A number of responses highlight teenage pregnancy as a particular cause of concern, but stress the need to look for solutions which address the more complex reasons behind young women becoming pregnant.

Better Services and Support for Parents

1.1 Many of the responses we received say that, although there are examples of good practice around the country, there is a lot more which could be done to help parents. Chapter One was criticised by some who responded because it did not address the specific needs of particular groups of parents, for example parents within minority ethnic communities, parents of children with special needs, and parents who have a disability or special needs themselves:

Forum members are concerned that there is insufficient information and support available to help particularly vulnerable parents... The statutory services (services provided by central or local government) are, in general, poorly funded and unwilling to address their complex requirements and many professionals are ill-equipped (in terms of training, expertise and resources) to resolve their problems.

Parenting Education and Support Forum

1.2 Some of the responses feel that too much emphasis was placed on problem-solving, at the expense of celebrating the positive side of family life, and the universal need to encourage strong families:

We would urge the Government to avoid any implication in its policy presentation that interest in families is focused on their failings, or that children are only acknowledged when they are a cause for concern. It is important to recognise that children, young people and their parents are

part of the solution to youth crime, drug misuse, school-age pregnancy and low achievement in schools as well as part of those problems.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Recognition that parenting is challenging and worthwhile is important. As is recognising that parents who seek help are good parents.

Mrs W Parker

1.3 The Government specifically sought views on:

Question 1:

The Government-funded programme of activities proposed for the National Family and Parenting Institute.

A National Family and Parenting Institute is supported by 92 per cent of those who responded. The Institute's independent status is welcomed by many, but some are worried that, as a charity, it would be required to raise funds from other sources to take forward its work, though others recognise that this will be important to secure its independence. It will be important that the Institute does not duplicate the work of existing organisations and that it develops effective links with a wide range of existing sources of support for families. It was generally agreed that the Institute should focus on supporting organisations working with families, rather than providing direct services for parents.

We need to ensure that every parent has access to the advice, support and services they need

1.4 Some of the responses say the new Institute should focus on the parenting role of men. The Institute's role in promoting research and mapping the availability of existing provision is particularly welcome.

Traditionally parenting was considered to be a private issue with support coming only from the extended family. Although this is no longer appropriate, due to lifestyle changes, people may often feel that they have failed if they need help with parenting. There must be no stigma in seeking support with parenting. The National Family and Parenting Institute needs to promote support so that it is seen as a responsible and caring option, accessible to all parents. The complexities of parenting need to be recognised and celebrated.

The Children's Society

Question 2:

How best to disseminate information helpful to parents.

1.5 Many of the responses said it would be important to find effective ways of getting information to families whose first language is not English, or who prefer alternatives to written information. Many of the responses recognise that health professionals are a key source of information and support. They are able to provide information relating to the specific circumstances of the parent and the family.

1.6 The media, and in particular soap operas, play an important role in spreading messages about

family life, and many of those who responded feel it is important to find ways of working with the media to help ensure that the information and messages given are accurate and positive. The internet could also be a helpful way of sharing information.

1.7 Many people express concern about the use of commercial companies to promote information to parents, particularly in cases where the companies are linked to the promotion of products which are not recommended by health professionals.

1.8 Responses also point out that there is scope for greater use of community facilities and networks to get information to the grass roots. Direct contact and word of mouth are effective ways of spreading information. Peer education and support groups and community family groups are also effective ways of reaching people. Supermarkets are also focal points within the community and there is potential for using them to get information to parents.

Disseminate helpful information to parents via leaflets issued with Child Benefit payments and at health checks on pre-schoolers.

Mrs Sarah Ashton

It is essential that the information is of really high quality. If this is achieved, statutory and voluntary agencies will fall over themselves to acquire and disseminate it. Information should be available at schools and GP surgeries, since parents often approach teachers and doctors about problems at home. More informal, community based routes are needed to reach

socially excluded and vulnerable families.

NCH Action For Children

Question 3:

The scope of the service which is to be offered by the proposed national helpline.

1.9 There is widespread support for the development of a national helpline for parents. The helpline will need to work with other voluntary and professional agencies to refer people to local sources of information and support. Responses also suggest that volunteers involved with the helpline ought to be well trained and the information held by the helpline will need to be regularly reviewed and updated. Local services also ought to be made aware of the need to provide information to the helpline.

We believe that the national helpline should try to encourage parents to develop closer links within their own communities, finding support nearby rather than calling a distant 'expert'. The helpline's emphasis should continue to be on listening to the caller, diffusing crisis situations and enabling the parent to make informed choices.

Christian Action Research and Education (CARE)

1.10 A significant number of responses express concern that the helpline would only be open from 8.00 am to 10.00 pm, as family crises might well happen outside these hours. The advice given should be culturally appropriate and accessible in the caller's first language.

The evidence around the use of telephone helplines and black communities suggests that

there are barriers to accessing these services.

Issues such as language and who is providing the advice do limit access. However there are also examples where such barriers can be minimised, and telephone helplines can provide an effective service. Two such examples are:

- *the service developed by BT which provides customer service operators from a range of ethnic groups, speaking a range of community languages*
- *the work carried out by Childline to make their service accessible to black children. In fact they now report that 30-40 per cent of their callers are black.*

The Government needs to consider the lessons learnt and strategies developed by other agencies who have sought to establish a similar service.

REU (Race Equality Unit, voluntary organisation)

1.11 Health professionals highlight the need for the helpline to develop effective links with NHS Direct, and to establish the type of calls which would be referred from one helpline to the other.

Question 4:

Whether it would be helpful for the work of health visitors to have a broader focus on supporting parents and on the possible components for a pilot programme.

1.12 While the majority of responses support the proposals to expand the role of health visitors, many of those responding suggest that there would have to be a substantial increase in the number of health visitors.

As the professional Association representing 90 per cent of Health Visitors, the Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA) especially welcomes the government's recognition of the universal, non-judgmental, non-stigmatising nature of health visiting work... The profession looks forward to piloting new ways of working, developing interagency links building not just on the strengths of family, but on the strengths of other agencies to give families the support they need.

The CPHVA welcomes the Government's commitment to "consider allocating further resources for the recruitment and training of further new Health Visitors." It is the Association's belief that urgent action needs to be taken to address not just the need to train new Health Visitors but, where possible, to retain the existing workforce.

Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA)

1.13 Many health visitors and other health professionals say that health visitors in their area are already providing some, if not all, of the elements of the proposed expanded role. Many said that the document did not fully reflect the extent of health visitors' current work with families. But the majority of health visitors welcome the proposed opportunity to focus more specifically on work with families and to develop further the services on offer.

1.14 Some of those who responded are concerned about the financial implications of the proposals. Some stress that sufficient funding would have to be made available for the recruitment and training of new health visitors, while others say that there could

be difficulty balancing existing priorities with the additional workload which the proposals would create.

1.15 Some health visitors feel there could be a conflict between emphasising the health visitor's role in working with families in a community setting and the need for health visitors to provide more primary healthcare support, for example by giving immunisations in surgeries. A number of responses raise the possibility of greater specialisation within the health visiting profession, suggesting that this would be a means of overcoming tensions of this sort, while increasing the opportunities for the career development of health visitors.

