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Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development

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Education and Culture DG

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Authors

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Chapter 1 Executive summary

1.1 Background and objectives

1.1.1 This is the Executive Summary of the European Commission report "Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development". As highlighted by evidence from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS), there is a clear link between poor literacy and factors such as socio-economic background and migrant status. While there are a wide range of school-based initiatives designed to reduce the impact of such factors on literacy acquisition, there is also a growing emphasis on programmes seeking to improve parents' ability to support child literacy development. Such "family literacy" initiatives take a variety of forms, including shared parent-child book reading programmes and book gifting schemes.

1.1.2 This report provides an overview of research, strategies, policies, initiatives and programmes in the field of family literacy. In particular, it analyses the evidence on the effectiveness of a broad range of family literacy interventions, placing special emphasis on those targeted at disadvantaged families. The report highlights good practice by providing case studies of unique and successful programmes throughout Europe. Furthermore, this report analyses the family literacy policy-making process in a number of Member States, providing evidence of policy successes and challenges through interviews with policymakers and other policy stakeholders. The aim of these investigations is to provide the Commission and Member States with practical information and analyses which can serve as a basis for future policy and programme design.

1.2 Key findings

1.2.1 The key finding of this report is that family literacy programmes are effective, both in improving child literacy and in improving parental support skills. We arrive at this conclusion based on our review of six recent meta-analyses of family literacy interventions, all of which found positive effects on child literacy development. These findings support those of the still small body of methodologically robust quantitative research on European family literacy programmes. We will look first at the meta-analytic evidence.

- 1.2.2 In quantifying programme effectiveness, meta-analyses use a measure known as effect size, which is a numerical estimate of the magnitude of an intervention's impact (Coe, 2002). An effect size of 1.0 is equivalent to an increase of one standard deviation. This would be considered an extremely large impact – the equivalent of advancing a child's achievement by two to three years or improving the rate of learning by 50% (Hattie, 2009). As Hattie (1999, 2009) has shown, the average (mean) effect size for educational interventions, the vast majority of which occur in schools, is 0.4. Most interventions have less impact than this: the most common effect size is 0.3, with the next most common being 0.2. These are followed by 0.4, then 0.1. This indicates that the majority of educational interventions have relatively limited impact. For example, the effect size of giving homework to primary school pupils is 0.15 (Hattie, 2009), while reducing class sizes from 23 to 15 yields an effect of 0.30 (Hattie, 1999).
- 1.2.3 The meta-analyses reviewed for this report found impacts of family literacy interventions ranging from a low of 0.25 to a high of 0.68. Five of the six meta-analyses found effect sizes greater than 0.3, with four finding effects greater than 0.4. In three of the six meta-analyses, the effect size is greater than 0.5. These findings suggest that family literacy interventions have a relatively large impact on child literacy acquisition.
- 1.2.4 Table 1.1 summarises the effect size found by each meta-analysis included in our review. For example, the bottom row presents the results of Sénéchal and Young (2008), who found an effect size of 0.68.
- 1.2.5 Columns 3 and 4 of this table illustrate the impacts of particular effect sizes. For example, Column 3 shows that with an effect size of 0.68, approximately 75% of the children in a control group (i.e. not receiving the intervention) would score below the average child participating in a family literacy intervention. That is, the effect of the programme is the equivalent of moving a child from the 50th percentile to the 76th. This is a large gain. Still focusing on Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis, Column 4 shows that the average family literacy intervention group score (i.e. the 13th highest score in a group of 25) would be equivalent to the sixth highest score in a comparable control group.

Table 1.1 Family literacy effect sizes, and gains expected from these effect sizes

Study	Effect size	Approximate percentage of control group who would be below the average person in the experimental group	Approximate rank of person in a control group of 25 who would be equivalent to the average person in the experimental group
van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011), How effective are family literacy programmes? Results of a meta-analysis	0.25	60%	11th
Manz et al (2010), A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically-diverse young children?	0.33	63%	10th
Nye et al (2006), Approaches to parent involvement for improving the academic performance of elementary school age children	0.42	66%	9th
Erion (2006), Parent tutoring: A meta-analysis	0.55	71%	8th
Mol et al (2008), Added value of dialogic parent-child book readings: A meta-analysis	0.59	73%	7th
Sénéchal and Young (2008), The effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading from kindergarten to grade 3: A meta-analytic review	0.68	75%	6th

(NB: Van Steensel et al found no positive effect in randomised studies. In contrast, Nye et al found an effect size of 0.42, even though their review included only randomised studies.)

1.2.6 The key question in deciding whether or not to employ a particular intervention is not "Does it work?" Most educational interventions work to some degree (Hattie, 2009). The key question is: "How well does an intervention work in comparison to other viable alternatives?" The meta-analytic evidence indicates that family literacy programmes have a greater impact than most educational interventions. This impact is heightened by consideration of the reduced opportunity cost associated with family literacy programmes. While school-based interventions tend to be "either-or" propositions – if one intervention is being implemented in a classroom, others cannot be – family interventions (the vast majority of which occur outside of school hours) are more likely to complement than to compete with school activities.

1.2.7 In our assessment, the meta-analytic evidence therefore strongly supports the argument that all Member States' child literacy strategies should include a family literacy component, and that policymakers should more actively support the

widespread proliferation of family literacy interventions.

- 1.2.8 Primary research data also support this conclusion – albeit more tentatively, given the limited European evidence base. Only three countries – Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK – have produced a significant body of quantitative research measuring the effectiveness of family literacy programmes. In the UK, the evidence suggests that government-funded family literacy interventions have been successful at improving child literacy amongst children in disadvantaged households (Brooks et al, 1996, 1998, 2008). In the Netherlands, the evidence indicates that the most extensive initiative, Opstap, initially failed to produce the desired gains (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). However, a modified programme, Opstap Opnieuw, has had some success, though not for all target groups (van Tuijl et al, 2001). In particular, the programme has led to gains for Turkish-Dutch children, but not for Moroccan-Dutch. Reasons for this discrepancy include the poorer literacy skills typical of Moroccan-Dutch parents, in comparison with their Turkish-Dutch peers.
- 1.2.9 Potentially the most valuable primary research comes from Turkey, where researchers have generated a relatively large body of longitudinal evidence of the effectiveness of two programmes: the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and its successor, the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP). This research finds strong evidence of long-term cognitive and non-cognitive gains for disadvantaged children participating in these programmes (Bekman, 2003; Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2001, 2005). These include gains in literacy skills and improvements in a range of other educational areas. They also include long-term returns to society, such as better employment outcomes in adulthood (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2005). Evidence suggests that long-term gains in child literacy are particularly likely when family literacy programmes emphasise the importance of providing parents with training not just in educational support skills but also in socio-emotional support skills (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003; Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 1992, 2001, 2005; Heckman, 2009). It is our own assessment, based on analysis of the evidence, that such programmes should be widely available in Member States, and targeted at disadvantaged households.
- 1.2.10 Other types of initiatives also appear to produce gains, both in child literacy and in other areas. For example, research on the impact of book gifting programmes such as Bookstart on child literacy is limited, but does suggest sustained literacy improvements (Wade and Moore, 1998; Moore and Wade, 2003). In their meta-analysis, Sénéchal and Young (2008) found particularly large benefits from programmes in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children.

- 1.2.11 Looking specifically at benefits for disadvantaged families, the British, Dutch and Turkish programmes discussed above were targeted specifically at educationally disadvantaged and/or migrant families, and produced positive effects for most participants. However, the meta-analytic evidence on disadvantage produces conflicting findings. Mol et al (2008) and Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) both found smaller gains for disadvantaged children. In contrast, Sénéchal and Young (2008) found that intervention impacts were no lower for children of low socio-economic status or those experiencing reading problems or considered to be at risk of such problems. Research on implementation quality has indicated that disadvantaged families often find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended by programme developers (McElvaney and Artelt, 2009; van Steensel et al, forthcoming 2011). The policy and programme leaders we interviewed for this project suggested that disadvantaged families benefited from programmes with more highly structured educational models: the increased structure ensured that parents had clear guidelines about tasks and techniques, and could readily understand how to perform the parent-child literacy tasks required of them.
- 1.2.12 Thus far, our discussion of effectiveness has focused only on quantifiably measured child literacy gains. This provides a somewhat limited understanding of the impacts of parental support programmes. Particularly when targeted at disadvantaged families, family literacy interventions appear to produce an important range of additional benefits that may support long-term child literacy development, including improved social and cultural capital, improved parental self-confidence and self-efficacy (Swain et al, 2009), and improved child self-concept as a reader and learner (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Policy stakeholders interviewed in the course of our research observed that even in programmes in which it was not a core objective, parental empowerment of low-income, poorly educated and/or migrant mothers was a common outcome of family literacy initiatives. There is also evidence of the broader societal impacts of family literacy interventions. A recent Social Return on Investment (SROI) of Bookstart in the England produced an estimate of savings to society over the next 37 years of £614 million on an investment of £9 million – i.e. £25 saved for every £1 invested.
- 1.2.13 A core objective of Bookstart and similar initiatives is to encourage a celebration of reading for pleasure. This is also the aim of initiatives such as “Every Czech Reads to Kids”. Such programmes seek to contribute to a cultural shift in which reading and learning become seen by all families, including disadvantaged ones, as enjoyable parts of daily life. Initiatives such as these can play a key role in contributing to Europe's necessary transition to a knowledge economy. This ambition, advanced in

many European and national skills strategies, is impossible without an improvement in literacy skills and, in particular, a closing of the literacy gap.

