

'Like Lighting a Fire'
July 2006



'Like Lighting a Fire':
An Evaluation of SRB6
Family Learning in County Durham

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This report examines the findings from a small-scale evaluation of the SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham project. It is based on document analysis and a small sample of interviews with representative individuals involved in the project. After reviewing the local and national contexts, the Project Appraisal, and the findings of the mid-term evaluation, the report presents the project's major achievements and the steps taken to mainstream them. Two aspects of the project's work are reviewed more closely; first, the development work and second, the partnership working at strategic and local levels. Interviewees were asked to identify opportunities, challenges and key priorities for family learning in the county. Following conclusions based on the fieldwork, a number of recommendations addressed to a range of stakeholders are presented.

The recommendations are set out below.

The local authority should:

1. take the lead in developing an appropriate form of post-SRB6 county-wide partnership taking account of the changing context;
2. take the lead in developing processes for ensuring that there are strong links between parenting and family learning developments, given the overlap of beneficiaries, needs and interests involved;
3. provide funding for an Annual Family Learning Conference in order to sustain the important networking and sharing of good practice it promotes;
4. regard the work of the Family Programmes Manager and the Family Learning Consultant together as including:
 - the promotion of a strategic approach to development work in family learning;
 - raising awareness of the role that family learning can play in the authority's major initiatives, such as *Every Child Matters*, children's centres, extended services, parenting *Skills for Life* and economic regeneration;
 - raising awareness of the role that family learning plays in raising the educational achievement of parents and children;
 - leading on the development of models of strategic planning in family learning that combine the responsiveness of local area planning and the strategic overview of authority-wide planning
 - developing strong links with family learning services across the region through regional networks and collaborative initiatives.

Individual SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham partners should:

1. remain committed to a county-wide Durham partnership approach, based on their common wish to engage more, and new, families across the county in quality learning opportunities;
2. maintain and promote the broad and inclusive vision of family learning developed through the project, as it is a powerful model particularly relevant to current policy and practice;
3. remain actively involved in the Family Learning Operational Groups and other local area partnerships where family learning provision can be co-ordinated and good practice shared.

Members of Family Learning Operational Groups (FLOGs) should:

1. highlight the unique features of family learning and its relationship to key local authority initiatives such as *Every Child Matters*, children's centres, extended services, parenting *Skills for Life* and economic regeneration;
2. ensure FLOGs are aligned, as far as possible, with other key partnerships in the local area, including extended services clusters and *21st Century Family Schools*, and in Southwest Durham with the Adult Learning Group;

The County Durham Lifelong Learning Partnership should:

1. support Lifelong Learning Co-ordinators in chairing the FLOGs;
2. ensure that family learning is supported through its work and that of its sub-groups;
3. request briefing papers, when appropriate, on family learning from the local authority and other organisations to inform its discussions and decision-making.

Background

The SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham project, a county-wide multi-agency partnership which operated between 2001 and March 2006, aimed to develop family learning as an effective tool for raising children and families' skills and aspirations and to strengthen the capacity of the county in making family learning provision. The project provided £2,190,000 for a number of partners to deliver family learning provision and to meet other project outputs. All of the project's output targets were achieved over the 5 years, as well as a number of other significant outcomes. During this time wide ranging changes occurred in family learning policy and implementation, impacting on the project and the challenges and opportunities it faced.

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide an end of project review that will promote the embedding of its achievements and maintain the momentum created through the project. The evaluation is timely in assisting family learning

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providers and stakeholders in addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by current policies and initiatives.

Methodology

Following an initial planning meeting in late April with the current caretaker managers of the project, the focus of the evaluation was clarified and a short list of individuals for interview was drawn up. In addition, a number of key documents were identified for consideration.

Seven interviews were conducted in late April and early May, and the documents were identified. One interview involved three members of staff with different roles in family learning.

The data collected through these methods were analysed in mid May, and a draft report was circulated for comment before a final report was presented to the local authority.

The Project Appraisal

The project appraisal states that the aim of the project is

'to develop locally-based family learning initiatives to improve attainment of school pupils and the basic skills levels of adults within the SRB6 target population who have few or no qualifications and little experience of formal education.'

The Basic Skills family learning model was identified as the primary means of achieving this aim, totalling 42 school-based schemes annually over the life of the project. One advantage of adopting this familiar and tested model, which the local authority was experienced in delivering, was that it enabled the authority, who led on preparing the proposal, to satisfy the Government Office Northeast's (GONE) criteria for costing the provision.