1.16 Some responses also highlight the important role which health visitors play in supporting the families of children with special needs. Responses also mention the health visitor's role in tackling health inequalities and say it will be important for the enhanced role of health visitors to be innovative rather than prescriptive.

1.17 Many school nurses highlight their valuable work with families. Some health visitors also mention the work of school nurses. School nurses do much more than give advice on specific issues such as settling children in school. The majority of school nurses who responded say that they have a high level of contact with the families of children in the schools they cover, and emphasise that they are well placed to give support to families on a broad range of health and welfare issues. Some express reservations about expanding the role of health visitors to cover school age children - this was seen as unnecessary duplication of responsibility; although

many agree that health visitors and school nurses need to work closely.

We are delighted to see that the needs of parents are being recognised. It has certainly been an area of concern for school nurses for some time. As Community School Nurses, we would very much wish to have a significant role alongside health visitors, working with children, parents and schools. We should like to develop our long established role which we know is valued by parents, teachers and young people. We believe we can contribute to your ideas and we are increasing our role in health promotion and mental health... As qualified nurses with specialist training in the health needs of school age children we are uniquely placed to offer a holistic approach.

Community School Nurses, Wokingham Hospital

Question 5:

Ways of improving parental involvement in children's education, parental support for schools and schools' support for parents.

1.18 Schools are an important community resource but many responses say that schools are not as accessible to parents as they could be. A 'them and us' culture can exist, despite schools trying to involve parents on a more regular basis. Some suggest that using school premises more often for out of school (extra curricular) activities would help to reduce these barriers. School-based family literacy schemes are seen as valuable, although some note the importance of encouraging parents to become involved with their children's learning before they reach school age.

Health visitors could become involved by letting parents know about parent and toddler reading schemes in the area. The value of effective links between health visitors and local playgroups was also mentioned.

The Children's Society has launched a 'cradle club' initiative in Walsall which encourages and supports parents and their babies to join in a local group at the library, and to read aloud to their baby... Through our nine month involvement in this group we have seen many positive changes... The babies, now mostly approaching their first year, are attentive to the story, enjoy the onomatopoeic sounds and repetitions, are aware of their peers and enjoy the increased contact, both physical and emotional, with their parent. Their carers, mostly mothers, have also learnt a valued skill, which they continue to use outside the group setting.

The Children's Society

Looking at Learning Together, which was supported in its development stage by Marks and Spencer - is a pack of materials comprising six two hour sessions designed to be delivered by pre-school staff, tutors, teachers or group leaders to groups of parents. It aims to help individual parents and carers explore with other parents what parenting involves, and how young children learn in the early years... Throughout, the pack encourages parents to think about themselves as learners and to consider opportunities for further learning for themselves.

Pre-school Learning Alliance

Question 6:

The best way to develop education on parental responsibility in schools.

I.19 Several responses say that education about parental responsibility is most effective when it is delivered in conjunction with parents. Some people believe that it is best provided by people other than school staff: for example it could include visits by the parents of young babies. The role of school nurses is again highlighted in this area.

I.20 Many responses suggest that education on parental responsibility needs to start in primary schools, and to continue throughout secondary schools. There is widespread support for its inclusion in the National Curriculum. Some suggest that it could be a part of A level general studies course. There is a view that sex education should be broadened to look at wider relationship issues. Some responses suggest that there is scope for more imaginative use of the arts (for example drama) to help students develop relationship skills.

NSPCC welcomes the Government's focus on developing education on parental responsibility in schools. We believe that family life education is key to changing attitudes and behaviour about relationships and parenting, and to reducing child abuse. Within this context, we believe that family life education should be an integral part of the National Curriculum, and are pleased that the Government intends to implement this in the year 2000. However, we also feel strongly that there must be more teaching time and emphasis within the curriculum on family life education for this to be of real benefit.

NSPCC

I think that having parenting classes is a good idea in school years... Girls and boys need to know how it feels to be a parent because once a child is born, you can't afford to make any mistakes. I think that it should be available in schools and colleges and elsewhere. It is a great idea and it can get teenagers used to the commitment and responsibility of being a parent.

Miss K Semeniuk, Blurton High School

Question 7:

The support which might be provided for grandparents, including:

- ***the best way to involve grandparents in children's education and how best to involve older volunteers in schools***

I.21 The Government's recognition of the role that grandparents and older people can play in children's education was welcomed by many of the responses, but a number say that we should not assume that grandparents are always able to offer the support needed. They are concerned that some grandparents might not be the right people to provide support, particularly if they have not been able to provide it to their own children. Other responses point out that many grandparents today are comparatively young and still in full-time employment, so they might not be able to play a very active role in supporting their grandchildren.

I.22 However, many people see scope for the involvement of older volunteers, including grandparents, as classroom helpers, provided that adequate child protection safeguards were in place.

Older people are a real resource which even now is largely untapped. In the ten years since its inception, CSV's Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme has involved and continues to involve several thousand older volunteers, many grandparents among them, in helping children with their reading in schools... Local authorities have in fact requested RSVP's help in progressing this year's National Year of Reading.

Community Service Volunteers (CSV)

■ **best practice for grandparents as foster carers**

I.23 Few people address this question. A few suggest that greater recognition of the role of grandparents among employers would be helpful. Others refer to personal difficulties in obtaining contact with their grandchildren, often as a result of family breakdown, and question whether more might be done to support continuing contact when it is in the interests of the child or children.

■ **the involvement of the health visitor**

I.24 A number of health visitors say they encourage the involvement of grandparents where appropriate, for example by opening ante-natal classes to grandparents. Others mention that their wider duties bring them into regular contact with older people, many of whom are grandparents who want to discuss concerns about family issues such as contact with their grandchildren.

■ **the need to consider wider family needs when allocating housing**

I.25 Of those who responded, 34 per cent specifically agree that it would be helpful for local housing authorities to take the wider family's needs into account when allocating housing.

Members... are well aware of the importance of safe, secure and affordable housing in underpinning family life. Poor housing and homelessness damages family life in many ways... We support the proposal to recommend that allocation schemes for social housing give due weight to the housing needs of family members who can give support to their relatives.

Chartered Institute of Housing

I.26 A number of those who responded also mention the problem of finding appropriate housing in their area:

There is also an issue about the housing stock and its suitability for older people. Older people whose family has left home often remain in large, family sized council houses because there is a shortage of the kind of housing they seek. Two bedroom bungalows that, for example, allow grandchildren to stop over, are particularly sought after in some areas. Under current funding arrangements, these are difficult for social landlords to develop. Providing such housing would enable the older person to move into more suitable accommodation, while at the same time freeing up much needed family sized housing.

Chartered Institute of Housing

Question 8:

Ways in which the wider community could be encouraged to assist families and nurture family life in their neighbourhood.

I.27 Some responses highlight the role that the wider community can play in supporting families.

An increasing number of older adults without children would like to see a role for themselves in helping to bring up a new generation, as part of their contribution to the future. With careful vetting, including police checks, this should be perfectly viable... It should be emphasised that successful child rearing is the responsibility of the community as a whole.