1.3 Policy context, influences and obstacles

- 1.3.1 In Section 1.2, we presented key findings from our review of family literacy research. In Sections 1.3-1.5, we summarise key messages from our own research of family literacy initiatives. This research consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with policymakers and other policy stakeholders in a number of Member States. In addition, we conducted case studies of successful and innovative family literacy programmes in the following countries: Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Turkey and the UK.
- 1.3.2 Despite increasing interest, family literacy remains a marginal field, even in countries where parental support policies and programmes are most developed. A particular challenge is the lack of a clear policy home for family literacy programmes. Our research found that institutional barriers frequently limit the development of family literacy initiatives. In many countries parents are acknowledged in principle as the "first teachers"; however, in practice, school systems are often indifferent or even hostile to the potential of family literacy interventions to complement school-based literacy strategies. One exception is Malta, where the new national literacy strategy includes a family literacy component.
- 1.3.3 A primary cause of such indifference is the complexity inherent in developing and administering policies and programmes focused on families rather than on institutional structures such as schools. The focus on families requires "joined-up", cross-departmental policy making. While our research found many barriers to such cross-departmental work, we also found examples of success. For example, the Netherlands has made significant strides in crafting "childhood-wide" policies which rely on cooperative efforts from a number of departments or ministries, particularly those responsible for education and health. In the Netherlands, family literacy programmes have successfully worked with Health Services to ensure greater coverage of family literacy policy. Likewise, Bookstart in the UK utilises home health visitors to provide free book packs to children, while Buchstart in Hamburg distributes book packs via paediatricians.
- 1.3.4 In part due to the lack of a clear policy home for family literacy interventions, coupled with the challenges associated with cross-departmental policy-making, family literacy policy would likely benefit from the presence in Member States of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) specifically charged with advancing the

interests of the field. We found evidence of such benefits in Ireland, Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK, where family literacy programmes have gained from the presence of NGOs serving as policy champions. However, in each of these countries, the NGOs in question have championed not family literacy in general, but one specific type of programme. For example, in Ireland the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) supports family literacy programmes which include a focus on both child literacy development and parental literacy development. In Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEV) engages in advocacy work and coordinates a number of programmes, including the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) and the Father Support programme. However, in no Member State did we find an organisation, whether governmental or non-governmental, working to advance the interests of the field of family literacy as a whole. Likewise, we found little evidence of coherent, overarching family literacy strategies. The emphasis is on individual programmes or types of programmes, rather than a coherent mix of offerings.

1.4 Programme sustainability, expansion and transfer

- 1.4.1 In addition to a lack of policy strategy and vision, our research found a number of barriers to programme success and sustainability. Policy stakeholders emphasised that programmes should be tailored to meet the particular needs of participating groups. Disadvantage is heterogeneous, and initiatives are not necessarily as effective with all types of families, as was found in the Netherlands with Opstap Opnieuw (Eldering and Vedder, 1999).
- 1.4.2 In the Netherlands, an established programme – HIPPY – was transferred into the country, but rolled out without sufficient evaluation (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). The Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) has been transferred to Belgium (French-speaking), France, Cyprus, Germany and Switzerland, and a number of Middle Eastern countries, with apparent success (Bekman et al, 2010). Programme leaders and researchers associated with MOCEP emphasise that it is necessary to analyse the needs, beliefs and characteristics of the new target population, while also analysing the objectives and aims of the old and new initiatives. According to analysts of MOCEP, successful transfer can be credited to what we will call the 4 P's: participant characteristics; pilots; partnerships; and project teams.
- 1.4.3 Regarding participant characteristics, cultural validity is a key concern (see also Manz et al, forthcoming 2011). Programmes tend to be more successfully transferred when the new target population has similar characteristics to those as of the programme's "home" population; however, they need not be the same ethnic group

or otherwise “identical”. The next factor is piloting. Ideally, transferred family literacy interventions should have two pilots: the first to learn what adjustments need to be made in order to meet participant needs, and the second to evaluate effectiveness.

- 1.4.4 The third “P”, Partnership, was cited both as a key to programme transfer and to programme sustainability in general. Partnerships were highlighted as important not only by MOCEP but by a number of other programmes we analysed. Leaders of Bookstart, for example, insisted that effective collaboration – whether with government departments, NGOs or the private sector, or a combination of the three – is a prerequisite for programme success.
- 1.4.5 MOCEP’s final “P” concerns the Project team. Particular emphasis was placed on the importance of high quality, well trained staff. Stakeholders from MOCEP and other programmes indicated that a reliance on volunteers has a tendency to negatively affect quality and sustainability.
- 1.4.6 Looking more generally at sustainability, our research found four key factors shaping long-term programme success: funding, programme quality, partnerships, and research-based evidence of success. Some programmes also cited a fifth factor for sustainability: media support. Stakeholders in a number of Member States suggested that many good programmes, which took considerable time and resource to develop, have suffered or disappeared because of a dependency on short-term grants which require frequent renewal and are subject to numerous external policy pressures. The short-term nature of much family literacy funding is representative of the general lack of overall policy vision for the field. Member States tend to conceptualise family literacy unconnected programmes, rather than as a broad-ranging but ultimately coherent policy field made up of initiatives which complement each other, while also complementing broader literacy strategies.

1.5 The role of research: evidence-based policymaking

- 1.5.1 Research evidence was cited by programme leaders and policymakers as key to programme sustainability, expansion and transfer. For example, when family literacy advocates seek to launch versions of Bookstart in other Member States, they often refer to quantitatively measured benefits found in UK studies (e.g. Wade and Moore, 1998; Moore and Wade, 2003). In general, however, there is a strong need for a much larger body of high-quality European research in this field, particularly outside Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK. A greater number of methodologically robust

studies of family literacy provision would not only improve our understanding of the degree to which such initiatives work, it would also enhance our understanding of how, why and for whom programmes work, and under what conditions. A larger European evidence base would also reduce the current over-reliance on North American research. Particularly important research gaps exist with regard to issues including: implementation quality; cultural validity and the impact of disadvantage on programme implementation; and the comparative effectiveness of different programme types for different participant groups. There is also an increasing need for research on the potential uses and impacts of digital technologies in family literacy interventions.

1.6 Recommendations

- 1.6.1 In order to facilitate pan-European sharing and transfer of good programme practice, EU-level funding, either from structural funds or from the Lifelong Learning Programme (or its successor), should be made available to support the development of Peer Learning Activities, European networks and other recognised means for sharing good practice. Funding and opportunities should also be made available for family literacy experts to share knowledge and messages with policymakers in related fields, particularly school education.
- 1.6.2 All national child literacy strategies should include family literacy strategies. As part of all child literacy strategies, schools should be encouraged to utilise family literacy initiatives as a complement to in-class literacy programmes. In addition, policymakers should view the different components of their child literacy strategies as complementary rather than competing. For example, funds should not be diverted from family literacy initiatives in order to fund interventions such as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), as has occurred in the Netherlands.
- 1.6.3 Policymakers and policy stakeholders should develop coherent national family literacy policies which include a range of complementary programme types meeting a range of targeted and universal needs. In particular, Member States should support the development and sustainable funding of three key programme types, adopted to local contexts:
 - a) universal book gifting or "celebration of reading" initiatives, such as Bookstart and "Every Czech Reads To Kids", which encourage the development of a culture of reading and learning that is essential in modern knowledge societies;

- b) national family literacy initiatives targeted at disadvantaged families and modelled on Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme. These programmes should aim to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development, while also (and in part through) developing parents' ability to support their child's cognitive and non-cognitive development. In some Member States, such programmes may also seek to develop parents' literacy skills;
- c) Shorter-term, local, targeted initiatives focused only on child literacy and parental support of child literacy. Examples of such programmes include dialogic reading programmes for younger children, and the successful literacy skills training programmes highlighted by Sénéchal and Young (2008).

1.6.4 In most Member States, the field of family literacy will continue to be overlooked by policymakers and thus will not develop sufficiently under current institutional structures, which tend to encourage either child-focused, school-focused or adult-focused approaches. Member States should therefore encourage the establishment of non-departmental organisations – for example, NGOs – charged specifically with the support and advocacy of the full range of potentially valuable family literacy interventions. In the field of adult literacy, similar organisations already exist, advancing policy and programme development in Member States such as Ireland (the National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA) and the United Kingdom (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, NIACE). Another potentially useful model is that adopted for adult learning in Norway, where Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, is part of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, but operates with a great deal of autonomy.

1.6.5 Programme developers and researchers should devote greater attention to the cultural validity of initiatives, in order to ensure that they successfully meet the needs of low-income families and ethnically diverse target groups. Based on the available research evidence, the cognitive aspects of programmes targeted at disadvantaged families should be more highly structured than those developed for the general population.

1.6.6 European and national research councils and other grant-giving bodies should fund more European primary research and meta-analyses, in order to overcome the current over-reliance on non-European evidence.

1.6.7 In order to assess more fully the promising gains associated with programmes in which parents are trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children (Sénéchal

and Young, 2008), Member States and/or the Commission should fund research and development projects investigating such programmes.

Chapter 2 Introduction

This document is the final report of the European Commission research project on “Ensuring early acquisition of literacy: a study on parental support”. This study has been undertaken by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) at the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE). NRDC’s partners on this project have been the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), also in the UK; the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Germany; the Mother-Child Education Foundation, Turkey; and the Romanian educational research and programme consultancy Learn&Vision.

