

Early Years – Tackling Poverty

Introduction

This chapter will explore the impact that the Early Years Framework approach can have on tackling poverty. The chapter brings together the findings of a brief review of relevant policy and research literature. Research was reviewed from a range of national and international sources and where possible the impact of Scottish initiatives has been explored. The Early Years Framework is relatively new so there is a limited amount of research evidence for its impact on outcomes for children and young people. However, there is international longitudinal evidence of impact from early years type approaches which is summarised in this chapter, and it is likely that other less formal information about Early Years Framework impact may be available through contact with networks of local authority officers and voluntary organisations.

The chapter begins by illustrating the impact that poverty can have on children's lives. It then looks at a snapshot of the findings of the impact of the early years approach in general. The chapter goes on to set out the main purpose and approach of the Early Years Framework and highlights the links the Framework makes to tackling poverty. This chapter ends with a review of the international evidence on what early years work can contribute to tackling poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty.

The impact of poverty on outcomes

Children who grow up in poor households are more likely to have low self-esteem, play truant, leave home earlier, leave school earlier and with fewer qualifications, and be economically inactive as adults (Ermisch et al. 2001). Consequently, children born into poor families are more likely to be poor adults (Smith and Middleton 2007).

Although children are less likely to be in poverty if they live with a working adult (just 11 % of children in working households in Scotland are in poverty), 42% of all children living in poverty live in working households (Households Below Average Income 2008/9). Work can fail to lift families out of poverty if that work is low paid, part-time or temporary.

Children who experience poverty may lack many of the experiences and opportunities that others take for granted and can be exposed to severe hardship, deprivation and the negative effects of inequality and exclusion. Growing up in poverty can damage physical, cognitive, social and emotional development which are determinants of outcomes in adult life.

Experiencing poverty can impact on a child's educational opportunities. Poor children tend to have lower educational attainment and poorer health. These reduce productivity within the population which in turn reduces economic growth and limits the UK's ability to compete globally.

However, there is no clear cut causal link between poverty and quality of parenting. It is likely that different individuals respond in different ways to financial hardship. Factors such as family structure, neighbourhood and social support interact with parents' temperaments, beliefs and their own experiences of parenting (Katz et al. 2007). There is evidence to indicate that good parenting can mitigate the disadvantages of growing up in a low income household or deprived neighbourhood (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2008).

Lone parents are more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive than parents in general. In Scotland, 43.5% of lone parents are unemployed or economically inactive compared with 20.2% of parents in general (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2006).

However, poverty can contribute to parental stress, depression and anxiety leading to disrupted parenting and it is this rather than poverty alone that may result in poorer long-term outcomes for children (Katz et al. 2007). State support can therefore play a crucial role in helping families overcome these problems. The governments of the UK are committed to ending child poverty and have introduced many measures to tackle the problem.

Early analysis of cognitive scores in Growing Up in Scotland show that by sweep three (children aged 2-3 and 4-5) cognitive development was most strongly correlated with income and material inequality than any other independent variable, and the only activity that could overcome this inherent inequality was if parents: read with their children; carry out daily educational activities or go on a large number of educational or cultural visits with their children (Bromley 2009).

Early Years impact on outcomes

One of the main recommendations of the Kilbrandon Report (Kilbrandon 1964) (which formed the basis of the Children's Hearing System) was of the value of **early intervention** to prevent the development of future problems. A growing body of evidence over the years supports this further, demonstrating both the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of early intervention¹. In particular, interventions delivered before the child reaches the age of 8 are most likely to reduce the likelihood of problematic behaviours continuing (Webster-Stratton 2001) and can produce measurable benefits in attainment at primary school stage, in behaviour by about 12 and in criminality and health (e.g. lower first pregnancy, lower drug use) (Sinclair 2007)

This finding is supported by more recent studies such as the Seattle Social Development Project which has shown that intervening earlier in a child's life is a more effective and cost-effective approach than intervening at a later stage. However it is important to note that while earlier intervention is effective, the effects should also be sustained over time through age-appropriate support. While early intervention does help to significantly reduce risk, it is not an "inoculation" against the development of later problems.