Encouraging parents to help at school events is already widespread. It would be good to see this extended to fathers, grandparents and other older people who have skills that will be very pertinent in the classroom.

Age Concern

I.28 Some responses suggest that local neighbourhoods need to become family-friendly. Parks and playground facilities need to be available as well as crèche facilities at shopping centres and supermarkets.

I.29 Affordable and accessible public transport was also mentioned by a number of people as a way of reducing isolation and helping parents to access the support available within the community.

Transport is a big problem within our community, with many women unable to access services as a result. Community transport schemes are very

scarce, but would benefit the local population enormously and would enable socially isolated people to benefit from services provided at local health centres and community venues.

A group of Health Visitors from North Birmingham

I.30 A number of responses note the valuable work of faith groups within local communities, both by providing support such as parent and toddler groups, and in creating a network of cross-generational support by bringing together people of all ages within the community. Many of the responses urge the Government to work with faith communities to promote the development of this support.

We were disappointed not to see some reference in the document to the valuable role played by faith communities in providing support services to families. In a multicultural society, such key resources should not be marginalised but encouraged into active partnerships with government and others to enhance their opportunities to strengthen family life.

National Council of Voluntary Childcare Organisations (NCVCCO)

I.31 Others point out however, that these groups often work with scant resources and rely on the goodwill of volunteers. It will be important to take these limitations into account when developing support strategies which include faith groups.

Better Financial Support for Families

2.1 Chapter Two summarises the Government's reforms of the tax and benefits systems to ensure that families get the help they need. It covers policies which are already being implemented, there are therefore no specific consultation questions in this chapter.

2.2 A number of the responses make general points about financial support to families, and on the advantages and disadvantages of using financial policy to strengthen marriage. Many of the responses which support the document's emphasis on marriage believe that this is considerably undermined by the fact that the measures outlined in Chapter Two do not give extra financial support to married couples. Some suggest that, as a minimum, it should not be financially disadvantageous to be married.

We are disappointed at the way increased Child Benefit will be funded by reducing or abolishing the Married Couples Allowance. In our opinion, this gives the wrong message to society from a fiscal point of view, that marriage has no benefit. In fact the opposite is true. The married couple represents a fundamental unit with which government can relate at many different life stages. Unless the Married Couples Allowance is replaced by other fiscal indications of the importance of marriage, there will be increased ambivalence and confusion of the real message government wishes to give.

Jewish Marriage Council

We are concerned that despite Government acknowledgements about the importance of strengthening marriage, the current tax and benefits systems and proposals continue to undermine marriage and disadvantage married families. Whilst we welcome the additional support for families provided in the Budgets of 1998 and 1999, the proposals as they stand do not support marriage and still leave many families bearing a disproportionate share of the tax burden. We believe that if the Government as a whole wishes to be taken seriously about its desire to strengthen marriage, financial support measures need to acknowledge the significance of marriage, alongside other practical proposals.

The desire to strengthen marriage is inconsistent with the proposals to finance the increase in child benefit and the creation of the new Children's Tax Credit by ending the Marriage Couples Allowance (MCA). The MCA is the only recognition of marriage in the income tax system and through its removal the message that taxpayers receive is that the Government does not value marriage.

Care (Christian Action, Research & Education)

We need to improve family prosperity and reduce child poverty

2.3 But many other responses support the Government's intention to target help at the families which are in greatest need, and agree that this should be regardless of family structure.

We approve the trend in fiscal policy from a married person's tax allowance towards increased child benefit... We are not persuaded in principle that there should be a married person's tax allowance, since... it derives from a very different era and does not necessarily strengthen contemporary marriage. If the choice is between treating the married couple as one unit for the purposes of taxation or as two, we incline to the latter. It is not appropriate to use a fiscal stick or carrot to sustain the institution of marriage. There are other more suitable ways to strengthen it.

United Reform Church

Helping Families Balance Work and Home

3.1 Chapter Three asks for views on helping families cope with the pressures of balancing work and home. It asked employees and employers how family-friendly employment policies could be put into practice.

Question 9:

Information from employers about the ways in which they have introduced family-friendly employment policies and their views on what works.

3.2 Only a small number of employers responded to this question. However, as the Government takes forward work on family-friendly employment, it is consulting closely with employers. Some of the employers who responded said that making family-friendly working conditions a reality is as much about changing the culture in the work place as about policies on paper. Employers need to make clear to their employees that taking up family-friendly work practices will not be seen as showing a lack of commitment to their job.

3.3 Employers also say that bringing in family-friendly work practices has had a positive effect on their workforces while also benefiting the business:

The development of family-friendly initiatives has been found to support recruitment, but more importantly they aid retention. They encourage and permit individuals to work who might

otherwise be lost to the job market. Their success is however partially dependent on having a core workforce receptive to such arrangements, and for this reason positive marketing is important.

Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust

3.4 Several employers told us about new ways of working that they had introduced to help their employees to balance work and home:

We are committed to implementing family-friendly employment policies and after conducting employee focus groups... have established two family-friendly practices. TIME TO CARE is a family-friendly employment practice which enables all employees up to ten unpaid days a year to attend to family or personal issues. This practice was introduced in January 1998 and enjoys high uptake among our employees. FREEDOM ON FRIDAY is an initiative that offers employees on a monthly basis to start the weekend at 1.00 pm on Friday (providing that their contractual hours are met). This practice offers the opportunity for employees to spend a more prolonged period of time with their families at the weekend.

Johnson and Johnson

Question 10:

Views from employees about the main difficulties they experience in balancing

We need to make it easier for parents to spend more time with their children

work and family life and the family-friendly practices they believe are helpful.

3.5 Several responses say that family-friendly practices must be designed to cover both men and women. The major problem facing employees is the 'long hours culture', which affects both men and women.

*The long hours culture is endemic in many employment sectors and causes a number of problems for working parents. **Time, Work and the Family**, a research report published by Parents at Work in November 1995 revealed, for example, 64 per cent of those surveyed said that they did not see enough of their children; and almost two-thirds reported that their partners also worked long hours, making it hard for them to spend time together. Almost all of the sample (96 per cent) cited 'pressure of workload' as at least one of the reasons for working long hours. However... 55 per cent of those who do work long hours said 'workplace' culture' and a further 35 per cent gave direct pressure from line management as the reason.*

Parents at Work

I support your drive for more family-friendly employment practices. The wiser employers realise that it means happier, less stressed employees who are thus going to be more productive and if they see the company helping them: more loyal.

Mr Alain Williams

3.6 Some of the responses suggest that it is important that employers are flexible when parents have unexpected problems at home, such as having to pick up a sick child from school. Others recognise that there could be a difficulty matching the employees' need for flexibility with the employers' need for an efficient, reliable workforce.

3.7 A third key issue is the need for reliable public transport to help parents combine work with dropping and collecting children from school - for example, the best laid plans for combining work and home can be completely undermined by a late-running bus or train.