2.1 Key information

Name of Project:	Ensuring early acquisition of literacy: a study on parental support
Contractor:	National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (NRDC) Institute of Education University of London 20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL United Kingdom Tel: 020 7612 6476 Fax: 020 7612 6671 Email: info@nrdc.org.uk
Contracting Authority:	European Commission, Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture
Call Number:	EAC/16/2009
Start/End Date	18 December 2009/ 17 February 2011
Budget:	€173,580
Specific Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Give an overview of programmes that aim to assist parents of disadvantaged families to support their children's reading literacy in the early years and to draw conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of good practices. 2) Provide the Commission, and decision makers in Member States, with practical information and analyses which can serve as a basis for future policy

	proposals and developments.
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Project Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), UK • Mother-Child Education Foundation, Turkey • UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning • Learn&Vision, Romania

2.2 About this report

2.2.1 This document is the final report of the project entitled "Ensuring Early Acquisition of Literacy: Study on Parental Support", undertaken by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), at the Institute of Education, University of London (IoE). NRDC's partners on this project are the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE), also in the UK; the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Germany; the Mother-Child Education Foundation, Turkey; and the Romanian educational research and programme consultancy Learn&Vision.

2.2.2 This report presents the findings from all strands of the Study on Parental Support, along with recommendations for policy and programme design and actions.

2.2.3 About this report:

- Chapter 1 provides an Executive Summary of this report
- Chapter 2 introduces the background to the study and outlines the project's objectives and approach
- Chapter 3 provides a review and analysis of meta-analytic evidence on the effectiveness of family literacy interventions. This chapter also includes a review of European primary research investigating five research issues:
 - The links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children
 - Factors determining the quality of the support that parents can give their children in order to help them acquire reading literacy
 - The effect of disadvantaged on the literacy skills and literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1

- Obstacles encountered by policies and programmes seeking to improve the literacy skills and literacy support skills of disadvantaged parents
- The most effective approaches to improving the literacy skills of children at ISCED level 0-1 through parental support.
- Chapter 4 provides a discussion and analysis of key policy issues and institutions impacting on the field of family literacy
- Chapter 5 offers a discussion and analysis of policy and programme objectives, characteristics and success factors
- Chapter 6 discusses key issues regarding family literacy programme participants
- Chapter 7 focuses on policy and programme sustainability, expansion and transfer
- Chapter 8 looks at the role of research evidence in family literacy policy-making
- Chapter 9 provides an overview of family literacy policies and programmes in a range of European countries
- Chapter 10 presents the findings from seven case studies of family literacy initiatives
- Chapter 11 provides recommendations regarding policy and programme design, and policy actions that could be taken at national or European level.

2.3 Background to this study

- 2.3.1 Literacy is an essential foundation for educational success and the development of the broad range of competences required in modern knowledge economies. Because of this, literacy improvement has a central place in European Union education and training policies.
- 2.3.2 Improved reading literacy is one of the 13 objectives established by the Education and Training 2010 programme (European Council, 2002). In 2003, reading literacy was established by the Council of the European Union as one of the five key European benchmarks: by 2010, the percentage of 15-year-olds with poor performance in reading literacy was to have decreased by at least 20% compared to the year 2000.
- 2.3.3 Unfortunately, not only has that benchmark not been achieved, the reading skills of this age group have actually grown worse by roughly 15%: whereas 21.3% of 15-year-olds in Europe had poor reading skills in 2000, 24.1% did in 2006 (European Commission, 2009). These disappointing outcomes highlight the need for greater efforts to improve children's literacy across Europe.

- 2.3.4 In March 2008, the Council urged Member States to take concrete action to substantially reduce the number of young people with poor reading skills (2008a). It also urged Member States to reduce the number of early school leavers, an issue related to poor literacy development. Furthermore, the Member States were asked to improve the achievement levels of learners from migrant or disadvantaged groups.
- 2.3.5 Council Conclusions later that year (2008b) established an agenda for European cooperation on schools, and re-emphasised the lack of progress towards meeting the 2010 literacy benchmark. These Conclusions agreed that there was an urgent need to improve young people's literacy development, and asked Member States to cooperate in achieving that aim.
- 2.3.6 In May 2009, the ET2020 Council Conclusions on cooperation in education and training restated the importance of literacy and other basic skills, and established a new literacy benchmark for 2020, in which the percentage of low achievers in reading should be reduced to below 15%.
- 2.3.7 All of these policy developments have taken place in a political and economic context in which the acquisition of good literacy skills has grown ever more essential for economic and other forms of well-being, as Member States continue their transition from industrial economies to knowledge societies. In this context, a range of European policy documents have emphasised the ever closer links between education, employment and economic growth. (See for example *New Skills for New Jobs* (EC 2010)).
- 2.3.8 As highlighted by the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other studies, there is a clear link between disadvantage and poor literacy (OECD, 2010). While many disadvantaged children had good or even excellent literacy skills, most of the students who perform poorly in PISA are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (ibid).
- 2.3.9 The concept of educational disadvantage can be interpreted in a variety of ways, but for the purposes of this report can be considered to apply to children who live in social, economic, linguistic or cultural circumstances which limit their capacity to fulfil their educational potential.
- 2.3.10 Throughout the OECD, students from the top 15% of the socio-economic distribution outscore students from average backgrounds by the equivalent of approximately one year's worth of education (38 points), and outscore disadvantaged pupils by

even more (50 points).

- 2.3.11 Migrant status also has strong impacts on reading literacy. In the most recent PISA, children born outside their country of assessment who also have foreign-born parents scored an average of 52 points below children without an immigrant background.
- 2.3.12 There are a number of ways in which governments seek to combat the impacts of educational disadvantage on child literacy development. Included in these approaches are initiatives seeking to improve parents' capacity to support their children's literacy development. PISA results indicate that engagement in parent-child literacy activities has a positive impact on child reading performance (OECD, 2010). These results confirm findings from a wide body of research in Europe and elsewhere showing the positive benefits of parental involvement in their children's literacy development.
- 2.3.13 Within this context, the influence of families in general and parents in particular on their children's literacy development is of the utmost importance. Parents who suffer from poor literacy skills themselves, or who lack the ability or inclination to help their own children develop their literacy abilities, put their children at a disadvantage.

2.4 Objectives

- 2.4.1 Throughout Europe, a wide variety of policies and programmes have been developed in recent years with the aim of improving parents' literacy skills and/or their ability to support their own children's literacy development. The European Commission, and the individual EU, EEA/EFTA and candidate countries, would benefit greatly from a comprehensive picture of all relevant research, strategies, policies, initiatives and programmes which aim to support the reading literacy and literacy support skills of parents, particularly those in disadvantaged families. This report seeks to provide such a picture.
- 2.4.2 The overall objective of this study is to support the work of the European Commission and Member States within the Education and Training 2010 work programme by providing policy-relevant advice and information in the field of support for early literacy development, and by providing examples of good practice.
- 2.4.3 The specific objectives of this project are to:

- give an overview of programmes that aim to assist parents of disadvantaged families to support their children's reading literacy in the early years and to draw conclusions and recommendations based on the analysis of good practices
- provide the Commission, and decision makers in Member States, with practical information and analyses which can serve as a basis for future policy proposals and developments.

2.4.4 As agreed in the project contract, these objectives are satisfied in this report by:

- providing a summary of research evidence investigating the five issues introduced in Section 2.2.3 above
- providing a summary of initiatives, policy measures and policy approaches that support the improvement of literacy skills, and of the literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1
- engaging in comparison and analysis of the effectiveness of various initiatives, and the conditions for the successful transfer to other contexts
- providing 5-10 case studies of good policy practice or innovative local projects that have proved to be particularly effective in reaching disadvantaged parents and improving their literacy and/or literacy support skills
- offering recommendations regarding ways in which policies and programmes could be designed in order to support disadvantaged parents with a view to improving their children's reading literacy
- identifying actions that could be taken at national or European level to: 1) improve the role of parents in the acquisition of literacy skills by children in disadvantaged families; 2) improve the support given to disadvantaged parents with a view to improving their children's reading literacy.

2.5 Scope and approach

2.5.1 This project discusses, compares and analyses policies and programmes aimed at improving the capacity of parents to support their children's literacy development. Because the field of parental support initiatives covers a broad range of areas – for example, programmes aimed at improving child behaviour or health – in this report we will use the term "family literacy" to emphasise our focus on reading literacy.

2.5.2 The term "family literacy" was coined by Taylor (1983), who used it to refer to literacy practices engaged in within families (Hannon et al, 2007). In Chapter 3, we provide an overview of research looking at the impact of such practices on child literacy.

- 2.5.3 However, the primary focus of this project is to look not at the impacts of parental involvement, but at policies and programmes aimed at supporting parental involvement, particularly among disadvantaged families. That is, instead of focusing on literacy within families, we focus on literacy initiatives involving families.
- 2.5.4 Family literacy policies and programmes encompass a broad variety of initiatives with a range of objectives. Briefly, the key types of initiatives include: shared parent-child book reading programmes, book gifting schemes, programmes which seek to improve only child literacy, programmes which seek to improve child literacy and parenting skills, and programmes which seek to improve both parent and child literacy. These and other initiatives will be discussed in fuller detail in the main body of the report.
- 2.5.5 In investigating the broad range of family literacy initiatives being undertaken in Europe, this project has utilised three complementary research techniques: a research review summarising evidence on a range of key family literacy issues; case studies presenting examples of best practice throughout Europe and analysing reasons for success; and qualitative interviews with family literacy policy and programme experts throughout Europe. These three research strands are introduced below.
- 2.5.6 The research review consists of two primary components: 1) a summary and analysis of meta-analyses investigating the effectiveness of family literacy programmes; and 2) an overview of European primary research which provide information relevant to the research questions listed in Section 2.2.3 above.
- 2.5.7 In our use of primary research, we limited ourselves to studies of European programmes, in order to ensure greater relevance and generalisability. However, of necessity the meta-analyses incorporate studies from a broader range of developed countries. Our expectation is that European primary research will provide valuable insights which complement the meta-analyses.
- 2.5.8 Case studies of successful programmes were undertaken in seven countries: Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Turkey and the UK. In selecting case study sites we aimed for a broad range of programme types, while also seeking as broad a geographical range as possible.
- 2.5.9 The research review and case studies are complemented by a series of semi-structured, qualitative interviews conducted with family literacy policy actors and stakeholders throughout Europe. Rather than devote a separate chapter of this

report to those interviews, we have drawn on them throughout much of the document – in particular, chapters 4-8, where we provide discussion, comparison and analysis of key policy and programme issues. Because no single chapter is devoted to these interviews, we provide an introduction to them here.