It was agreed that 85% of the funding would go to the authority's Education in the Community (EiC) Team as it was seen as the major deliverer of family learning across the county and therefore best placed to deliver the project outputs. The purpose of the partnership was essentially to co-ordinate the variety of family learning provision across the county. It was also envisaged that the additional funding and staffing gained through the project would be used to develop wider family learning and to identify additional need.

The Mid-term Evaluation

The mid-term evaluation of the project, undertaken by the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in November 2004, reported that the project had made a significant contribution to:

- improving the performance of children through parents and children working together;
- increasing the capability of parents to support their children's learning and through this raise their own skills levels, aspirations, expectations and confidence;
- increasing the capacity of local families to take up education and training provision and to progress to higher levels.

The project was reported to be closely linked with other county initiatives and to have raised the profile of family learning across the county through its website and annual family learning conference.

The developmental strand was singled out as a 'particularly strong' dimension of the project's work, resulting in new models of provision, in addition to the family literacy and numeracy model. The project's success in attracting new groups of families and men, under-represented in family learning, was noted.

The mid-term evaluation found that, while the project appeared to have encouraged a more strategic way of working across the county amongst partners, an explicit county-wide strategy for family learning had not been developed.

A number of recommendations were addressed to key stakeholders. The local authority, as lead partner, was asked to:

- assume responsibility for the development of a county-wide strategy for family learning;
- build upon the project's success in multi-agency work;
- absorb the project's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme into its own in the Education Development Service;
- maintain the Family Learning Website.

There were a number of other recommendations aimed at:

- County Durham Lifelong Learning Partnership;
- County Durham LSC;
- Local Strategic Partnerships.

The Changing Context

The completion of the SRB6 project coincides with a period of significant change in the national and local contexts of family and lifelong learning.

At national level a key driver is the *Every Child Matters (ECM)* agenda, setting out the five outcomes for children and a vision of integrated services through children's centres and extended schools. For adult learners, including many parents, the government's priorities, are Level 2 qualifications and *Skills for Life* targets. Learning relating to 'personal and community development', 'family learning' and 'neighbourhood renewal' is protected, in the short term, through ringfenced LSC funding. The FE sector, examined in the Foster and the Leitch Reviews and the government's White Paper, 'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances', is seen as the engine of economic skills.

Durham County Council, along with local authorities everywhere, has reorganised to take account of its new responsibilities for children. Two new service departments have been created, *Children and Young People's Services* and more recently, *Adult Services*, led by two new directors. Education in the Community (EiC), of which Family Learning is a part, is currently located in the Children and Young People's Services. Decisions about the future location of EiC are pending.

As a service that straddles both the child's and the parents' interest, a case can be made for aligning family learning with either children's or adult services, with the powerful benefits of parental involvement in children's outcomes closely linked to the positive outcomes for children. In Durham County Council, however, family learning is currently an integral part of EiC, a unique service that combines community education, *Skills for Life*, youth work and family learning. The new division between children's and adult services may see the separation of these services after many years of integrated work.

In addition to structural change, there are other local authority factors that create a sense of change for family learning. Amongst these is a recent change in political leadership of the Council, bringing in new lead members for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning. Earlier in the year, the local authority budget was not able to support family learning because of an adverse financial settlement.

In terms of planning and funding, LSC County Durham is also in a state of flux. The LSC's *Agenda for Change* has led to reduced activity at local LSC level and a move towards greater regionalism. One interviewee expressed a concern that LSC funding could gravitate to urban areas, leaving rural areas in County Durham with fewer resources.

Achievements

The success of the project in meeting its output targets is a matter of record and not the main focus of the current evaluation, but the management group wished to underline again the success of the project in meeting these targets. In addition, the project stimulated a significant expansion of family learning in schools and other settings. The focus of this evaluation is on some of the less quantifiable, but nonetheless significant, outcomes. In the words of the Project Co-ordinator, it felt 'like lighting a fire', an image that conjures up the energy and excitement of collaboration and innovation.

One of the achievements most cited was the development work that was made possible through the project. Examples that were cited included *Family Learning through Football*, *Cascade Music*, *Families First* and work with men. Through developments like these the partners were able to reach new learners, such as men and those parents less confident in coming forward in schools.