3.8 *Prima* magazine ran a survey in response to *Supporting Families* in December 1998. Readers were asked to identify the main difficulty they experience in balancing work and family life and what would be the best way for the Government to help. Among the readers who responded (670), the biggest single difficulty was not having enough time. They felt that the best way the Government could help was through support for child care.

Question 11:

Views on how best to take forward an awareness and promotional campaign (such as the value and operation of a national award or accreditation scheme for employers); and an effective monitoring and evaluation strategy.

3.9 There was general support for an awareness campaign to promote family-friendly employment.

We believe that an awareness raising campaign would be of great value in overcoming barriers to progress. Such a campaign would need to highlight the potential benefits to employers of implementing family-friendly policies, including:

- *reduced rates of sickness absence*
- *increased staff morale and loyalty*
- *improved performance*
- *increased retention of existing staff*
- *reduced retraining costs*
- *reduced rates of reported stress and anxiety*
- *enhanced company image*
- *ability to attract and retain high quality staff.*

Health Education Authority

3.10 Some of the responses suggest linking an awareness campaign with a 'national family week', as a way to focus employers' attention on the issue. Some note the positive effect of Investors in People and suggest the development of an 'Investors in Families' scheme along similar lines. A few of those who responded are doubtful about whether an award scheme would have any significant impact on the ground. Others say that an award scheme could work if enough attention was paid to proper monitoring and evaluation of the entries:

National awards or accreditation schemes, such as the Parents at Work Award, can raise the profile of family-friendly policies and help to set a benchmark. However, there is always a risk that they will reward employment policies which may not in reality be translated into good employment practices from the employee's perspective. An effective monitoring and

evaluation strategy therefore has to concentrate on the effect on the employee, rather than the intention of the employer.

PricewaterhouseCoopers

Question 12:

Views on how to make public services more family-friendly.

3.11 Many responses suggest that opening times and appointment systems for public services ought to better reflect the realities of modern family life.

Most public services from the utilities to doctors, schools, trades people and those repairing domestic equipment still work on the assumption that there is a woman at home at all hours of the day to provide access and supervision to the home or to meet appointments. There needs to be some awareness that in the majority of households this is no longer the case. More flexible hours, precise appointment times and services offered at a range of times and venues would help lone parents and in particular working lone parents... The assumption that children may also be consumers and regular service users might help to improve many services, shops and public spaces. One helpful example here is IKEA with its children's facilities.

National Council for One Parent Families

3.12 Some responses suggest that childcare facilities should be provided on-site, but recognise that there are also wider issues about family-friendly public services, which need to be carefully thought through:

If more employers set up crèche provision, the logistics of getting to work with young children will need to improve. At present, access to over- and underground train platforms is difficult and buses can be hazardous for people travelling with pushchairs or buggies. Access to buildings is also difficult for parents with young children. One-stop shops reduce the need to go from department to department, but long queues can still be a nightmare. It would be useful to have child-sized chairs so that parents do not have to discuss their business with children on their laps. Appointment times should fit in with family commitments, for example collecting children from school, and should be punctual.

British Association for Early Childhood Education

Strengthening Marriage

4.1 Many of the responses welcome the Government's commitment to address an extremely sensitive issue, but some feel that the proposals will not strengthen marriage sufficiently. A similar number feel that the Government has focused too heavily on marriage at the expense of other relationships.

We are concerned about the primacy given to marriage as the 'surest foundation for raising children'. This statement will tend to devalue and even demonise other family circumstances which often provide very positive and appropriate environments for children. Usually single parents have not chosen to be in this very demanding situation. We feel emphasis should be on the fact that there are many successful ways of raising children and not a single monolith.

National Deaf Children's Society

Surely a family which is strong and stable, nurturing and caring for the children irrespective of whether marriage exists or not, should be applauded as an example of success.

Public and Commercial Services Union

We broadly welcome the document and whilst we have reservations about some of its contents, we are extremely pleased to see that the government recognises that the whole future of our country is bound up with the stability and wellbeing of marriage and family life.

Patrick & Pauline Haynes

4.2 Of the more than 1,000 responses overall a smaller proportion were directed specifically to the questions in this chapter. We have therefore indicated the number of responses in favour or against these proposals.

Question 13:

The idea of introducing a statement of rights and responsibilities to be given to all people planning to marry; and providing a similar statement to those who co-habit.

4.3 The majority of those who responded to this question (143) agree this would be helpful. Many suggest that couples are often unaware of the practical implications of differences in legal status between married and unmarried couples. Fifty two people who responded rejected the proposal.

Question 14:

What sort of advice might be provided for couples before marriage and how the availability of this advice might best be promoted.

4.4 Most of the responses welcome the development of information packs by voluntary marriage support organisations, to be given to couples by registration officers. Suggestions for the content of these packs include:

We need to protect the interests of children by strengthening marriage and reducing the risks of family breakdown

- information on the legal rights and responsibilities of married couples
- actions which can or should be taken, such as the re-registration of the birth of children
- information on the legal status of children born inside and outside marriage
- the legal requirements for marriage
- information about the ceremony, including how to involve the family (particularly children of a previous marriage)
- advice on the effect which marriage may have on a relationship
- guidance on steps which might be taken in the event of a serious problem (such as abuse) arising
- information on sources of help on financial and emotional matters
- information on property rights, inheritance and investments, including issues such as joint bank accounts
- guidance on names (particularly on the options for the children where stepfamilies are being created).

4.5 A number of responses highlight the value of marriage preparation classes and in particular the work of churches and voluntary organisations in providing them.

We feel that getting married and then having children are two of the biggest changes in our lives. We had no teaching on either, at school or since, until we went on a parenting course last year. We found this most helpful, as would a lot of other parents. We feel marriage preparation

courses and parenting courses should be more readily available and more should be taught in secondary schools, even if briefly and simply, on these issues.

Mr & Mrs C Hughes

We believe that marriage preparation is valuable, and is especially drawn upon in the early stages of a couple's marriage. However, we are aware that this is a subjective view, not backed up by systematic research. Academically rigorous evaluation of marriage preparation would be helpful to those trying to offer it, not least as a guide to 'what works best'.

Churches Together for Families

Question 15:

The desirability of allowing couples to make written agreements dealing with their financial affairs on divorce and the safeguards which would lead to an agreement not being legally binding.

4.6 The 157 people who responded to this question are divided in their opinions: 80 agree it would be helpful to allow nuptial agreements to be legally binding; 77 felt that this would foster negative expectations on the part of those contemplating marriage. The response from the Women's National Commission is illustrative of those expressing reservations:

Our member organisations have mixed views on the concept of a pre-nuptial agreement. Where support was expressed it was muted, with doubts

as to the value of a document that does not reflect changes in circumstances that occur after marriage. It was also commented that, if the value of the agreement is in the reduction of conflict on a break-up, this is most valuable where there are children of the marriage. But this is a circumstance where the agreement would not be binding. One organisation expressed support for the proposal with the safeguards described in the consultation document. Several organisations were more vehemently against the proposal, particularly because of the perception that this would imply countenancing the break-up of a marriage before the marriage contract had been entered into.