2.5.10 Interviews were conducted with 16 experts in 10 countries. In those interviews, we sought to address a range of key issues which had arisen during the research review and case studies. Appendix 3 contains a copy of the interview guide.

2.5.11 In determining which policy actors to interview, we were strongly influenced by a desire to gain insight on family literacy policy and programme development from as broad a range of perspectives as possible. In particular, we sought to avoid relying solely or even primarily on interviews with government civil servants. As Hamilton and Hillier (2006) argue, policymaking is a top-down, linear process only in the realm of theory. In the messy world which we inhabit, policy-making – and indeed programme development – is a complicated process shaped by the interplay of a range of policy actors and stakeholders. These include but are not limited to civil servants.

2.5.12 Hamilton and Hillier refer to the "complex agency" (p. 76) involved in generating and implementing policy. This complex agency involves a range of policy actors, including civil servants, stakeholders in private enterprise and civil society, and what Hamilton and Hillier refer to as "policy activists" (p. 76). In this latter category are individuals and organisations that pursue particular visions or causes, often across institutional boundaries. In relatively unformed, marginal fields such as family literacy, policy activists – for example, in the form of non-governmental organisations such as the UK's Booktrust, Turkey's Mother-Child Education Foundation, and the Netherland's Read Write Foundation – often play important, foundational roles in shaping policy agendas. This is true both in countries with relatively well-developed family literacy policies (e.g. Turkey) and countries characterised by policy vacuums or voids in this field. We discuss these issues in greater detail in Chapter 7.

2.5.13 By including the voices of a broad range of policy actors and stakeholders, we hope to provide policymakers with views not just from other countries, but from "the other side of the fence" – that is, from the perspective of programme leaders, trainers and other key stakeholders. We hope that such perspectives will facilitate the policy-making process.

2.5.14 Interviews were conducted with:

1. Dr Loizos Symeou, Cyprus – Assistant Professor, Chair of the Department of Education Sciences, European University; Parental involvement researcher
2. Professor Nele McElvany, Germany – Family literacy research and programme developer
3. Dr Gabriele Rabkin, Germany – Head of Hamburg Family Literacy Project (FLY)
4. Inez Bailey, Ireland – Director, National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA)
5. Sandro Spiteri, Malta – Director, Quality Assurance Department, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education; former Senior Executive, Foundation for Educational Services
6. Hannah Vosen, Netherlands – Project manager, pre- and early-school education
7. Gro Hexeberg Dahl, Norway – Senior Adviser, Foreldreutvalget for grunnopplæringen (The National Parents Committee for primary and secondary education)
8. Simona Bernat, Romania – Director, Read&Learn, an educational charity
9. Monica Onojescu, Romania – National Association of Romanian Language and Literature
10. Ayla Goksel, Turkey – Chief Executive Officer, Mother-Child Education Foundation (AÇEV)
11. Sadrettin Gonultas, Turkey – Director of the Non-Formal Education, Ministry of National Education
12. Carol Taylor, UK – Director of Operations, National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE); former Director, Basic Skills Agency
13. Viv Bird, UK – Chief Executive, Booktrust
14. Louise Chadwick, UK – Head of Public Policy and Research, Booktrust
15. Rosemary Clarke, UK – Director of Bookgifting, Booktrust
16. Eva Katrušáková, Director, The “Every Czech Reads to Kids” Foundation

Chapter 3 Research review: The importance of family literacy, and the effectiveness of family literacy interventions

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This chapter provides a review of research addressing a range of questions regarding parental support of child literacy development. Those questions are:

- 1) What are the links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children?
- 2) What are the factors determining the quality of the support that parents can give their children in order to help them acquire reading literacy?
- 3) What are the effects of disadvantage on the literacy skills and literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1?
- 4) What are the obstacles encountered by policies and programmes seeking to improve the literacy skills and literacy support skills of disadvantaged parents?
- 5) What are the most effective approaches to improving the literacy skills of children at ISCED level 0-1 through parental support?

3.1.2 Question 5 above presupposes that some family literacy interventions are effective. Before addressing that question, it is necessary to ask a more basic one: Do family literacy interventions produce quantifiable gains in child literacy? In order to investigate this question, this chapter begins by summarising and analysing evidence from a number of recent meta-analyses of family literacy programmes. In looking at this evidence, we also investigate questions regarding programme and participant characteristics associated with effectiveness. Investigating these issues allows us to better determine not only what programmes are most effective, but why, and under what circumstances. This information is likely to enhance programme transferability.

3.1.3 The structure of this chapter is as follows. After first providing a brief explanation of what meta-analyses are, we then summarise the relevant meta-analytic research on family literacy programme effectiveness, contextualising these findings in a broader discussion of the effectiveness of other educational interventions. Following this, we summarise primary research evidence on each of the five research questions listed in paragraph 3.1.1 above. Following a brief discussion of research gaps, the chapter concludes with a discussion of key messages for policymakers and programme

leaders.

- 3.1.4 Appendix 1 contains additional information that many readers of this chapter may find useful. In particular, Appendix 1 provides detailed summaries of all the meta-analyses discussed in this chapter. In addition, it provides a longer discussion of effect sizes and their interpretation.

What are meta-analyses, and why are they valuable?

- 3.1.5 One of the primary challenges associated with evidence-based policy making is the fact that research studies often arrive at conflicting conclusions. Moreover, such studies often vary significantly in quality and methodological rigour. These facts, when combined, can encourage decision-makers to “cherry pick” findings, choosing the research evidence that best fits their preconceived notions about programme effectiveness. For example, policymakers in favour of investing in family literacy interventions can readily point to studies showing evidence of success. On the other hand, policymakers who would prefer not to invest in such interventions can likewise point to primary research supporting their stance.
- 3.1.6 Meta-analysis provides a tool for overcoming many of the challenges associated with conflicting research evidence and variable study quality. Meta-analyses systematically combine the results of a number of primary research studies in order to arrive at a more robust conclusion about the effectiveness of particular types of interventions (Coe, 2002). This means that instead of looking at just one study on an intervention type such as dialogic reading, meta-analyses can combine the results of a number of studies of dialogic reading, to enable policymakers to draw a more robust conclusion about the value of that type of initiative. In doing so, meta-analyses also assess the quality of primary research, filtering out or giving less weight to lower quality evidence. Because they pool studies and thus produce a larger sample size, meta-analyses can also provide more reliable evidence about participant and programme characteristics affecting intervention outcomes.

Measuring programme impact: effect size

- 3.1.7 In quantifying programme effectiveness, meta-analyses use a measure known as effect size. An effect size is a numerical estimate of the magnitude of an intervention’s impact. Expressing impacts in effect size allows for the quantitative comparison of the relative impacts of two or more different interventions, or an intervention compared to a control group (Coe, 2002).
- 3.1.8 An effect size of 1.0 indicates an increase of one standard deviation. In educational terms, this is typically associated with advancing a child's achievement by two to

three years or improving the rate of learning by 50% (Hattie, 2009). Traditionally, effect sizes in the social sciences have been loosely classified as small, medium and large, with small generally being seen as any effect size under 0.5, medium being anything between 0.5 and 0.79, and large being 0.8 and above. However, these are generalisations for the social sciences as a whole, and may not be particularly useful when seeking to determine the value of educational interventions, as interventions in education typically have smaller effect sizes than in other areas of the social sciences. As Valentine and Cooper (2003, p. 6) argue, "comparing a specific effect size to effect sizes found in other disciplines or discipline in general may be interesting but in most instances it is not very informative".

- 3.1.9 As Coe (2002) emphasises, the effectiveness of a particular intervention must be assessed not in comparison to all of the social sciences, but in comparison to the effectiveness of other interventions that seek to produce the same effect. And as Hattie (2009) observes, outputs should be judged in terms of their required inputs: programmes that produce relatively small effect sizes but which require minimal resources may be judged to be more effective than more expensive interventions which produce large impacts. Furthermore, interventions must be assessed in relation to their relative return on investment, both in the short-and long-term. For example, reducing class sizes from 23 to 15 is associated with an effect size of 0.30 (Hattie, 1999). As Wiliam (1998) has argued, this is a relatively small gain in relation to the cost of the intervention.

Comparing effect sizes for educational interventions

- 3.1.10 In education, the average effect size is 0.4. This is the figure calculated by Hattie (1999, 2009), who has synthesised more than 200,000 effect sizes from more than 180,000 educational studies, covering almost all types of interventions.
- 3.1.11 As Hattie (2009, p. 15) emphasises, meta-analysis of educational interventions turns up one remarkable fact: almost everything works. In fact, "ninety percent of all effect sizes in education are positive". What matters, therefore, is how much an intervention works in comparison to another intervention that could be undertaken.
- 3.1.12 The most common effect size for educational interventions and other education-related variables is 0.3, with the second most common effect size being 0.2 (Hattie, 1999, p. 5). This is followed by 0.4, then 0.1. Hattie (2009) argues that the key number in this discussion is 0.4: intervention types producing an effect larger than this are better than average, while those producing a smaller effect could and should be replaced by other types of programmes. Given that the first, second and fourth most common intervention effect size is below average, there would appear to be

significant room for improvement.