Another achievement frequently cited was the family learning infrastructure created through the partnership. The Family Learning Operational Groups (FLOGs), groups that meet locally to share information and discuss delivery issues, were cited as an example of valuable infrastructure. In one instance, members of the local FLOG recognised an issue at the local school that could be addressed through family learning and worked together to good effect. Members of the FLOG were able to put aside their own interests and put the needs of parents and children first.

Just less than half of the respondents felt that the partnership created by the new resources had been a significant achievement. The project enabled the local authority and its partners, such as Sunderland Football Club, Sure Start projects and libraries, to develop their collaboration further. This created a new spirit of partnership, so that there was 'a different atmosphere, not us and them', but 'how can we put on this course together'. As the lead partner, the local authority was, inevitably, a major force in the partnership.

Almost half of the respondents felt that one of the project's achievements was the broad and inclusive model of family learning underpinning the partnership. The inclusive model, embracing, for example, *Skills for Life*, parental involvement, parenting, and family and community relationships, had 'broken down silos' at County Council level according to one respondent. This breadth is very significant, given that the Project Appraisal focused so tightly on family literacy and numeracy programmes delivered through schools.

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Almost half of those interviewed said that the additionality provided by the SRB6 funds was an achievement.

The project's website was cited by almost half of those interviewed as an achievement, with one interviewee citing its success in appealing to learners.

The project's joint training and staff development activities were cited by almost half of those interviewed as an achievement. While some training, such as the SHARE Facilitator training, was open to all of the partners, other opportunities, such as the *Welcoming Schools* training, was targeted especially at schools.

Other achievements that were mentioned include:

- Understanding of one another's role and good working relationships. An example was what one respondent described as improved links with the voluntary and community sector (VCS);
- The focus on learners;
- The *Working with Men* initiative;
- Progression routes;
- Changed perception of ICT;
- The Annual Conferences, which were well attended, by professionals outside the county as well as within;
- enabling partners to match money;
- A strategic approach; considerable attention was paid to aligning the project with the Widening Participation Project and County Durham Learning;
- The best practice guide;
- Additional resources;
- Enhanced profile for family learning, both within and outside of County Durham.

Mainstreaming the Project

It is significant that virtually all of the project's achievements are currently being embedded, largely through the work of its lead partner the local authority, and to a lesser extent, in the work of partner organisations. The appointment in 2004 of a Family Programmes Manager located in EiC has been critical in helping to embed many of the outcomes, with the postholder working closely with the SRB6 Project Co-ordinator to ensure synergy.

One of the most successfully embedded achievements of the project has been the infrastructure that emerged with the Family Learning Operational Groups (FLOGs). There is a FLOG group in each of the six areas of the county, bringing

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together all the providers in the locality. The 6 FLOGs are aligned with the 4 areas that make up EiC's local family learning initiative, *21st Century Family Schools*, which in itself is a development of the SRB6 project. The role of the FLOGs is to co-ordinate local provision, reducing duplication and building progression routes. In addition, the FLOGs plan Family Learning Week in their local area. The responsibility for chairing the groups has been passed on to the Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator in each area and EiC provides administrative support to them. Some interviewees noted the importance for FLOGs of working closely with the Extended Schools Clusters in each area.

The project's developmental work with men has been embedded with the Regional Resource Centre for Fatherhood, based in Durham, which has assumed responsibility for leading the work. The role of the SHARE Coordinator has been broadened to include responsibility for Active Dads and Family Football.

The Annual Family Learning Conference is recognised as an important way of bringing people together once a year to celebrate the achievements of learners and to promote family learning throughout the county. EiC intend to continue the conference, though the cost of mounting the conference might have to be met by charging delegates a conference fee. As the project brought together and supported a conference planning group, another way of planning the event will need to be found.

The project's Steering Group met for the final time in March 2006. The local authority accepts responsibility for leadership in developing a process that will reconfigure a form of partnership appropriate to the post-SRB context. EiC intends to convene a new group, once decisions at a strategic level on where family learning will be located have been made, that reflects current stakeholder interest in family learning. This new post-SRB6 'partnership' would be outside the work of the local authority's Family Learning Advisory Group (FLAG), whose remit is to co-ordinate the authority's own family learning provision.