Women's National Commission

Question 16:

The proposals for changes in practice at register offices and whether changes to the law on these issues would be appropriate:

- ***superintendent registrars providing more information and support to couples in preparing for marriage (including providing information in register offices in the form of marriage preparation packs, and giving couples information on pre-marriage support services)***

4.7 We received 190 responses to this question. Of these, 138 support the proposal and said they would be willing to distribute such information. However, many stress that registration officers themselves should not be expected to provide advice or support to couples, but simply to refer them to written information or local support services.

- ***requiring both partners in a couple to attend the register office to give notice of marriage***

4.8 We received 139 responses to this question. Of those who responded, 117 agree that requiring both partners to attend the register office would be helpful in establishing that both are willing and legally able to marry; 22 were not in favour. A number of the responses suggest that this proposal might have resource implications, since there could be increased demand for register offices to be open outside normal office hours to give couples the opportunity to attend together.

We were unanimous in the proposal for both parties in a couple to attend the Register Office to give a notice of marriage. A large proportion also felt that each party to the marriage should give a notice of marriage... Others felt that this could result in undue financial burden in some cases and create difficulties in others because of employment abroad. However, on balance it was felt that it would show individual commitment to the marriage and doubtless procedures could be devised to accommodate extenuating circumstances.

Society of Registration Officers

4.9 Many of the responses express reservations about changing the requirement for notice of marriage to be given to the registrar of the district(s) where the couples live: they suggest that this would be a backward step in combating illegal and bogus marriages, and would make checking records more difficult. But some responses do support the idea of allowing notice to be given in the district where the wedding was to take place.

4.10 There was widespread support for the proposal to give registrars a statutory power to ask for supporting documentation to check the couple's identity and marital status. A number of registrars note that it would be best to introduce a statutory duty on all registrars to request this documentation to protect registrars from charges of discrimination if documentation were requested in some cases but not in others.

■ ***requiring a minimum of 15 days' notice of intention to marry (except in exceptional circumstances)***

4.11 We received 140 responses to this question. The majority of the responses (105 out of 140) agree that all couples should be required to give a minimum of 15 days' notice of their intention to marry. Many believe that a single 15 day requirement would be simpler for people to understand than the current arrangements, and might help to reduce impulse marriages (for example, around Christmas and Valentine's day). Some of the responses suggest that it might cause difficulties for couples coming from abroad to be married, and it would be important to be clear about what constituted exceptional circumstances.

■ ***issuing guidance to registrars to encourage greater flexibility in the form of marriage ceremonies couples may choose***

4.12 There was general support for this proposal. Many of the registrars who responded say they already offer enhanced marriage services, which allow couples to select poetry and music. However, a number of responses point out that such

ceremonies take significantly longer than the standard ceremony, and this has resource implications, since it means that fewer ceremonies can be performed in any one day.

4.13 The review of the legislation governing the work of registrars proposed in *Supporting Families*, and now underway, is warmly welcomed by registrars and local authorities. The review is examining anomalies in the powers and duties of registrars and how to best to modernise the registration service to enable it to meet the needs of the public more effectively. The Office of National Statistics will use the responses to the questions in this chapter to inform the review. Following discussion with Government departments, local authorities and registrars, a consultation paper will be published later this summer setting out options for the future development of registration services.

Question 17:

The proposal to introduce separate group meetings for couples involved in disputes about children, finance and property.

4.14 We received 127 responses to this question; 110 agree that group meetings would be helpful for couples involved in such disputes, but few give views on the detailed implications of the proposal; 17 people did not support the proposal.

Greater Manchester Probation Service has been the lead agency in piloting the provision of information meetings under the Family Law Act in this county. Experience has shown that such meetings have been very well-received as they empower people to go through separation and

divorce in an informed way, recognising that they retain some influence over their destiny through being shown choices. Information meetings will also reduce the fear of the unknown and thereby enhance the capacity of individuals to retain the degree of equilibrium required if they are to continue as good parents.

Greater Manchester Probation Service

Question 18:

The proposals to strengthen the services available to support adult relationships including:

- ***promoting and developing the availability of counselling services for couples and providing particular help to couples at potential stress points***

4.15 We received 194 responses to this question. The proposal to increase support for couples at potential pressure points was generally welcomed, with 172 responses in favour. A few of the responses (5) express concern about the cost implications. Others mention the need for counselling services to address the needs of children whose parents are going through a divorce; and 17 of the responses did not support the proposal.

In our experience, many couple counselling services lack explicit understanding of the difficulties and complexities of stepfamily life - it is simply not possible to provide conventional couple counselling to step couples - the children are part of the package, and have to be included in the counselling. We are currently working with Relate to look at their training, and would be

pleased to work with other providers of couple counselling to support them in developing their work so that it meets the needs of step couples.

The National Stepfamily Association

- ***introducing support for couples when they have a child by asking health visitors, midwives and other health professionals to identify and offer help with relationship problems experienced by parents in the period following a birth***

4.16 We received 182 responses to this question. The proposal for support for couples at the birth of a child was welcomed by 168 of those who responded; while 14 were not in favour. Many of the responses from health professionals suggest that support of this type is already provided within the holistic framework for healthcare promoted in some local areas. Some responses note that additional training for health professionals might be required to give them confidence in providing relationship support.

- ***promoting baby-naming ceremonies and enlarging the role of registrars to enable them to conduct such ceremonies.***

4.17 There was a mixed response to the proposal for baby-naming ceremonies. We received 158 responses; with 111 people in agreement that there is a need for these ceremonies and supportive of the proposals: 43 responses oppose the idea of baby-naming ceremonies and question the need for secular ceremonies. Some of the responses (2) do not oppose the idea of baby-naming ceremonies, but question whether registrars are the best people to perform them. Most responses agree that local

authorities should be able to recover the costs of such ceremonies. One response highlights the implications for the workload of registrars, particularly at weekends, and foresees problems with conflicting demands for the use of venues for marriages and baby-naming ceremonies.

The proposal also raises many practical questions. For example, when will the ceremonies take place? If there is a demand, the most popular times will be at the weekends or evenings. Where will they take place? There is only one suitable room at Southampton - the Marriage Room, and this must be retained exclusively for marriages on Saturdays... There are other questions of a technical nature concerning the status of these events, whether they will be recorded and, if they are, what their legal relationship will be to the original entry.

Southampton City Council Register Office

4.18 A number of responses suggest that, if baby-naming ceremonies are to be encouraged, then ceremonies to mark the renewal of marriage vows and other occasions should also be allowed.

If proposals for extending the services offered by Registration Officers are approved, they should include re-commitment ceremonies, civil funerals and memorial ceremonies so that the public have the option to celebrate important rites of passage with a ceremony involving the family. This office has received requests for all these types of ceremony, so there is a public demand for a service which we are at present unable to fulfil due to the statutory limitations imposed on our functions.

Taunton Register Office

Question 19:

The desirability of having an objective for ancillary relief proceedings and on the content of the proposed objective; and the content of the guiding principles for ancillary relief and any additional factors the court should take into account.