3.1.13 Being aware of these figures is useful for our analysis of family literacy interventions, as it helps us to determine not just how much impact such interventions have, but how much impact they have in comparison to school-based interventions. To provide relevant context, we list here effect sizes associated with 12 common educational interventions (Hattie 1999, 2009). A fuller list is available in Appendix 1.

Table 3.1 Selected educational intervention effect sizes (adapted from Hattie 1999, 2009)

Intervention type	Effect size
Repeated reading programmes	0.67
Vocabulary programmes	0.67
Phonics instruction	0.60
Participation in pre-school programmes	0.45
Computer-assisted instruction	0.37
Reducing class sizes from 23 to 15	0.30
Individualised instruction	0.23
Teaching test taking skills	0.22
Sentence combining programmes	0.15
Homework (at primary school level)	0.15
Whole language programmes	0.06
Retention (i.e. children repeating a school year)	-0.16

3.1.14 Unfortunately, Hattie does not include family literacy programmes in his comparisons, which focus almost exclusively on school-based interventions. In part, this is indicative of the much greater number of interventions taking place in the classroom. However, it also highlights the marginal nature of the field of family literacy – an issue which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 4-8.

3.1.15 In seeking to contextualise the impact of family interventions alongside school-based programmes, it is difficult to ascertain what benchmark of effectiveness we should set for the former. This is an area for future study. In order to facilitate comparison with other educational interventions, in this report we follow Hattie (2009) in establishing an effect size of 0.40 or above as a desirable benchmark. However, given the reduced resource requirements required by many family literacy programmes as compared to in-school interventions, lower effectiveness from the former may still prove cost-effective. Again, this is an area that requires further research.

3.1.16 Another point of consideration is opportunity cost. While school-based interventions tend to be “either-or” propositions– if one intervention is being implemented in a classroom, others cannot be – family-based interventions (the vast majority of which occur outside of school hours) are more likely to complement than to compete with school-based interventions. In Chapter 4 we discuss the concept of childhood-wide policy-making, in which policymakers develop a range of complementary initiatives centred not on institutions such as schools but on the full range of development-related activities engaged in by children and families. The evidence suggests that successful family literacy interventions can be a valuable part of policy makers' arsenal of tools for improving child literacy development.

3.2 Discussion and analysis of meta-analyses

Summary of meta-analyses included in our review

- 3.2.1 In this section we summarise the findings from six meta-analyses quantitatively assessing the impacts of family literacy programmes. In our search for evidence, we found 10 relevant meta-analyses. All of these meta-analyses are described in detail in Appendix 1. Of those 10 reviews, only six provide quantitative evidence on literacy outcomes. In this chapter we limit ourselves to discussion of these six studies.
- 3.2.2 Our discussion also includes findings from McElvaney et al's (in prep.) review of the meta-analytic evidence on family literacy interventions. This study includes a discussion of some meta-analyses not included in our own research, but does not include all the meta-analyses we did.¹
- 3.2.3 Along with a fuller discussion of all meta-analyses, a description of our search methodology can also be found in Appendix 1.
- 3.2.4 Please note that throughout this chapter, when we speak of programme outcomes, we limit ourselves to the discussion of quantitatively measured improvements in child literacy performance. The evidence indicates that family literacy programmes can and do produce a wide range of other beneficial outcomes, but as these tend not to be assessed by meta-analyses, we will not discuss those in this section. However, we do discuss additional outcomes and their critical importance throughout the rest

¹ McElvaney et al's review was completed after our own review was submitted for publication. However, the authors helpfully provided us a draft copy, and because of the value of the analysis undertaken by McElvaney and colleagues, we felt it important that our report was informed by their key messages and findings.

of the report.

- 3.2.5 Meta-analysis 1: Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) undertook a descriptive review of 31 studies of family literacy interventions targeted at children ages 2-6, coupled with a meta-analysis of a subset of 14 of those studies. Their meta-analysis focused in particular on the impact of family literacy interventions on low income, ethnic minority and/or linguistically diverse children. These researchers found an effect size of 0.33, but found smaller gains for socio-economically disadvantaged children.
- 3.2.6 Meta-analysis 2: Van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) analysed the effectiveness of a range of family literacy programmes, investigating whether intervention impacts were different for comprehension-and code-related measures, and seeking to identify programme, sample and study characteristics that influenced outcomes. These researchers found an effect size of 0.25; however, in randomised studies this effect disappeared.
- 3.2.7 Meta-analysis 3: Mol et al (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of a specific type of family literacy intervention: dialogic parent-child book reading. The aim of this review was to examine the added value of dialogic parent-child book reading in comparison to more typical, less interactive forms of parent-child reading. A further objective was to investigate whether disadvantaged children benefited more or less from dialogic reading interventions than non-disadvantaged children. Mol et al found an effect size of 0.59, but found that dialogic reading programmes were far less effective for disadvantaged children and those over the age of three.
- 3.2.8 Meta-analysis 4: Sénéchal and Young (2008) analysed the effects of three types of parental involvement interventions: 1) those in which parents read to children; 2) those in which parents listened to their children read; and 3) those in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children. These researchers found an overall effect size of 0.68, with outcomes for disadvantaged children being just as good as those of other children. Sénéchal and Young found significant variation depending on intervention type: programmes in which parents taught reading skills to their children produced a very large effect size: 1.15. This was somewhat more than double the effect size for interventions in which parents were trained to listen to their children read: 0.51. Parents reading to children produced the smallest effect size: 0.18.
- 3.2.9 Meta-analysis 5: Nye et al (2006) synthesised findings from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) investigating the effects of parental involvement intervention

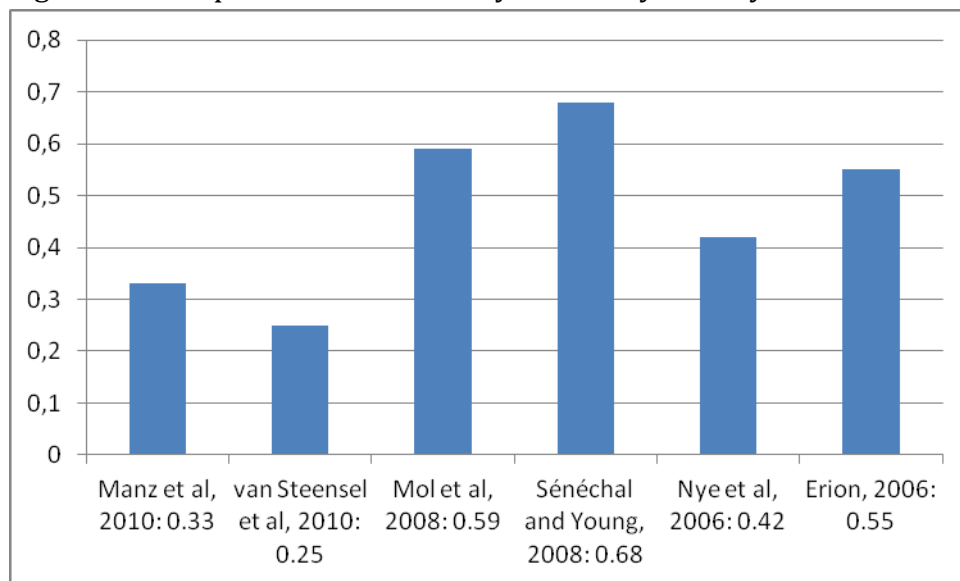
programmes on the academic performance of primary school-age children. This review included studies looking at the effects of parental involvement not just on reading achievement, but also on maths and science. However, reading was the primary focus of most of the studies. The researchers found an effect size for all three academic areas combined of 0.43. Looking at reading outcomes only, they found an effect size of 0.42.

3.2.10 Meta-analysis 6: Erion (2006) synthesised research on a range of parental support programmes designed to enhance children's performance in a range of academic areas. While this review did not limit itself to interventions targeting reading, literacy was the focus of most programmes studied. Synthesising 14 studies that included measures of reading comprehension, Erion found an effect size of 0.57.

Outcomes: comparing meta-analytic effect sizes

3.2.11 Figure 3.2 compares effect sizes found in the six meta-analyses included in our review. Other studies summarised in Appendix 1 have not been included here because they do not provide effect sizes specifically for child literacy outcomes.

Figure 3.1 Comparison of meta-analyses: family literacy effect sizes



(NB: Van Steensel et al found no positive effect in randomised studies. In contrast, Nye et al found an effect size of 0.42, even though their review included only randomised studies.)

3.2.12 All six of these meta-analyses concluded that family literacy programmes produce positive effects on quantitatively measured child literacy outcomes, although van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) found negligible impacts in randomised studies.

3.2.13 On the whole, these effects are greater than those produced by the majority of educational interventions, as measured in meta-analyses and summarised by Hattie, (1999, 2009). In four of the six meta-analyses, the effect size exceeds Hattie’s target of 0.4. This is an impressive result, particularly given that parent-focused child literacy interventions face considerable obstacles not encountered by classroom interventions. For example, altering many parents' educational knowledge, habits and behaviours is likely to be more challenging than altering classroom variables.

3.2.14 The result is made even more impressive by the fact that family literacy programmes are likely to complement rather than compete with school-based literacy interventions. This suggests that gains from family literacy programmes have a higher added value, as they are not associated with opportunity costs. That is, in determining added value, a school-based intervention with an effect size of 0.50 should be compared not to an effect size of zero, but to an effect size of 0.40. In contrast, interventions occurring outside school hours should be compared either to the effects of no intervention, or to the effects of other home-based interventions, such as homework. As indicated in Table 3.1, homework for primary school students has an effect size of 0.15.