Research exploring the impact of early years interventions in health found that despite a number of weaknesses and gaps in the evidence base, there is increasing evidence that investing in the early years (and focusing on young people while they are at school to promote sexual health and prevent early pregnancy) can have long term benefits and, ultimately, play a significant role in reducing health inequalities (Hallam 2008).

An analysis by Feinstein of the 1970 British Birth Cohort Study showed that cognitive assessments at 22 and 42 months predicted educational outcomes at 26 years. Furthermore, this analysis also showed the impact social inequalities have: low scoring children from high

¹ For example: Tremblay, R. E., Pagani-Kurtz, L., Masse, L. C., Vitaro, F., and Pihl, R. O. (1995) A bimodal preventive intervention for disruptive kindergarten boys: Its impact through mid-adolescence. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 63, 560-568; Schweinhart, L. J. and Weikart, D. P. (1992) 'Significant benefits: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 27', Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. Quoted in Penman, M. (2007) Summary of Literature on Parenting Interventions, unpublished paper, Scottish Government

status households improved their position in later years more than those from less advantaged backgrounds (Feinstein 2003).

Many early intervention initiatives have mixed applicability to a Scottish context. In a US context, many of these interventions take place with limited already existing early-years services, such as health visiting and nursery provision. These interventions are therefore likely to have an exaggerated impact on target populations compared to when they are transferred into a UK context (Action for Children and New Economics Foundation 2009).

Scottish Government economists explored the economic benefits of early years services. The overall finding is that there is the potential to make significant savings over a person's life course, if early years interventions are effective. This work was published in November 2010, and the main findings are below:

- A wide range of economic studies suggest that returns to early investment in children during the pre-birth period and up to the age of eight years old are high, but reduce the later the investment is initiated. Skill formation in the early years begets more skill, and makes later acquisition easier. Children from advantaged environments by and large receive substantial early investment. Children from disadvantaged environments more often do not, and therefore there are greater returns to be sought from identifying and targeting interventions in early childhood for disadvantaged children.
- **The models in the study are based on the assumption that early years interventions are 100% effective. The study is not an attempt to assess the efficacy of any specific early years programmes.** It instead highlights the costs to the public sector of failing to intervene in the early years of a child's life, and the benefits that can be gained from mitigating against the negative outcomes associated with disadvantaged children.
- **The models used in the analysis are based on hypothetical “pathways” for three different cohorts of children, reflecting existing policies and provision in Scotland:** the “control” cohort or pathway, providing the baseline costs, are children with no additional needs who receive standard universal services; the second pathway is of those with “modest” additional needs; the third pathway is for those with “severe” additional needs. We use Scottish data on costs wherever possible.
- **We use the numbers of looked after children in the community as a proxy for the size of the “modest needs” group of children and the number of looked after and accommodated children as a proxy for those with “severe” additional needs.** The model examines hypothetical, but realistic, life trajectories for the two additional needs groups over the short term (from birth to 5 years) and over the full lifetime, and calculates the estimated additional costs to the public purse for these 2 cohorts in both the short, medium and the long term, in comparison with the control group.
- **Our financial modelling of short term savings from investing in early years / early interventions from pre-birth to aged five suggest that there are potential net savings of up to £37.4k per annum per child in the most severe cases and of approximately £5.1k per annum for a child with moderate difficulties in the first five years of life.** While these savings may be modest in comparison to the well known longer term savings are still significant.
- **The short term costs of failing to mitigate against the most severe cases are incurred largely by Local Authorities and health services,** particularly through engagement with

Social Services, Maternal Health interventions and costs associated with not being ready for school education.