4.19 Relatively few of the responses addressed this question (57 in all), but the majority of those who did (53) are in favour of the Government's proposals. 4 of the responses did not support the proposal. The Law Society expresses a number of detailed reservations on this proposal, including that it could lead to a system which was too rigid and might have an unfair impact on a range of people across the social spectrum. The Law Society also suggest that it is crucial that no reform of the law on maintenance and capital provision should proceed unless it has been preceded by a thorough examination of the operation of the existing law and options for reform by the Law Commission.

Better Support for Serious Family Problems

5.1 Although the question in Chapter 5 asks for views on domestic violence, the responses to Chapter 5 cover a wide range of issues and difficulties that many families face. Many of the responses were concerned that Chapter 5 did not focus sufficiently on the full range of problems that families can face in their everyday lives such as unemployment, housing problems, family breakdown or on the more specific problems that certain families can face for example, ethnic minority families and families with disabled children.

The Children's Society recommends that practical support needs to be easily available for parents that focus on resolving the immediate stresses of everyday family life such as income, employment, mental wellbeing, overcrowded housing, family breakdown, health, lack of skills and confidence. These concerns can be a constant worry to parents in the daily running of family life...

Children's Society

Turning to the needs of those families who do have more serious problems, Home-Start urges Ministers not to confine their attention to the somewhat narrow categories of problem referred to in the Green Paper, but to consider other difficulties in family situations such as:

- *families where a parent is in prison*
- *families where there is mental illness*
- *families where there is a disability*
- *families from minority communities.*

It may not actually be helpful to think in terms of particular categories of problems. Many of the concerns which arise for families facing severe problems are similar...

Home-Start UK

Family Policy areas missing from the consultation paper: The particular needs of 'other' types of family groups: gay and lesbian parents, parents from ethnic groups, parents of disabled children. The poverty strategy fails to identify families who are likely to have additional needs; those where there are mental health problems, refugee families, homeless families, travellers etc.

Barnardos

5.2 Several responses highlight that some families including ethnic minority families can experience additional problems.

While we accept that all families face pressure in everyday life, some may face particular external pressure in the form of abuse, prejudice, and discrimination on the grounds of disability, ethnicity, language, religion or culture. Evidence shows that some families are disproportionately, as a consequence of discrimination and disadvantage, in poor housing, with unemployed parents, with low paid employment and with poor levels of health. These factors, together with low levels of educational attainment, are cumulative and have serious implications for family life.

We need to tackle the more serious problems of family life, including domestic violence and school-age pregnancy

They cannot be detached from other pressures that all families face.

Early Years Trainers Anti-Racist Network

5.4 Many of the responses felt there had been insufficient focus on the needs of families with children with disabilities.

We would like to see more recognition of the needs of families of children with disabilities. Particularly where the child has emotional and behavioural difficulties and conditions such as autism, ADHD, the stress with the family is enormous. Family breakdown is common, poverty and social exclusion is a way of life. Where parents are working they often receive little understanding of their needs and they find difficulty in obtaining suitable childcare... The exhaustion of just coping on an everyday basis can lead to the physical and mental ill health of the parents and family members. We would like to see more work done to support the siblings who often are at the receiving end of bullying at school when they attempt to support their brother or sister and they can miss out on some of the activities which their peers experience.

InFocus Essex

5.5 Many of the responses focus on teenage parenthood and the issues surrounding why teenagers become parents.

There is no examination of the factors that lead to teenage parenting, in particular, low school achievement, apparent irrelevance of school, inadequate sex education programmes, poverty,

and peer and social pressures. The assumption should not be made that teenage parents are, per se, inadequate parents.

Anti-Racist Teacher Education Network

Prevention of teenage parenthood will not always work. Particular attention needs to be paid to the support needs of teenage parents: many of the children born in these circumstances will be amongst the most vulnerable, with an immature mother, living in poverty and often without a positive male role model.

Association of Chief Officers of Probation

5.6 Other responses focus on youth offending and the support that could be given to parents through the youth justice system where children were at risk of offending or had offended.

The Probation Service's role is to deal with the consequences of family breakdown, social dislocation and offending behaviour for the young person. Prevention is better. The more groups, agencies and communities can do prior to a young person entering the Criminal Justice system the better. ILPS finds much to applaud in the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act which relates to parents; parental involvement at the first offence stage, parenting orders. It is clear to us, however, that a range of facilities and resources for parents pre-court, might assist them in heading off trouble with their children.

Inner London Probation Service (ILPS)

We very much welcome the introduction of the new Youth Offending Teams and the commitment

to prevention, and the pre-court intervention. Our work has also demonstrated the importance of multi-agency work with young people serving a sentence. We hope the new Youth Offending Teams will build on the opportunities for positive work with Young Offender Institutions. The Government support for Youth Action Groups and parenting education in prisons are both initiatives where the Thames Valley Partnership is involved in our region. Our Schools in Action and Generation Project supports 45 Community Safety schemes undertaken by young people each year and we are currently working with the Prison Service to support and develop parenting initiatives in Youth Offender Institutions and adult prisons.

The Thames Valley Partnership

We believe that in the youth offending context too much emphasis has been placed on young people and parents as problematic, and too little emphasis on seeing them as potential sources of support and commitment to solve problems... From our experience we know that most parents of young offenders are eager to seek help in imposing discipline and control. Parenting orders are unnecessary in this respect, but good quality parenting support programmes may well be required.

Barnardos

Question 20:

The Government invited views on further ways to tackle these more serious family problems and in particular on how local and national awareness campaigns on

domestic violence might best be developed.

5.7 The majority of responses to this chapter focus primarily on domestic violence. Suggestions for action include:

- greater focus on perpetrators
- the number of the local Women's Aid branch should be given routinely at the first visit by a health visitor. All health visitors should know how to access a safe house
- the provision of play specialists in refuges to help children come to terms with their experiences
- the production of a domestic violence training pack for use in schools.

We agree wholeheartedly that tackling domestic violence is a crucial part of family policy. Our task group on the links between domestic violence and child abuse has published guidelines for local authorities and other agencies... which makes recommendations for good interagency policy, practice and services in support of families. One of the aims of the briefing is to help raise awareness of the links between domestic violence and child abuse and to increase understanding of the support which children living with domestic violence and their non-abusing parents would find most helpful.

Local Government Association

Whilst we welcome the government's commitment to tackling domestic violence issues and the development of campaigns locally and nationally, we would like to make the following points:

- *awareness and publicity campaigns are no good in isolation*
- *agencies and organisations need to have policy commitments to include domestic violence issues in their strategic planning*
- *we would agree that support and education are crucial factors and would welcome the development of educational programmes that address domestic violence issues*
- *our main concern is about funding, and in particular statutory funding for refuges and the funding of local and national initiatives which will support the work of women's aid organisations*
- *domestic violence is not just about physical abuse and a wider definition needs to be used to include emotional and economic abuse*
- *the requirement that stands at the moment for victims to pursue a complaint themselves is not always helpful to women, who are already fearful of repercussion. A change in the law to allow the police officer to lay the complaint could lead to better reporting and a tougher attitude by the police and ultimately the courts.*

Lancaster and District Women's Aid

Progress Since Publication

6.1 The Ministerial Group on the Family has been active in pushing forward work on family policy and practice.

- The **National Family and Parenting Institute** has been set up as an independent charity. The membership of the Board is:

Dame Margaret Booth, DBE, Chair of UK College of Family Mediators. Elected Chair of National Family and Parenting Institute.