Gains associated with family literacy effect sizes

3.2.15 What do these effect sizes mean, in terms of relative gains? One way of interpreting an effect size is to compare the percentage of a control group who would score below the average person in an experimental group boasting that particular effect size (Coe, 2002). Another way of interpreting effect size is to compare the rank of a person in a control group of 25 to the average score in an experimental group of 25 (ibid).

3.2.16 Table 3.2 illustrates the relative gains that would be expected based on the effect sizes of the meta-analyses included in our review.

Table 3.2 Relative gains expected from meta-analytic effect sizes

Study	Effect size	Approximate percentage of control group who would be below the average person in the experimental group	Approximate rank of person in a control group of 25 who would be equivalent to the average person in the experimental group
van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011)	0.25	60%	11th
Manz et al (2010)	0.33	63%	10th
Nye et al (2006)	0.42	66%	9th
Erion (2006)	0.55	71%	8th
Mol et al (2008)	0.59	73%	7th

Sénéchal and Young (2008)	0.68	75%	6th
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(NB: Van Steensel et al found no positive effect in randomised studies. In contrast, Nye et al found an effect size of 0.42, even though their review included only randomised studies.)

3.2.17 For example, with an effect size of 0.68, as found by one of the meta-analyses discussed in this chapter (Sénéchal and Young, 2008), approximately 75% of the control group would score below the average child receiving one of the interventions included in this meta-analysis. That is, the effect is the equivalent of moving an individual from the 50th percentile to the 76th.

3.2.18 In Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis, the average intervention group score (i.e. the 13th highest score) would be equivalent to the sixth highest score in a comparable control group. In Mol et al's, the average score in the intervention group would be roughly equivalent to the seventh best score in the control group.

Appendix 1 provides a more extensive overview of various ways to interpret and understand effect sizes.

Conflicting results: why do meta-analyses arrive at different conclusions?

3.2.19 The most basic reason for conflicting results is the inclusion of different primary studies in meta-analyses. While the meta-analyses included in our report shared a small number of primary studies in common, differing selection and inclusion criteria meant that there was variability between reviews in the primary research drawn upon.

3.2.20 As McElvaney et al (in prep.) observe in their own review of the meta-analytic evidence, meta-analyses vary in the number of studies included and therefore in the precision with which they can estimate impacts.

3.2.21 McElvaney et al (in prep.) also note another apparent cause for differing meta-analytic conclusions. Some reviews, in particular those of Mol et al (2008) and Sénéchal and Young (2008), look at the impacts of specific types of programmes on specific categories of literacy skills. These meta-analyses showed larger effect sizes than reviews that included a broader variety of programme types and/or a broader range of measured outcomes.

3.2.22 Other reasons for conflicting results include differing interpretations of data. For example, van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) observe that the earlier studies in Sénéchal and Young's review of family literacy programmes, i.e. those carried out between 1970 and 1989, reported a larger average effect size than did studies

carried out between 1990 and 2001. However, Sénéchal and Young argue that the apparently lesser impact of the more recent interventions is due to the presence of two Shared Reading programmes, both of which had minimal effect sizes. Once the two studies of this intervention type are removed, earlier studies show no greater impacts than do later ones.

Intervention characteristics

3.2.23 In this section, we discuss intervention characteristics which appear to influence programme impacts. In our discussion, we draw on all 10 meta-analysis reviewed for this project. These meta-analyses are described in detail in Appendix 1.

Type of intervention

3.2.24 One of the most significant findings in the reviews collected in this report is Sénéchal and Young's conclusion that training parents to teach their children to read – which yielded an effect size of 1.15 – was more than twice as effective as programmes which encouraged parents to listen to their children to read (effect size of 0.51), and six times more effective than those which encouraged parents to read to their children (0.18). However, Sénéchal and Young point out that only two studies of these programmes were included in her review, so evidence for or against these types of programmes should still be seen as very limited. Two studies are not enough to draw firm conclusions.

3.2.25 While training parents to teach their children reading skills appeared to be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents to listen to their children read, interventions in the former category might be thought of as necessitating greater resources than the latter. Training parents requires workshops or other forms of active, face-to-face education. However, in Sénéchal and Young's review, programmes in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children tended to demand only a small amount of parent training, usually 1-2 hours. This suggests that such programmes may be less resource intensive than one might expect.

3.2.26 Alongside the benefits of training parents to teach reading skills to their children, the potential efficacy of programmes encouraging parents to listen to their children read should not be underestimated. Sénéchal found an effect size for such programmes of 0.51, which is significantly higher than the majority of educational interventions.

Intervention site

- 3.2.27 Blok and colleagues (2005), who analysed the impacts of parental support programmes on cognitive outcomes in general rather than literacy in particular, found that centre-based and combined centre-and home-based programmes had markedly greater impact (approximately 0.5 standard deviations larger) than did home-based programmes. Blok et al point as a possible explanation to the greater intensity of the centre-based and combined home and centre programmes, also noting that such programmes appeared more likely to continue beyond kindergarten into primary school.
- 3.2.28 According to the authors, this finding quantitatively confirms conclusions reached in earlier narrative syntheses. However, some primary research has suggested that home-based programmes can be more effective than those in other sites. For example, Sylva and colleagues (2008) suggest that home environments can be the most effective because parents can better tailor their approach to their own child in a home-based, one-to-one context. This conclusion is supported by another meta-analysis included in our review, that by Manz et al (forthcoming 2011). These authors found that home-based interventions had a combined effect size of 0.47, while combined home- and centre-based interventions had an effect size of 0.13. Further research would be required to understand why the findings from this meta-analysis differ from those of Blok et al.

Duration of intervention

- 3.2.29 Though common sense would appear to dictate that longer family literacy interventions produce better outcomes than shorter ones, there is as yet no evidence to support this hypothesis, as observed by van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011). In part this is likely to be due to the lack of reliable, high-quality information from primary studies. However, three of the reviews included in this report -- those by Erion, Blok et al and Sénéchal and Young-- looked for effects of programme length, but found none.
- 3.2.30 Also commenting on intervention length, Nye et al suggested that the positive effect on reading they found in their systematic review (0.42) was particularly impressive given that the median length of parent involvement was only 11 weeks. Further research is needed to develop a better understanding of the most effective programme lengths for different types of interventions.

Duration and intensity of parent training

- 3.2.31 In his review of a range of parent tutoring interventions, Erion (2006) found that longer training sessions for parents appeared to improve outcomes, but only by a

small amount. However, Erion's review includes programmes targeting outcomes other than child literacy, and we were unable to assess the impact of the amount of training parents received in literacy interventions.

- 3.2.32 In contrast to Erion's finding that more parent training was associated with better outcomes, Sénéchal and Young's review of family literacy programmes found that programmes in which training for parents lasted 1-2 hours were associated with better outcomes than those in which parent training lasted between three and eight hours. The explanation for this surprising finding likely has more to do with the fact that two-thirds of the programmes which offered parents only 1-2 hours of training were programmes in which parents were trained to teach their children specific literacy skills. As Sénéchal and Young found, these types of programmes produced by far the largest positive outcomes in her review, with a combined weight of effect size of 1.18.
- 3.2.33 While Sénéchal and Young do not emphasise this correlation, treating it more as a confounding variable than as a valuable finding, the potential implications of this association are both interesting and exciting. Parental training is resource intensive, but in Sénéchal and Young's review, it was found that family literacy programmes demanding very limited amounts of such training tended to have excellent results. This does not imply that more training is worse training; rather it suggests that particular types of programmes delivered to particular participants may require very limited doses of resource-intensive activities, yet may still function excellently.

Parent training: quality

- 3.2.34 It was understandably difficult for reviewers to analyse the impact of the quality of training received by parents, as few primary studies provided any information on this programme variable. For example, Erion notes that many of the studies included in his meta-analysis reported that parents were provided with corrective feedback during training. However, only three studies reported that parents achieved some level of mastery in the techniques required by their intervention. As Erion somewhat trenchantly observes, "Noting a training feature was implemented does not mean parents benefited from the training" (p. 97).
- 3.2.35 In general, most primary studies do not appear to seek to evaluate the quality of the "training dose" given to parents, concerning themselves more -- if at all -- with the size (i.e. duration) of that dose. This is understandable: researchers have limited time and budgets, and evaluating training quality is both resource intensive and fairly subjective. Two rare examples of this approach are analyses by McElvany and van Steensel's (2009) and McElvany and Artelt (2009). It may be the case that most

research studies neither can nor should not seek to do this important issue justice; rather that some studies should seek to focus specifically on this and other matters pertaining to intervention quality.

Supportive feedback for parents

3.2.36 One aspect of parent training potentially affecting its quality is the presence or absence of supportive feedback for parents. In Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis of family literacy interventions, they found no evidence that providing such feedback during the programme improved effectiveness. However, this does not provide sufficient evidence against providing supportive feedback; this issue would need to be investigated with a study specifically focused on parental feedback.

Impact of training in parenting skills

3.2.37 Blok et al (2005) found that parental support programmes which focused not just on academic outcomes, but which also included training in parenting skills, led to markedly larger positive effects in cognitive domains. Unfortunately, the studies included in Blok et al's meta-analysis did not provide enough information about parenting skill training to enable the reviewers to draw conclusions about how and why such training affected intervention outcomes.

3.2.38 However, drawing on previous literature, Blok and colleagues do discuss potential mechanisms. In particular, they point to the likely importance of an emotionally supportive home environment in encouraging and supporting cognitive gains. As van Tuijl and Leseman (2004) have hypothesised, embedding parenting skills training in cognitively focused programmes may improve parental emotional support, with positive knock-on effects for academic outcomes.