- **The model also demonstrates that there are potential medium term net savings to the public sector, that can be realised 10 years after the early years period.** Using Looked After Children as a proxy for those individuals with moderate difficulties, and those in residential care as a proxy for the severe cases, it is estimated that the total potential saving resulting from 100% effective interventions early in life (pre-birth to aged eight) could initially be up to **£131m per annum**, in the medium term.
- **In the longer term, a failure to effectively intervene to address the complex needs of an individual in early childhood can result in a nine fold increase in direct public costs, when compared with an individual who accesses only universal services.** A package of effective early years interventions designed to reduce the frequency and type of service demanded by those individuals experiencing severe pathways could have a significant impact on the outcomes for those individuals, and therefore a reduction in the level of cost to the public sector. For example, a **ten percent** reduction in the total cost to the public sector of an individual's severe pathway could result in a potential saving of approximately **£94,000 per individual**.
- Targeting children with identified additional needs could have a significant impact on lowering direct public costs and improving the outcomes of children, both in the short and long term. In 2009, there were over 15,000 looked after children in Scotland (1.5% of the under 16 population), 10% of who were in high cost residential placements. A further consequence of not having the best start in life is an increased probability of an individual not being in Education, Employment or Training. Latest estimates put the number of NEET young people at 32,000, in 2009 (a rate of 12.1%). In the longer term, early interventions could help in addressing intergenerational cycles of deprivation, such as the 15.7% of children growing up in workless households in Scotland.

Across the Scottish Government most policies are already moving towards early intervention, early prevention and targeted universal services. In Education, *Getting it Right for Every Child* is focusing on providing the best services to all children in Scotland; the *Early Years Framework* is focusing Community Planning Partnerships and the Scottish Government on early intervention to improve long-term outcomes; Children's Hearing reform and the child protection review are renewing help for those most vulnerable within a framework of universal services.

Early Years Framework²

The Early Years Framework approach sets out to challenge head on the key issue that it is during our very earliest years and pre-birth that a large part of the pattern for our future adult life is set.

The Framework states that:

“what happens to children in their earliest years says much about our society and is key to outcomes in adult life. The framework at its simplest is about giving all our children the best start in life and the steps that the Scottish Government, local partners and practitioners in early years services need to take to start us on that journey”.

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/01/13095148/0>

Early intervention has relevance to a wide range of social policy but it is particularly relevant in early years, which will often be the earliest and best opportunity to intervene. The Early Years Framework identifies 4 principles of early intervention:

- we want all to have the same outcomes and the same opportunities;
- we identify those at risk of not achieving those outcomes and take steps to prevent that risk materialising;
- where the risk has materialised, we take effective action;
- we work to help parents, families and communities to develop their own solutions, using accessible, high quality public services as required.

There is an emphasis in the Early Years Framework on supporting parenting and building parental capacity. Transformational change is needed to deliver the Early Years vision and the Framework sets out what this change would look like in relation to parents:

“Parents are given appropriate support to help them understand the responsibilities and sustained commitment associated with bringing up a child and to develop the skills needed to provide a nurturing and stimulating home environment free from conflict”

Key points about the Framework

- a. The Early Years Framework is pre-birth to 8 years old.
- b. Early years research consistently highlights the quality of services and relationships as being the single biggest contributor to outcomes from early years services.
- c. Curriculum for Excellence is central to the delivery of the early years framework.
- d. Getting it Right for Every Child is a key foundation for all action with children, young people and families. The approach has established a set of 14 principles and values and 10 core components (www.scotland.gov.uk/gettingitright) and puts the child firmly at the centre of planning and action.