The delivery of programmes has been embedded in the work of the local authority, in the main, and to a lesser extent in that of smaller providers. EiC has taken on responsibility for the delivery of the *SHARE* programmes, broadening the Co-ordinator's role to take in other successful programmes. It is hoped this work can be continued beyond July 2007 when the funding ceases. The Peterlee Excellence Cluster in East Durham has embedded the work of *Families First*, where Family Leaders built up personal relationships to gain parents' trust. Their work was the prototype for the expanded role of Family Learning Development Workers in a new initiative, *21st Century Family Schools*. EiC is seeking funding to ensure that the work of the *21st Century Family Schools* project continues when the funding is finished in July 2006.

The project's role in promoting progression continues, with the EiC meeting colleges to discuss progression routes. This development is especially important in South Durham, as interviewees representing that area are especially keen to develop better links with EiC around basic skills and family learning.

The local authority, as the provider with greatest capacity, is also best placed to lead on a strategic approach to Family Learning Week across the county.

Finally, it was felt that the role of identifying, and responding to, training needs in family learning is, likely to be a shared responsibility between the local authority and other providers.

Maintaining Development Work

The mid-term evaluation singled out the development work as a particular strength of the project, a dimension which features strongly in the final evaluation. It was pointed out that there had been good examples of developmental work before SRB6, for example, in one partner's efforts to engage more men in childcare. What the SRB6 project did was to multiply individual partners' efforts, thus creating more impact on the target group. One interviewee maintained that 'everyone needs to be developmental', and the high level of innovative work in the county suggests that this, indeed, is what happens on the ground.

The interviews also identified some of the priorities that may well represent new areas of development. For example, an interviewee in the school sector identified the need to prepare for the introduction in all schools, by 2012, of a 'virtual learning environment', enabling all parents to access information about their children's school online. A strong case was argued for a county-wide family learning approach to ensure that some children and parents are not excluded from the benefits to be had from the technology.

Interviewees identified several local authority staff that appear to have some capacity for development work across the authority, including:

- the Family Programmes Manager;
- the SHARE Co-ordinator;
- the Family Learning Development Workers in *21st Century Family Schools*, who work regionally as well as in their local cluster.

A concern raised in the interviews is that, apart from that of the Family Programme Manager, the posts with some capacity for cross county development

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work are funded on a short-term basis. The SHARE Co-ordinator's post, for example, finishes in July 2007, and the 21st Century School Development Workers even earlier.

The interviewees cited frequently the critical role of the SRB6 Project Co-ordinator in driving forward the development work. Interviewees expressed the view that without a driving figure, development work may lack focus. Some interviewees felt that the local authority, with its county-wide remit, is best placed to exercise this strategic role in relationship to development work, particularly through EiC's Family Programmes Manager. It was pointed out by another interviewee that, wherever the responsibility lies, the role requires a very proactive, externally focused approach.

'21st Century Family Schools' - a New Development

This is a recent example of development work, led by EiC, which aims to develop a more strategic approach to the planning and delivery of family learning programmes in the county's schools. EiC currently delivers in 130 schools, but that leaves over 50% of Durham's schools without the benefits of family learning. By establishing clusters of schools in four areas, EiC hopes to build the capacity of schools to work together to widen participation and promote progression within clusters.

This new development builds on the success of the SRB6 project's work with the Excellence Cluster in East Durham where the *Families First* programme built capacity in schools and engaged significantly more parents in family learning and progression to further programmes.

The infrastructure supporting the development features:

- 4 cluster groups of schools;
- 4 area operational groups;
- a county-wide steering group to co-ordinate activities;
- support from the Family Programmes Manager in EiC.

In developing the work, EiC is conscious of the need to engage with other new initiatives, many of which are forming clusters and networks. EiC intends that 21st Century Schools will link to:

- the local authority extended schools clusters;
- Children's Centres and the ECM agenda;
- The Primary Strategy;
- Primary Inclusion Project;
- Communities of Learning;

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- Other local projects.

Staffing includes a .5 Development Worker, a .5 teacher, and a .5 Family Learning Tutor in each of the 4 areas. These are funded on a short-term basis from LSC, SRB, ESF *Neighbourhood Learning in Deprived Communities* and charitable organisations.

One interviewee with experience of the initiative felt that it is providing a showcase for the family learning work his school has been developing through the years. In a school where family learning is well established, the initiative provides some 'quick wins', while in other schools in the cluster, with less of a track record in family learning, the initiative is providing valuable support in engaging parents and making provision. Schools welcomed the Development Workers, it was reported, and had been drawn closer together through the initiative.