3.2.39 Another possible explanation cited by Blok and colleagues is related to implementation quality. It may be the case that the inclusion of parenting coaching in academically focused programmes increases the attractiveness of such programmes for high risk groups, improving attendance and overall parental involvement. That is, training in parenting skills may increase some parents' involvement in and commitment to the programme, thus improving treatment in integrity and quality. Interestingly, while Blok et al found a large positive effect for the inclusion of parent coaching, they found no such effect for other forms of family support, including economic, social and health related. This may suggest that improving some forms of capital matters more than improving others.

Implementation quality

- 3.2.40 Evidence suggests that many parents, particularly those suffering disadvantage, either do not or cannot implement intervention techniques with the intensity, quality and/or frequency envisaged by programme developers. While the family has great potential as a setting for literacy interventions, "parents are not teachers" (McElvany and Artelt, 2009, p. 81). Many parents have poor reading skills of their own, and many more are likely to lack an understanding of how best to help their children develop their own reading. As van Steensel and others have noted, giving parents training in an intervention technique is one thing, but ensuring that they remain true to this training in the home is quite another. Furthermore, as emphasised by research on Opstap in the Netherlands (see e.g. van Tuijl and Leseman, 2004), many parents may be too busy with work or child rearing to carry out interventions as intended.
- 3.2.41 There is some evidence, however, that variations in implementation quality may not have large impacts. In their meta-analysis of dialogic reading programmes, Mol and colleagues assessed whether interventions that paid more attention to the content and/or frequency of parent-child book reading sessions produced larger effect sizes than those which did not. They found no significant differences, suggesting to the authors that differences in intervention quality did not significantly affect programme outcomes.
- 3.2.42 What this may also suggest is that methods for assessing implementation quality or poor. As van Steensel and co-authors (forthcoming 2011) observe, even though implementation quality likely plays a central role in determining whether or not programmes are successful, information about it is only very rarely provided. This is a serious methodological weakness. As van Steensel et al note, the manner in which parents and children carry out programme activities remains a matter of speculation -- a black box -- and needs to be the subject of future research.
- 3.2.43 Erion (2006) echoes van Steensel's call for greater attention to implementation quality, both in terms of analysis and reporting. As the former author observes, many of the studies included in his review contained no information about the presence or absence of key intervention characteristics, leaving it unclear whether programmes offered parents training, consultations or other forms of assistance. Erion therefore argues in favour of research which includes "quantifiable checks on how well parents have mastered tutoring skills prior to the start of tutoring" (p. 100).

Participant characteristics

3.2.44 In this section, we discuss intervention characteristics which appear to influence programme impacts. In primary research, data on participant characteristics are more likely to be reported than are data about intervention quality, as the former tend to be easier to gather and measure. Participant characteristics tend to be relatively static facts (e.g. child age at beginning of intervention, parents' socio-economic status, migrant status) rather than processes (e.g. implementation quality). Of particular importance to us are data on disadvantage.

Impacts of family disadvantage on programme outcomes

3.2.45 In their meta-analysis of dialogic reading programmes, Mol et al found much poorer results for children from disadvantaged families: while the combined mean effect size for all studies in this review was 0.59, the effect for the seven studies of children at risk was much lower: 0.13.

3.2.46 Van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) suggest that disadvantaged families may find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended. This was the conclusion of McElvany and Artelt (2009), who used video analysis to assess the implementation quality of a family literacy programme. McElvany and Artelt found unsatisfactory implementation in a range of key areas, including the structure of conversations between parent and child, and the amount of parental feedback, and the extent of parental guidance.

3.2.47 Suggestions that disadvantaged families find it more difficult to successfully implement family literacy programmes are supported by evidence from the meta-analysis conducted by Manz et al (forthcoming 2011). Investigating the impact of a range of participant characteristics on effect sizes, these authors found effect sizes four times greater in programmes enlisting primarily White participants (effect size = 0.64) than in programmes with primarily ethnic minority participants (0.16).

3.2.48 Manz et al also found significant effects of socio-economic disadvantage. Studies including primarily middle or high socio-economic status families achieved a combined mean effect size of 0.39, nearly three times greater than that of studies including primarily low income participants (0.14).

3.2.49 Manz et al argue that these data indicate a clear need to develop and test programmes which are better targeted at the most needy families.

3.2.50 In contrast to the above findings, Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis found that intervention impacts were no lower for children experiencing reading problems or

considered to be at risk of such problems. In this review, socio-economic status did not have an impact on effect sizes.

- 3.2.51 Nor did it in Jeyne's (2005) meta-analysis looking at general academic improvement. Based on these findings, Jeynes suggests that parental involvement interventions can be a means of reducing the achievement gap.

Child gender

- 3.2.52 Child gender is a significant and growing predictor of literacy development, with girls consistently outperforming boys throughout Europe and in many other countries of the world. Despite this, only two of the meta-analyses we reviewed specifically mentioned child gender as a participant characteristic in family literacy initiatives. Neither of these two studies – Nye et al (2006) and Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) – reported any differences in outcomes for boys versus girls. We were unable to determine whether this suggested that gender had no impact on outcomes or whether primary study characteristics made it too difficult for the reviewers to ascertain and analyse gender's impact. We suspect the latter, as any evidence on gender would be of interest, whether the finding was that programmes worked better, worse or the same for boys.

Child age

- 3.2.53 Looking at a broad array of family literacy programmes, van Steensel and colleagues (forthcoming 2011) found a larger mean effect size for children in primary school than for those in pre-primary. The same was true for Fischel and Ramirez (2005) in their review of parental support programmes.
- 3.2.54 In their review of dialogic reading interventions, Mol et al (2008) expected to find that dialogic reading interventions were more effective for younger children, who are likely to be more dependent on parents' ability to bridge the gap between children's understanding and the actual meanings of stories. The authors expected that older children would be more capable of understanding stories on their own, and thus less affected, either positively or negatively, by parental abilities.
- 3.2.55 Mol et al did find that older children (in this study, those aged 4-5) benefited less from dialogic reading than children aged 2-3. In their review, children aged 4-5 experienced a very small effect size of only 0.14, less than one-third that for 2-3 year olds (0.50). However, the authors also found that dialogic reading programmes did not appear to benefit disadvantaged 2-3-year-olds. It may be the case that these children and/or their parents are not yet ready for dialogic reading techniques.

3.2.56 Mol et al note that dialogic reading techniques specifically aimed at children aged 4 to 5 have been developed, and that these techniques focus on more advanced skills appropriate for this age group.

What do meta-analyses not tell us?

3.2.57 Conducting a meta-analysis of family literacy programmes involves synthesising the effects of a variety of often very different family literacy programmes, conducted in different contexts, with different types of participants and different intervention characteristics, not to mention differences in implementation quality. This process can lead to overly simplistic conclusions about programme effectiveness. As Pawson (2002) observes, generalisations arising from meta-analyses -- e.g. claims that family literacy programmes do or do not work -- may be insensitive to important differences in programme contexts, theories, participants and implementation. While this is less true of more recent meta-analyses, which have sought to examine which variables have the greatest impact on effect sizes, limited information available from many studies means that even when reviewers seek to explain the “whys and hows” of programme efficacy, they are unable to do so with great confidence.

3.2.58 Particularly in a relatively undeveloped field such as family literacy, meta-analysis often must synthesise the effects of programmes which are different enough to be considered apples and oranges. For example, home-based dialogic reading programmes in which parent and child read together for the child's benefit may be included in the same study as centre-based British or Irish "parallel development" programmes aimed at improving both parents' and children's quantitatively measured literacy skills. This is a weakness of the field. However, as more research is conducted, meta-analyses will be able to be more discerning about which types of interventions are included in each review, allowing a subtler and more accurate investigation of different interventions' potential impacts.

3.2.59 It is of the utmost importance that neither policymakers nor researchers take meta-analytic conclusions, valuable as they are, as the final or only word. It is essential that meta-analytic assessments be complemented both by high quality quantitative primary research focusing on key issues such as implementation quality, and by high quality qualitative research gathering data which cannot accurately be gathered quantitatively. Failure to do so leaves researchers and policymakers open to charges of “spurious precision” (Pawson, 2002, p. 166).

3.3 Review of European primary research

3.3.1 This section provides a brief overview of key European primary research evidence on parental support interventions designed to improve child literacy. Findings are presented in five sub-sections, each corresponding to one of five research issues:

- The links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children
- Factors determining the quality of the support that parents can give their children in order to help them acquire reading literacy
- The effect of disadvantaged on the literacy skills and literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1
- Obstacles encountered by policies and programmes seeking to improve the literacy skills and literacy support skills of disadvantaged parents
- The most effective approaches to improving the literacy skills of children at ISCED level 0-1 through parental support.

Links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children

3.3.2 Apart from a small number of studies carried out in the UK, there appears to be very little robust evidence regarding links between parents' literacy skills and those of their children. This section summarises the available research.

3.3.3 In the UK, Bynner and Parsons (2006) reported findings from the age 34 sweep of the British Cohort Study 1970. In 2004, the cohort members' literacy was tested, as was that of their children: children of parents with the poorest grasp of literacy tended to have lower scores themselves. The authors concluded that "children in families with parents at the very lowest literacy and numeracy levels appeared to be at a substantial disadvantage in relation to their own reading and maths development relative to those with parents at higher levels" (Bynner & Parsons, p. 100).

3.3.4 Using data from the BCS70, De Coulon, Meschi and Vignoles (2008) looked at the relationship between parents' basic skills and their children's early cognitive development (between the ages of 3 and 6). Unlike other research on this subject, the authors were able to separate the impact of the adult parents' literacy and numeracy skills (aged 34) on their children's cognitive test scores and distinguish between the impact of these skills and other factors such as parental ability, education and socio-economic status. De Coulon and colleagues found that "parents' basic skills in literacy and numeracy at age 34 have a positive significant effect on their children's [cognitive] test scores, over and above the positive effects of parental education and ability" (p. 2). For parents with low levels of qualifications, good basic skills in literacy and numeracy were strongly associated with better child cognitive outcomes, and the impact was stronger for low-educated parents than for

higher educated parents. Policymakers have interpreted this as a strong argument in favour of investment in adult basic skills training, on the assumption that improvements in adult literacy will lead to improvements in children's cognitive skills. However, to our knowledge there have been no robust studies testing this hypothesis.