Sir Peter Barclay, Chairman of the Joseph Rowntree Trust.

Kathleen Duncan, Director General of the Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales.

Ratna Dutt, Director of Race Equality Unit (REU).

Rev David Gamble, Chair of Barnardo's Council and the Methodist Church's Secretary for the Family and Personal Relationships.

Margaret Harrison, Founder of Home-Start UK.

Michael Hastings, Head of UK Public Affairs at the BBC and Chairman of Crime Concern.

Oliver James, clinical psychologist, author and columnist.

Dr Gillian Pugh, Chief Executive of the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children.

Deidre Sanders, author, columnist, counsellor, TV presenter and the problem page editor for The Sun.

Maeve Sherlock, Director of the National Council for One Parent Families.

Ed Straw, author, broadcaster, policy adviser and chair of the Board of Trustees of Relate.

Catriona Williams, Chief Executive of Children in Wales.

At the moment the Institute has temporary staff and offices (based at the Thomas Coram Foundation). The Institute has a challenging programme of work ahead. It intends to build effective relationships with existing organisations and promote good practice in parenting support. The Trustees hope to appoint a Chief Executive for the Institute by the end of this month.

- **Parentline** is making good progress in its expansion to provide a national helpline for parents. Dorit Braun has been appointed as the new Chief Executive and has set up a new collaborative working arrangement between Parentline and the National Stepfamily

Association. Parentline has already absorbed the National Stepfamily Association's helpline, and there are plans for the two organisations to merge completely. A freephone line is being piloted, through a network of call centres, from 8 June.

- The Home Office has set up the new **Family Support Grant** of £7 million over three years, for voluntary organisations working with families. The funding will help to support infrastructure organisations working with smaller family support organisations; it will promote the development of new work which has the potential to be used across the country; and it will support work on specific themes, for example with boys, young men and fathers.
- **Sure Start** has a fund of £450 million in England over the next three years to develop and add value to services for children under four. So far, 21 Sure Start Trailblazer proposals have been approved in principle and we expect to announce more soon. Virtually all the proposals contain parenting support and an expanded role for health visitors. Partnerships are mainly led by local authorities but there are a significant number led by health authorities and voluntary agencies.
- The **Sure Start programme** in Wales was announced on 8 April 1999. It shares the aims and principles of Sure Start across the UK and links to the wider social inclusion agenda in Wales. Local plans are to be prepared by multi-agency partnerships in response to indicative resource allocations and these plans will be considered by the National Assembly for Wales.
- We have started to rebuild and reinvest in **health visiting and school nursing**. As a first step, we have set up an Innovation Fund of £1 million to explore new ways of working for health visitors and school nurses, including new roles and partnerships. The fund has been allocated on a regional basis and will be invested in local initiatives which demonstrate good practice, including those, which will strengthen and develop the role of health visitors and school nurses in addressing parenting and family needs. The Government recognises that health visitors will not be able to take on this agenda while continuing to carry out their traditional role using traditional working styles. A modern health visiting approach is family-centered with the health visitor working with individuals, families and communities. New ways of working will require new partnerships, and interagency and multidisciplinary working to deliver high quality and effective services to address the challenges of inequalities, parenting and family policy.
- **Quality Protects**, the Department of Health's three year programme for transforming the management and delivery of children's social services, has made rapid progress since last autumn. Supported by the £375 million

children's services grant, Quality Protects aims to raise standards in six priority areas: placement choice, support for care leavers, listening to children, assessment, management information and quality assurance. All 150 local authority Quality Protects Management Action Plans (MAPs) submitted in January have now been approved and a team of eight Regional Development Workers has been recruited to help local authorities take forward the substantial development agenda highlighted by MAPs. In the summer, the Department of Health will be publishing a national overview report setting out the key messages from the evaluation of the first round of MAPs, together with a national work programme and an updated version of the Government Objectives for children's services which Quality Protects will play a central role in implementing.

- **Children First** is designed to transform and modernise the management and delivery of children's social services in Wales. The programme will extend over three years with the emphasis initially on action plans which will include the establishment of service delivery baselines. The National Assembly for Wales will review and monitor performance as the programme proceeds.
- **Employee Rights Bill** In May 1998, the Government published its Fairness at Work White Paper. This sets out proposals for implementing the Parental Leave Directive as part of a coherent package of family-friendly employment rights, including parental leave, time off to deal with domestic emergencies and simplified and improved maternity rights.

It proposes that part-time workers should be treated no less favorably than full-timers, in line with the requirement of the Part-Time Work Directive. On 27 January 1999 the Employment Relations Bill began its passage through Parliament. The Bill creates the legislative framework to implement the Fairness at Work proposals and provides powers to make supporting regulations setting out the detailed provisions. Following consultation on the detailed provisions, the Government intends the new parental rights to be in place by December 1999, the time limit for implementing the Parental Leave Directive. Part-timers protection will be in place by April 2000.

- Working closely with employers and others, the Government also intends to take forward a campaign to promote good practice in **family-friendly employment**, in a way that benefits businesses and other organisations, as well as those who work for them. We intend to announce the next steps in relation to the campaign this summer. We shall build on the responses to *Supporting Families* and on the views that we have received separately from employers, trade unions and other partners.
- One exciting example of the Government's work to prepare and support the campaign on family-friendly employment is a project that brings the NHS and retail sectors together in an innovative partnership. Those sectors differ in a business sense but share issues around servicing the 24 hour economy. We aim to show how flexible working policies that recognise the diversity of staff can be a key part of successful management planning.
- Sir Graham Hart, former Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health, has completed his

independent review of the way in which the Government funds **marriage support and research services**. The review will help the Government to develop a more strategic approach to the allocation of funding for marriage support. Sir Graham submitted his report to the Lord Chancellor just before Easter. The Lord Chancellor is now considering the report, which he intends to publish, together with his response, in the summer.

- The Government has introduced legislation to amend the **Marriage Act** to require each of the parties to a marriage to attend personally before the superintendent registrar of the district where they live and give notice, and for there then to be a 15 day waiting period before the marriage can proceed (with the Registrar General given a discretion to reduce in exceptional circumstances). Registrars are also to be given a statutory power to demand evidence of name, age and other details from couples. This will be supplemented by guidance issued by the Registrar General to help ensure that the power is applied to all couples and in a fair way.
- The Government's measures for reforming the **youth justice system** are being implemented. Youth offending teams in nine areas are piloting measures like Final Warnings, Parenting Orders, Reparation Orders, and Child Safety Orders. The Youth Justice Board is overseeing a programme for establishing youth offending teams in all areas with the primary aim of preventing offending. About 50 teams are now in place and the other 100 or so will be

operational by April 2000. The Government has provided the Board with a Development Fund of £85 million over the next three years. This Fund will be used to expand the range of local intervention programmes to change offending behaviour by young people. £13 million has already been allocated to improve supervision on bail and stop re-offending.