Another aspect of the initiative, it was reported, is that of raising schools' expectations of parents - 'the key is to have really high expectations of parents'. This interviewee's school had seen the benefits to come from having such high expectations, including parents' progression to access courses and jobs such as Teaching Assistant, as well as helping parents to understand new developments in the school. The benefits cited for pupils include a boost to under-performing pupils, higher motivation, improved behaviour, better work and social skills and recognition of lifelong learning.

Some issues were identified, however, namely, that it is often unrealistic to expect parents to move from their preferred school, where they have established relationships, in order to progress. Some parents preferred to learn in the context of their child's school, however attractive the opportunities in other schools might be. The importance of working closely with extended schools clusters was also identified.

In South Durham, it was reported that the local college actively works with schools and it would be important that the 21st Century Schools cluster is part of the Adult Learning Strategy being developed in that area.

Sustaining Family Learning Partnerships

One of the key achievements noted by the interviewees was the promotion of partnerships through the project. At the strategic level, the project created a *Steering Group* that brought together the partners to oversee the project's work and to give a strategic oversight to family learning across the entire county. The partners, from different sectors, worked together bound by mutual

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interests in seeing the project achieve its outcomes and the county benefit from the impact of family learning. With the completion of the project, the Steering Group is temporarily in abeyance. Its final meeting was held in March 2006.

The question is, should a strategic county-wide group bringing all the sectors together be created post-SRB6? While there are other groups at a strategic level, none has the reach of the Steering Group. The local authority's Family Learning Action Group, for example, brings together its own services with a common interest in family learning, but does not involve those from the FE and voluntary and community sectors. The Lifelong Learning Partnership has the desired reach, though currently family learning is not represented in its Adult Learning sub-groups. A new Lifelong Learning Partnership project is currently in the planning stages. EiC, as a partner, intends to focus on family learning, but even so, cannot expect to exercise its strategic role in family learning through the new project.

It is the intention of the local authority to take a lead in establishing a post SRB6 partnership consultation group, with a membership reflecting the current stakeholders across family learning, with a new role and remit. Its role is seen as working towards a set of commonly agreed guidelines in family learning.

Whether or not a county-wide written policy is appropriate has not yet been decided; one view is that a set of broad aims would be more appropriate. One interviewee called for an 'enabling framework' rather than a strategy. The elements of such a framework, it was argued, might include:

- A protocol;
- An expectation of what the family learning offer should include;
- Standards;
- Common prospectus;
- Uniform badging of family learning activities.

Local partnerships, it was argued, might interpret the framework to meet the needs of their area.

The project also created an infrastructure of local partnerships in the FLOGs, meeting at local level to network, share information and good practice and co-ordinate local family learning provision. Respondents felt that FLOGs are working well and that they are embedded into mainstream practice. With support of the local Lifelong Learning Co-ordinators and administrative support from staff in EiC, they appear to be sustainable.

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The example of the South West Durham area provides an interesting model.¹ Here the Adult Learning Strategy Group is encouraging renewed discussion about the links between the college and the EiC with a view to co-ordinating family learning provision. The view of the FE partner in this area is that better co-ordination will come from 'the bottom up' rather than the top-down. The FE partner hopes that an enhanced family learning partnership in the southwest could serve as a pilot for the rest of the county. At local level there is a great deal of goodwill and common interest to build on, producing innovative work.

Such local partnerships, however, will need to address some important issues. There is a recognition that they need to reflect new interests, roles and responsibilities in family learning so children's centres and extended schools need to be represented. Links with parenting initiatives too should be made by including local parenting groups and services. Local initiatives should demonstrate that they are working with the other partnerships in their area, including extended services clusters and EiC's own *21st Century Family Schools*. There is the potential for duplication of meetings and local exhaustion, leading to cynicism. Finally, how can the cross fertilisation of good ideas occur between local areas, if most of the energy focuses on local areas? And will there be any way of bringing together the practice in different areas, say, for example, for National Family Learning Week?

New Opportunities for Family Learning

Arising from the changing context there is a sense of new opportunities for family learning. Chief amongst these, it was felt by those interviewed, is, the ECM agenda, with its emphasis on the role of families and parents in supporting positive outcomes for children. Wherever the Family Learning Service is located, there is an opportunity to grow family learning provision and link it to the five outcomes, ranging across health, safety, achievement, enjoyment, taking part and financial security, a broad and rich curriculum.