Key links between Early Years and poverty

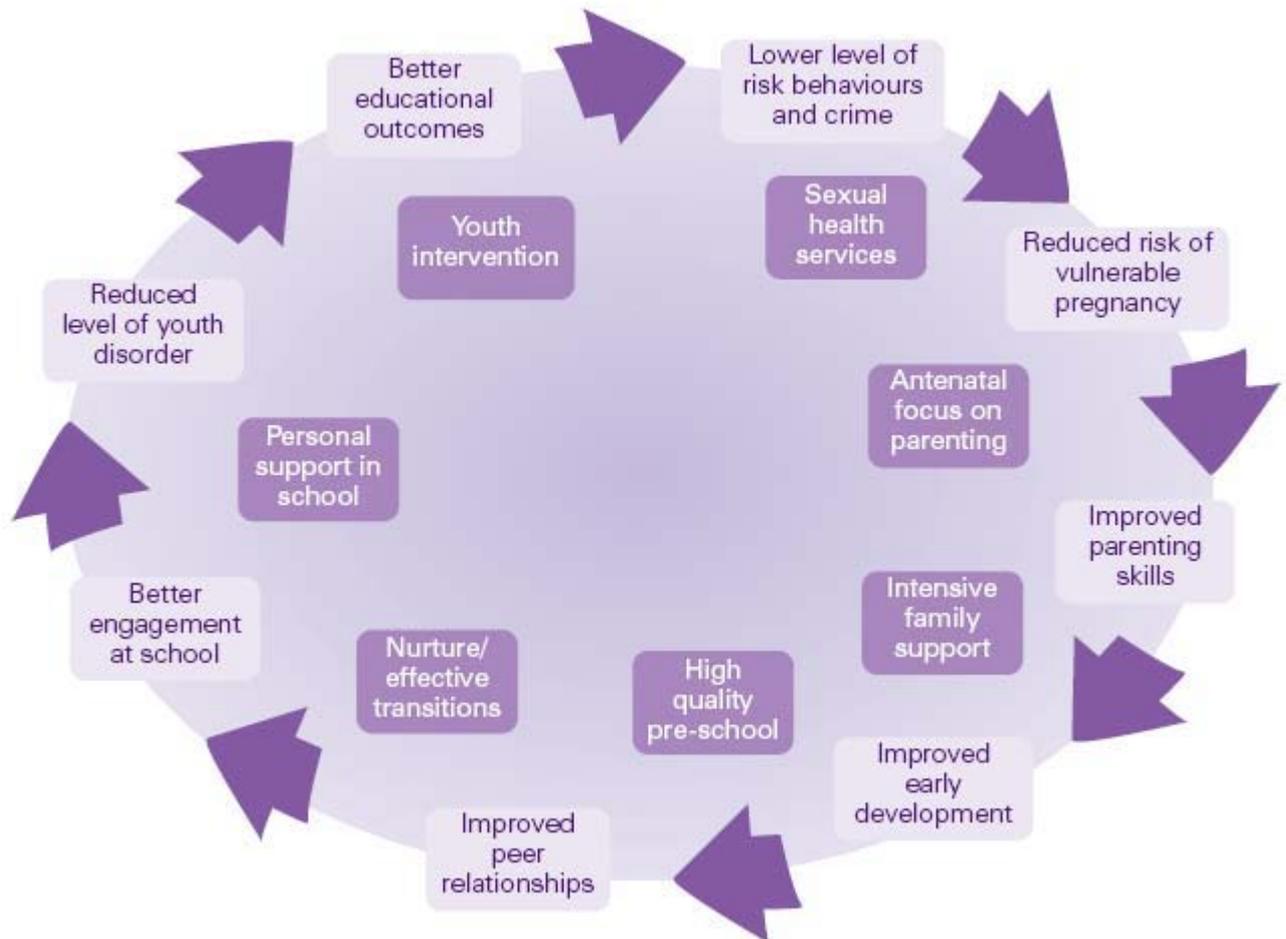
The Early Years Framework aims to combine its approach to tackling poverty with promoting those factors that will protect children and families from its effects.

The main routes out of poverty that the Early Years Framework seeks to impact are through improving the chances of parents to secure well-paid sustainable work and improving the chances of children (in the long term) to secure well-paid sustainable work. These are achieved in the following ways:

1. breaking the cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years;
2. reducing child poverty;
3. improving early years experiences;
4. early intervention approach (prevention)

Breaking the cycles of poverty, inequality and poor outcomes in and through early years

This is a key element of the Early Years Framework approach. The diagram below presents the cycle and key intervention points. It also illustrates the complexity of the cycle and the range of interventions and services that need to be engaged in order to make a difference.



Reducing child poverty

Two of the most relevant visions in the Early Years Framework are that:

“parents are supported to access employment and training to help reduce the risk of child poverty, including through the provision of flexible, accessible and affordable childcare”

“Children grow up free from poverty in their early years and have their outcomes defined by their ability and potential rather than their family background”

Child poverty may also be reduced by increasing parents’ income (and reducing outgoings) in other ways. The impact of the following on poverty are addressed in other sections and will not be explored in detail here: improving financial capability, increasing benefit uptake, childcare and the Energy Assistance Package.