- The issue of **teenage parenthood** was considered by the Prime Minister to be both so serious and complex that he asked the Social Exclusion Unit to look into the problem and build upon the work of the Department of Health. The Social Exclusion Unit has consulted widely, visited projects both in the UK and abroad and is due to report shortly.
- The first phase of the new national publicity campaign on **domestic violence** mentioned in *Supporting Families* was launched at the end of January 1999. The theme of the campaign is "Break the Chain". As well as providing support for survivors, it promotes the important message that domestic violence is a crime which must not be ignored - communities and individuals have a responsibility to take action to prevent it, and to put a stop to it where it is taking place.
- We have also been working with non-Government organisations and academics to take forward work on the document *Living without fear - an integrated approach to violence against women*. The document will deal with all forms of violence, including domestic violence, and will be published this

summer. The document will highlight good practice and promote partnership and interagency working. It will also focus on what works and will disseminate good practice.

- **Education** The Government is taking steps to ensure that all secondary schools have a role in teaching young people the skills of good parenting, both formally and through contact with good adult role models. The report by the Advisory Group on Personal Social and Health Education in schools and its recommendations is being published in conjunction with the Social Exclusion Unit's report on Teenage Pregnancy shortly. The Report's recommendations have already been fed into the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's review of the National Curriculum. Consultation on the revised National Curriculum framework, which includes provision for teaching the importance of good parenting within PHSE, was launched on 13 May.

- **Family learning** Family learning offers one approach to combining our drive to raise standards in schools, engage parents in the education of their children, widen participation in education and make lifelong learning a reality. We believe that family learning can play a part in contributing to the social inclusion agenda. We are developing our thinking about how we embed family learning in our many national initiatives for all age groups and how we can develop better, and more joined up policy between family learning generally and our policies on lifelong learning.

- **Community use of schools** The Government is also undertaking a range of initiatives to encourage school-community links. The Schools Plus Policy Action Team, established by the Social Exclusion Unit, will report in December 1999 on how best to use schools as a focus for community services in disadvantaged areas.

Next Steps for Family Policy

6.2 All the responses to *Supporting Families* will be used in the ongoing development of family policy across Government. In particular, responses will feed into:

- building the work of the National Family and Parenting Institute and the national telephone helpline for parents
- developing health visiting
- future work on Sure Start
- the DfEE-led campaign on Family-Friendly Employment in the interests of both businesses and their workforce
- the Lord Chancellor's review of marriage support
- the ONS review of civil registration and the role of registrars
- the Government's plans for the reform of child support. These are due to be announced shortly
- the Social Exclusion Unit's work on teenage parents.

Where does the Ministerial Group on the Family go next?

6.3 The Ministerial Group on the Family has identified some key problems facing families that they want to focus on over the coming year. The Ministerial Group is working on five new initiatives:

- support for boys, young men and fathers
- supporting stepfamilies
- adoption policy and practice
- the support available to families at different crisis points
- ensuring that Government funding for families fits together well.

Support for boys, young men and fathers

6.4 An increasing number of boys and young men seem to have difficulty maturing into responsible citizens and fathers. Declining educational performance, loss of 'traditional' male jobs, the growth of a 'laddish' anti-culture, greater use of drugs, irresponsible teenage fatherhood, and the rising rate of suicide may all show rising insecurity and uncertainty among young men. This has worrying implications for the stability of family life and wider society. The Ministerial Group on the Family is focusing on the needs of young men and the support available to fathers.

6.5 As a first step, in November 1998 the Ministerial Group on the Family held a seminar on *Boys, Young Men and Fathers*. The new Home Office family support grants set work with boys, young men and fathers as a theme and will be

funding some voluntary organisations' work in this area.

6.6 First of all, we want to recognise the potential of young men to make a positive contribution to our communities. We also want to take account of the views and ideas of young men themselves and we intend to work with the National Youth Agency to set up a dialogue with young men which will enable them to listen to and comment on our ideas. This could involve young men producing posters, tapes and video diaries and meeting Ministers to discuss Government plans for action.

6.7 Fathers have a crucial role to play in their children's upbringing, and their involvement can be particularly important to their sons. Most voluntary and professional organisations report that it is much more difficult to encourage fathers to participate in parenting support than mothers. Some groups have already developed programmes which specifically target fathers. The Ministerial Group on the Family will be looking at ways of encouraging the development of more parenting schemes for fathers and promoting recognition of the fact that fathers have an important role to play. As a first step we are funding **Fathers Direct**, a new voluntary organisation, to work closely with the National Family and Parenting Institute to increase the support available to fathers.

6.8 As we look at boys' needs so we must make sure that this work does not have an adverse effect on young women. The Women's Unit are also examining the specific needs of teenage girls. There are a set of distinct trends for girls. Despite rising female economic activity and girls achieving better

academic success than boys, the gender pay gap opens up very quickly at aged 18 and continues to widen over a woman's lifetime. This early start cannot be explained by having breaks for children. Alongside this are steep rises among teenage girls in smoking and alcohol abuse.

6.9 In exploring these trends, we have been examining the needs of teenage girls and their failure to achieve their early potential. The Women's Unit has been examining the best way to ensure that girls can make full use of the range of opportunities open to them.

Supporting Stepfamilies

6.10 The breakdown and reconstitution of families has a tremendous impact on the lives of children and parents. Nearly 10 per cent of children live in stepfamilies and it can be a challenge for all involved to make stepfamilies succeed. But they can succeed. Families come in all shapes and sizes, and often involve quite complex relationships.

6.11 The Ministerial Group on the Family will be looking at the particular needs of stepfamilies and how the Government can provide support which is relevant to family life in all its complexity.

Adoption Policy and Practice

6.12 The Ministerial Group on the Family has also been looking at adoption. Many people are concerned that it takes too long to adopt children and that adoptive parents have an unnecessarily difficult time when adopting. We want to improve the situation for couples wishing to adopt, and for

children waiting for adoption and look to the Quality Protects programme to deliver significant improvements.

Families in crisis

6.13 The Ministerial Group on the Family will also be looking at the critical points in family life to see if families have all the help they need from Government and in their local communities. We know that families can be put under extra pressure: when a new baby arrives; when a child goes to secondary school or takes GCSEs; when a young child turns into a more difficult teenager; or most of all if the parents' own relationship breaks down. At all these stages we want to find out what help is available and if it meets the needs of families today.

Government funding

6.14 Many voluntary organisations provide much needed services for families often in partnership with the Government. But the Ministerial Group on the Family is concerned that Government grant programmes should be joined up and strategic so that coherent support is available to families who need it most. As a first step we are funding NCVCCO to develop a booklet which will help family voluntary organisations to find their way around grants available from Government and other sources and to access the best advice on funding.

Further Information:

7.1 The contact point concerning this document is:

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7.2 Copies of this document are being sent to relevant local education authorities, professional organisations, health and social services bodies and professional associations, local authorities, national voluntary and community organisations involved in family support and criminal justice professionals.

7.3 Further copies of this publication can be obtained from The Stationery Office and its agents (for details see back cover).

7.4 The consultation document is also available on the internet. The address is:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>