As services start to integrate, there is an opportunity to capitalise on success of the SRB6 partnerships, particularly those at local level. At the same time, it will be important to ensure that reinvigorated local partnerships genuinely reflect the new partners and services charged with delivering Children's Services.

¹ This example emerged from the small number of interviewees and is not meant to imply the best and/or only, example of local partnerships. There are, very likely, other local examples that merit fuller examination.

Challenges for Family Learning

Against the significant opportunity presented by the ECM agenda, interviewees identified a number of challenges for family learning.

They foresaw a challenge in maintaining the breadth of family learning practice that SRB6 had promoted in the face of an agenda that is predominantly child focused. A narrower view of family learning linked to engaging parents, separate from their learning, for example, could change the direction of family learning in the county.

Linked to this is the challenge of maintaining a wide partnership representing family learning in a range of sectors and settings, including, for example, the workplace.

There is a challenge, the interviews recognised, in linking into the growing movement around parenting and the widening range of parenting initiatives underway. At the moment the relationship between these two areas of work is felt to be ambiguous.

Structural changes could present new challenges, if, for example, the Family Learning and *Skills for Life Services*, currently working together in EiC, were to be separated. This could impact negatively on the authority's achievement of its *Skills for Life* targets and its capacity for delivering family learning.

The funding of family learning was also cited as a challenge. The local authority was unable to provide any funding for family learning and while LSC and ESF funding has made up some of the loss of SRB funding this year, this cannot be guaranteed long-term.

The development of extended services presents a number of challenges for family learning. Chief amongst them is the need to demonstrate the impact of family learning on children's achievements so that schools buy in to the service. This would be especially important should budgets for family learning be 'passported' directly to schools, one interviewee explained. In these circumstances a case for ringfencing funds for family learning would need to be made and a service level agreement process investigated. EiC currently works with 130 schools, but there is a concerted effort underway to encourage the participation of the other 50% plus, with a questionnaire recently sent out determine how best to reach schools not involved.

The school head interviewed noted that tracking parental involvement after KS2 is a challenge. A further significant challenge in schools is the technological

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revolution associated with the requirement for schools to have a virtual learning environment in place by 2012, enabling children and parents to access school information and materials online. This was seen as a good example of a need for development work, to ensure that some parents and families are not excluded from the advantages of technology.

For FE, the challenge is to maintain involvement in family learning when the funding priorities are clearly for Level Two qualifications and adult basic skills work. The college represented in this evaluation is committed to family learning and to working with partners in the community, though it cannot be easy in the current funding climate. The current efforts of EiC and colleges to reach agreement on progression routes are very significant in light of these funding changes.

Keeping local networks and partnerships aligned is seen as a continuing challenge. These would include the *21st Century Family Schools* clusters, the extended services clusters and the FLOGs. If alignment cannot be achieved, there is a greater likelihood of gaps or duplication in service.

The local authority's strong family learning team, made up of 5 full-time and 6 half-time posts, as well as 1600 part-time tutor hours, enable it to deliver a comprehensive service, and maintaining staffing levels will be important for the future.

Priorities for Family Learning

Interviewees identified a number of priorities for family learning in Durham. They include (in a list not intended to denote order of importance):

1. Continuing the good practice in family learning and mainstreaming the valuable development work of the SRB6.
2. Sustaining the developmental work of SRB6, for example, by supporting families using the virtual learning environment that schools will introduce by 2012.
3. Reaching new groups and those under-represented in family learning, for example, parents of older children and more men in families.
4. Demonstrating the impact of family learning on children's performance, schools and families.

5. Extending family learning into schools currently not engaging with the service.
6. Tracking what happens to parents after KS2 in family learning.
7. Developing a post-SRB6 partnership consultation group, with a membership reflecting the current stakeholders across family learning, with a new role and remit.
8. Considering a profile-raising campaign, working alongside other groups with shared interests, for family learning in order to highlight certain key messages, which might include:
 - How family learning supports the 5 outcomes for children;
 - The wider benefits of family learning (beyond the ECM agenda);
 - The relationship to parenting;
 - The diversity of providers and settings engaged in family learning.
9. Gaining support for family learning at the corporate level.
10. Securing the funding base for family learning. In particular, there is a need for funding for developmental work not tied to targets and a revenue budget commitment from the local authority.
11. Taking account of new structures that are developing, both at strategic and local levels. The major local authority structures will be formed around children's and adult services, with a local infrastructure for extended services clusters and parenting initiatives.