Improving early years experiences

The Early Years Framework states that improving the early years experience in Scotland is key to enabling us to address some of our most entrenched problems in terms of poverty, poor health, poor attainment and anti social behaviour.

Improving the early years experiences of children is a central element of the strategy for regenerating communities, reducing crime, tackling substance misuse and **improving employability**. There is no single programme or approach that can deliver the improved outcomes we seek. Instead, it will take a **concerted and long-term effort** across a range of policies and services to achieve a transformation in outcomes.

Early intervention

Early Years Vision Statement:

“A renewed emphasis on the period between early pregnancy and 3 years old is needed to reflect the evidence that this is the period with the greatest bearing on outcomes and a critical period in terms of breaking cycles of poor outcomes”

Within universal services there needs to be the capacity to provide additional support and early intervention for families facing greater challenges, whether on a temporary or more long-term basis. Wherever possible, universal services should take responsibility for providing that additional support rather than referring onwards, in line with the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child. By ensuring universal services are effective in reaching and helping the most disadvantaged when they require help, the stigma of specific service provision may be reduced, and better outcomes produced.

The impact of childcare on poverty is discussed in section *** in relation to improving parents’ employability and income. In terms of the long term impact of early interventions, the quality of provision of childcare and any other intervention is absolutely key, particularly in relation to vulnerable children. High quality childcare can have huge impacts on a child’s ability to engage with education and work.

Over a life time people can access better employment opportunities and have better educational qualifications and more qualities that employers look for. This can lead to more stable and financially rewarding work and people being more resilient and better able to deal with life shocks. It also reduces the risk of state care, criminal behaviour and risks of physical health problems (especially those arising from stress).

Reach of Early Years impact on tackling poverty:

- Parents;
- Communities (especially deprived areas);
- Services (universal service provision that can better meet the needs of children with additional support needs); and
- Workforce (flexible with interchangeable skills, high quality, well qualified workforce).

Evidence review: what can early years work contribute to tackling poverty and breaking the cycle of poverty?

Key Findings:

Interventions in the early years can contribute to tackling poverty by improving the parenting skills of the parent and the social and cognitive development of the child, which can contribute to more positive outcomes in later life

- **Interventions with the parent(s)** such as the *Family Nurse Partnership* can help to tackle poverty by; supporting parenting and building parenting capacity; improving parenting skills and knowledge. The evidence base from a range of pilots and evaluations (including Family Nurse Partnership and Triple Ps) can inform direction in this area.
- **Pre-school/Childcare**
- Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds. (*Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project*)
- Benefits of pre-school for children with backgrounds of poverty (shown in American longitudinal studies) include: being more likely to graduate high school, being more likely to attend college, more likely to be employed at age 40, more likely to have a higher salary, more likely to have a skilled job, less likely to have their first child at age 18 or younger
- The mothers of children engaged in pre-school interventions were more likely to have higher educational and employment status
- For all children, the quality of the **home learning environment** is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are. (*Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project*, Growing Up in Scotland)

Growing up in poverty can affect every area of a child's development – social, educational and personal. As adults they are more likely to suffer ill-health, be unemployed or homeless, and become involved in offending, drug and alcohol abuse, and abusive relationships. Early intervention for vulnerable children is therefore crucial in breaking this cycle and has long been recognised as providing significant benefits in both the short and long-term for both the child and the parent.

The purpose of the next section of the paper is to summarise the key evidence which highlights the link between early intervention and improving child outcomes. The scope covers both UK-wide and international research.

Examples of Early Intervention

*High/Scope Perry pre-school study*³ was set up in the 1960s in the USA to track the effects of high quality pre-school education on children at risk of failing at school. The program was based on a participatory learning approach and a comparison group who received no preschool programme. The study found that adults at age 40 who had the preschool program had higher earnings, were more likely to hold a job, had committed fewer crimes, and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have preschool.