Conclusions

The SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham was an ambitious project with roots in both non-schedule 2 learning and several earlier successful family learning projects managed by EiC. There is no doubt of its achievements, including an inclusive model, a partnership approach, significant development work, local infrastructure, training, a website and an annual conference, to name a few. Given the focus on delivering family literacy and numeracy programmes in schools set out in the Project Appraisal in 2000, the scale of development work led by the Project Co-ordinator and supported by partners is particularly significant.

The developmental work, particularly that of engaging new groups through football, music and *Families First*, is largely being embedded, but it will be

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important to find ways of maintaining the developmental drive, as new areas of work, for example, families and the virtual learning environment, are identified.

Effective partnership working at local level has been embedded in the FLOGs, though the relationship of these groups to other emerging local networks such as extended services clusters, 21st Century Family Schools clusters and parenting networks requires work if there is not to be duplication and gaps in provision.

The SRB6 Steering Group was unique in giving every sector a voice in family learning, at least as it related to the project. Without the shared focus of the project, the basis for, and means of, bringing sectors together is not clear. While the local authority is the partner with the obvious capacity to lead on re-convening a post-SRB6 partnership group, it will need to take soundings and think carefully about its role and remit.

While there are opportunities in the ECM agenda there are limitations in linking family learning so strongly to children's outcomes and the child protection agenda. Encouragement to integrate services for children and families will necessarily put partnerships at a premium, and also stimulate the growth of new partnerships based on extended services, parenting, and other areas relating to the outcomes.

The challenges facing family learning in Durham are many, not least the need to ensure a stable funding base for its long-term development. All of them will require stakeholders in family learning to present a strong message about its core features, demonstrate its range of benefits, draw on the strengths and resources of all its partners, make links with related services and mobilise families themselves in support of its cause.

Recommendations

The local authority should:

1. take the lead in developing an appropriate form of post-SRB6 county-wide partnership taking account of the changing context;
2. take the lead on developing processes for ensuring that there are strong links between parenting and family learning developments, given the overlap of beneficiaries, needs and interests involved;
3. provide funding for an Annual Family Learning Conference in order to sustain the important networking and sharing of good practice it affords;

4. consider that the work of the Family Programmes Manager and the Family Learning Consultant together should include:
 - the promotion of a strategic approach to development work in family learning;
 - raising awareness of the role that family learning can play in the authority's major initiatives, such as *Every Child Matters*, children's centres, extended services, parenting *Skills for Life* and economic regeneration;
 - raising awareness of the role that family learning plays in raising the educational achievement of parents and children;
 - leading on the development of models of strategic planning in family learning combining the responsiveness of local area planning and the strategic overview of authority wide planning;
 - developing strong links with family learning services across the region through regional networks and collaborative initiatives.

Individual SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham partners should:

1. remain committed to a county-wide family learning partnership approach, based on their common wish to engage more, and new, families across the county in quality learning opportunities;
2. maintain and promote the broad and inclusive vision of family learning developed through the project, as it is a powerful model particularly relevant to current policy and practice;
3. remain actively involved in the Family Learning Operational Groups and other local area partnerships where family learning provision can be co-ordinated and good practice shared.

Members of Family Learning Operational Groups (FLOGs) should:

1. highlight the unique features of family learning and its relationship to key local authority initiatives such as ECM, children's centres, extended schools, parenting, *Skills for Life* and the skills agenda;
2. ensure FLOGs are aligned, as far as possible, with other key partnerships in the local area, including Extended Services Clusters and *21st Century Family Schools*, and in Southwest Durham with the Adult Learning Group;

The County Durham Lifelong Learning Partnership should:

1. support Lifelong Learning Co-ordinators in chairing the FLOGs;

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2. ensure that family learning is supported through its work and that of its sub-groups;
3. request briefing papers, when appropriate, on family learning from the local authority and other organisations to inform its discussions and decision-making.

Documents Consulted

Adult Learning Inspectorate 2003, *Inspection Report Durham LEA*. Adult Learning Inspectorate.

Durham County Council 2001, *Promoting Strong, Healthy and Safe Communities in County Durham: Project Appraisal*. Unpubl.

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NIACE 2004, *Every Family Matters: an evaluation of SRB6 Family Learning in County Durham*. Unpubl.