³ <http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>

Looking specifically at economic results at age 40; those who received the Perry Preschool programme were:

- Significantly more likely to have graduated from high school (65% vs. 45%)
- Significantly more likely to be employed at age 40 (76% vs. 62%), which continues the trend from age 27 (69% vs. 56%).
- Have significantly higher median annual earnings at ages 27 and 40 (\$12,000 vs. \$10,000 at age 27 and \$20,800 vs. \$15,300 at age 40) and higher median monthly incomes at both ages
- Have significantly more stable dwelling arrangements at ages 27 and 40—that is, more of them owned their own homes (27% vs. 5% at age 27, 37% vs. 28% at age 40).
- Significantly more owned a car at age 40 (82% vs. 60%),
- At age 40, significantly more had savings accounts (76% vs. 50%),

*Carolina Abecedarian Study*⁴ was a carefully controlled scientific study of the potential benefits of early childhood education for poor children. It provided high quality, intensive services to infants and pre-schoolers from low income families until school start. Follow up studies were completed at 12, 15 and 21 years of age. Findings show:

- Intervention children completed more years of education and were more likely to attend a four-year college (36% vs 14%)
- Intervention children were more likely to have a skilled job (47 percent versus 27 percent).
- Intervention children were less likely to have had their first child at age 18 or younger (26% versus 45%).
- Mothers whose children participated in the program achieved higher educational and employment status than mothers whose children were not in the program. These results were especially pronounced for teen mothers.

*The Seattle Social Development Project*⁵ is a universal intervention in elementary schools beginning in 1981. The intervention consisted of 3 components: teacher training in classroom instruction and management, child social and emotional skill development, and parent workshops. The intervention positively affected mental health, sexual health, and educational and economic achievement 15 years after the intervention ended.

*The Child-Parent Centre (CPC) Program*⁶ is a centre-based early intervention that provides comprehensive educational and family-support services to economically disadvantaged children from preschool to early elementary school. The CPC program was established in 1967. Findings from the Chicago Longitudinal Study so far show the attendance at the CPC has positive impacts relating to education and youth offending.

- Youth who attended preschool had a higher rate of high school completion (65%) than youth who did not attend preschool (54%).
- Youth who attended the CPCs for 5 or 6 years showed the highest levels of school achievement and educational attainment.
- Preschool participants had a 37% lower rate of juvenile arrest than the comparison group (16.4% vs. 25.9%).

⁴ <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/#home>

⁵ <http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/162/12/1133>

⁶ <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/PROGRAM.HTM>

*Head Start*⁷ in the USA aimed to combat the cycle of poverty by providing disadvantaged three and four year olds with pre-school education and a variety of health care services that would help them begin school on an equal footing with their more fortunate peers. Support was also provided for their parents. This was then further extended to *Early Head Start*⁸ which offered pregnant women and families with infants access to both centre-based and home-based family development services.

Research from Head Start and Early Head Start has demonstrated that early intervention can have positive results for vulnerable children's IQ, cognitive, social and emotional development, language skills, concentration and behaviour and educational attainments. In addition to short-term benefits, longitudinal research demonstrated long-term positive effects of early intervention programmes on literacy and social skills, IQ and school achievement, grade retention, placement in special education and social adjustment.

*The Nurse-Family Partnership*⁹ (NFP) was developed in the USA, a form of which is now being piloted in the UK and Scotland. It is an evidence-based nurse home visiting programme designed to improve the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of young first-time parents and their children. US research findings from when the NFP supported children reach 15 show that maternal life course was still positively affected, with NFP mothers having fewer births and, greater birth spacing, less welfare dependency and fewer arrests or substance-abuse impairment. All these beneficial effects applied to women who were poor and unmarried when originally enrolled in the programme.

In Scotland preschool places for 3 and 4 year olds have been free to all children since 2002. The Early Years Framework published in 2008 also provides a commitment to supporting families and raising children out of poverty.

Another example of an early intervention for parents is *Triple Ps Positive Parenting Programme*¹⁰. The Triple Ps programme is an example of a universal service that also has a targeted element being piloted by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and Glasgow City Council. The programme targets families who are assessed as being at risk according to certain risk factors which include deprivation and poverty. Studies have shown that positive parenting can help ease hardships, such as poverty (Parenting Support Framework 2009).

Research Findings: Child Outcomes

The findings above are supported by the *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education project (EPPE)*¹¹, a large-scale longitudinal study carried out in England (1997-2003) which reported that pre-school attendees showed higher cognitive attainment, sociability and concentration at school start compared with children without pre-school experience.

The EPPE team found that the specific form of pre-school provision influenced outcomes. Effective provision had an educational focus with teachers supporting less qualified staff, and with a high level of parental involvement. It provided a balance of free play and staff-led group work. Responsive feedback to children during activities and progress reports to their parents were also features of effective centres as were differentiated learning opportunities and the application of explicit behaviour policies.

⁷ Currie J, Thomas D. (1995). "Does Head Start Make A Difference?". *American Economic Review* **85** (3): 341-341.

⁸ www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/dev-416885.pdf

⁹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RW051%20v2.pdf>

¹⁰ For more information see: <http://glasgow.triplep-staypositive.net/>

¹¹ <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/RRP/u013144/index.shtml>

The role of the home learning environment was emphasised and the researchers proposed that the amount and quality of pre-school and the home learning environment were elements that policy could address more readily than family characteristics such as socio-economic disadvantage.

- Duration of attendance (in months) is important; an earlier start (under age 3 years) is related to better intellectual development.
- Full time attendance led to no better gains for children than part-time provision.
- Disadvantaged children benefit significantly from good quality pre-school experiences, especially where they are with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds.
- Overall disadvantaged children tend to attend pre-school for shorter periods of time than those from more advantaged groups (around 4-6 months less).
- High quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children.
- For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are.

In the follow up EPPE project¹², the following long term impacts were found:

- The positive benefits of both medium and high quality pre-school education have persisted to the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11) for attainment in Reading/English and Mathematics and all social/behavioural outcomes. Also attending a more effective pre-school showed long term benefits for Mathematics.
- Moreover, having attended a high quality preschool was especially beneficial for boys, pupils with special educational needs (SEN) and those from disadvantaged backgrounds for most social/behavioural outcomes.
- High quality pre-school was especially beneficial for the most disadvantaged pupils and for those of low qualified parents in promoting better Mathematics outcomes at age 11.
- Children who had attended poor quality/less effective pre-school generally showed no significant age 11 benefits in improved outcomes compared with those who did not attend any pre-school. However, they did show better Pro-social behaviour but poorer ratings for Hyperactivity.

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS)¹³ findings support the importance of the home learning environment, suggesting that although family factors such as parents education and socio-economic status can affect a child's cognitive development, the extent of home-learning activities exerts a greater and independent influence on cognitive development at three years of age.

¹² Kathy Sylva, Edward Melhuish, Pam Sammons, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and Brenda Taggart, (2008) *Final Report from the Primary Phase: Pre-school, School and Family Influences on children's development during Key Stage 2 (7-11)* DCSF RR 061 The Department for Children, Schools and Families. Nottingham <http://epped.ioe.ac.uk/epped3-11/epped3-11pubs.htm>

¹³ <http://www.growingupinscotland.org.uk/>

Research Findings: Parental outcomes

There are clear gaps between the development of children whose parents face daily stresses and those being brought up in less stressful households. These gaps continue through life. At age 3, children at higher risk of poor outcomes can be identified on the basis of their chaotic home circumstances, their emotional behaviour, their negativity and poor development. By the time such children reach adulthood, these children are more likely to have poor health outcomes, be unemployed, have criminal convictions, have substance misuse problems and have experienced teenage pregnancy.

Parents of children participating in *Sure Start* programmes have been found to offer their children more educational and emotional support, to cope better with conflict, to experience reduced parenting stress and to experience less household chaos. As part of a Scottish pilot project, three school districts in deprived areas extended their Sure Start programmes to provide early educational experiences for vulnerable two-year-olds and to provide increased support to their families. An evaluation¹⁴ showed that intervention group parents showed a significantly better response to the daily hassle of parenting the ‘terrible twos’ than comparison group parents. They learned important new skills for managing their children’s behaviour and for encouraging child learning. They gained valuable new insights and understanding into their children’s behaviour and changed the way they thought about their role as parents and their behavioural and developmental expectations of their children. This was likely to have occurred through observation of their children in the programmes, through activities their children brought home, and through direct advice from staff.

¹⁴ <http://www.ness.bbk.ac.uk/>

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