Factors determining the quality of support that parents can give to their children in order to help them acquire literacy

- 3.3.5 Mol et al (2008) note a range of research indicating that less educated mothers tend to be less likely to engage in a range of instructive behaviours when reading to their children – for example, low-SES mothers tend to ask fewer "why" questions when reading than do high-SES mothers. Bus and van IJzendoorn (1995) concluded that high-SES mothers tend to be more inclined to make their three-year-old children active participants in understanding stories, doing so by asking questions and offering hints and help to enable children to answer their own questions. This was in contrast to lower SES mothers, who had a stronger tendency to simply explain confusing aspects of stories, rather than trying to help their children to think through and understand these aspects for themselves. Mol and colleagues also note that when parents do not read for pleasure themselves, they may struggle to develop strategies for engaging their children in shared book reading. Such parents may actively want to engage in shared book reading for their children, and may understand its value, but may struggle to put it into practice.
- 3.3.6 A substantial body of research has demonstrated the importance of the home learning environment to literacy achievement throughout the schooling years. For example, the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study (Sylva et al, 2004) found that several aspects of the home learning environment had a significant impact on children's attainment at school entry. These include: the frequency with which children play with letters or numbers at home, parents drawing children's attention to sounds and letters, the frequency with which parents report reading to their child, and the frequency of library visits. While socio-economic status and ethnic background have been shown to be correlated with literacy practices in the home (Bradley et al, 2001), the EPPE study judged that the quality of a child's relationships and learning experiences in the family have more influence on future achievement than SES or innate ability, material circumstances or the quality of pre-school and school provision, and concluded that "what parents do is more important than who parents are" (Sylva et al. 2004: 9).
- 3.3.7 Research suggests that the development of more "technical" literacy skills (like decoding and spelling) is less dependent on children's home literacy experiences

than it is on formal instruction, whereas conceptual skills or skills related to comprehension are more strongly affected by home factors. For example, according to McElvany and Artelt (2009) a number of prerequisites of reading, such as vocabulary and metacognitive awareness of language, are primarily developed through children's interactions with their family members.

- 3.3.8 Kağıtçıbaşı et al (2001) summarise attempts to quantify various impacts of parenting on the development of children's academic and cognitive competencies, including their literacy skills. For example, low levels of emotional support and cognitive stimulation from parents have been found to account for one-third to one-half of the disadvantage their children experience in verbal and maths skills.
- 3.3.9 Evidence suggests that key determinants of the extent and form of parental involvement are: family social class; maternal level of education; poverty; maternal mental health; number of parents in the home; and, to a lesser degree, ethnicity. Determinants of parental involvement are not uni-directional, however; parental involvement is strongly influenced by a child's level of attainment. The higher that level, the more involved parents become (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).
- 3.3.10 Good parental involvement establishes a child's "self-concept" as a learner while also establishing high aspirations. This provides a context within which school-related skills such as literacy can better develop, while also helping children to develop key psychological qualities such as self-worth and motivation. Research on the Turkish Mother-Child Education Programme and the earlier Turkish Early Enrichment Project (see e.g. refs) has determined that family literacy intervention success is at least in part attributable to attention to psychological factors such as these, and their role in learning.
- 3.3.11 'At home good parenting' refers to parental involvement and good parenting practices in the home, as contrasted with parental involvement in a child's school. 'At home good parenting' has been shown to have a significant positive effect on children's educational achievement even after all other factors influencing attainment have been controlled for; for example, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found an independent positive effect on children's attainment when parenting practices included intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, constructive social and educational values, and high aspirations that shape the child's self-concept as a learner.
- 3.3.12 Different subgroups of parents also tend to have different levels of engagement, which may be due to work and childcare commitments (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein and Coleman 2008), as well as differing perceptions of their role, and their levels of

confidence in fulfilling it; some parents also face barriers such as their own negative experiences of schooling, or the way in which some teachers treat them (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Factors impacting on parents' ability to offer children good quality support

- 3.3.13 As highlighted by the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other studies, there is a clear link between disadvantage and poor literacy (OECD, 2010). While many disadvantaged children had good or even excellent literacy skills, most of the students who perform poorly in PISA are from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (ibid).
- 3.3.14 Migrant status also has strong impacts on reading literacy. In the most recent PISA, children born outside their country of assessment who also have foreign-born parents scored an average of 52 points below children without an immigrant background.
- 3.3.15 Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) have concluded that factors such as parents' contact with the school do not have as much impact on achievement as what goes on in the home. Recent research (Harris and Goodall 2007, 2008) has distinguished between "engagement" (in learning) and "involvement" (in school-based or school related activities). The authors note while many parents are involved in the latter activities, and that these may certainly have value, if they are not directly connected to learning they are likely to have little impact on pupil achievement. This work cautions that schools, parents and children tend to understand parental engagement and its purpose differently.
- 3.3.16 Fathers tend to be less engaged than mothers, although evidence also suggests that it is the quality of fathers' involvement that is more important than the quantity of time they spend with their children (Goldman 2005).
- 3.3.17 Children whose fathers are involved in their education "benefit from higher academic achievement and social and emotional well-being" (Morgan et al, 2009, p.168). Examining fathers' involvement in a British family literacy programme, these authors found that "visible participation" was low (p. 174): only 9% of fathers attended at least one group meeting or event, and teacher records indicated that only 16% of fathers were present during at least one home visit. These findings are consistent with other research, and consistent with the suggestion that programmes and studies which refer to parental involvement would more accurately refer only to maternal involvement, given the fact that mothers typically account for at least 95% of the participants in such programmes (see e.g. Nutbrown and Hannon, 2003).

- 3.3.18 However, as Morgan and colleagues note, it is important to make the distinction between fathers' involvement in family literacy programmes and fathers' involvement in family literacy. In a study investigating five-year-old children's perspectives of family literacy, Nutbrown and Hannon (2003) found evidence of greater involvement: 39% of children reported that their fathers engaged in some literacy activities with them at home. This is still an alarmingly small percentage. However, interviews with mothers (Morgan et al., 2009) suggest a higher rate of paternal involvement: 93% of families in the REAL programme reported some literacy activity shared by fathers and their children.
- 3.3.19 As Clark (2009) summarises, research suggests that men may be discouraged from becoming involved in literacy activities because of preconceived gender roles or feelings of inadequacy in their own literacy, because they prioritise their own needs and abilities and interests, because literacy may not be as valuable to men, and because mothers feel more strongly about their involvement and the power of their influence.

The effect of disadvantage on the literacy skills and literacy support skills of parents with children at ISCED level 0-1

- 3.3.20 Research from around the globe consistently shows that a range of socio-economic factors have negative effects on children's literacy. These factors include poverty, parental (especially maternal) education levels, minority ethnic status, number of parents in the family home, and migrant status (Eurydice, 2009).
- 3.3.21 The presence of any of the above factors increases the statistical likelihood of literacy problems in children, particularly in combination. The effects begin startlingly early. Research by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies in the United Kingdom as part of the Millennium Cohort Study has found that three-year-olds in families with incomes below the poverty line had vocabulary levels five months behind children in families who were above the poverty line. Children living with both natural parents also benefited: on average three-year-olds living with both natural parents were four months ahead of children in lone parent families and those living with one biological parent and one step-parent (George et al., 2007). However, it should be emphasised that no socio-economic factor, nor any combination of them, inevitably causes poor literacy (Parsons and Bynner, 2007).
- 3.3.22 More recent analysis of data from the Millennium Cohort Study indicates that parents' social class (based on occupation), recorded when their child was aged 3,

has a bigger influence on progress between 5 and 7 than a range of parenting practices, such as daily reading with a child (Sullivan et al, 2010). The finding that social class was a more powerful predictor of children's cognitive outcomes and educational scores than parental education (which might be assumed to be a good proxy of parental cognitive and cultural resources) was surprising.

- 3.3.23 Hart and Risley (1995) conducted longitudinal research over a 2½ year period with 42 families (from a range of backgrounds covering higher, middle and lower SES as well as families on welfare) where very young children (aged one and two) were learning to talk, taping hour-long observations on a monthly basis. The researchers observed that the vast majority of words (86%-98%) in the children's vocabularies were recorded in their parents' vocabularies. But the differences between the parental skills levels were replicated in the children: 'the three year old children from families on welfare not only had smaller vocabularies than did children of the same age in professional families, but they were also adding words more slowly'. Moreover, these measures of accomplishments at age 3 predicted measures of language skills at age 9-10. The authors could then ask what kind of intervention would be needed at age four to equalise children's early experience: Hart and Risley calculated that in a year, a child in a professional family would have 11.2 million words of language experience, compared to 6.5 million words for a child from a working-class family and 3.2 million for a child from a family on welfare. So, in four years, "an average child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family would have accumulated experience with 26 million words, and an average child in a welfare family would have accumulated experience with 13 million words". Children raised in professional families also accumulated far more instances of encouraging feedback relative to discouraging feedback than a child from a working class or welfare family.

The most effective approaches to improving children's literacy skills through parental support

- 3.3.24 In this section, we present primary research evidence on the impacts of a range of different types of family literacy programmes, including: bookgifting initiatives; programmes focused on shared parent-child book reading; programmes focused on child literacy outcomes only; programmes focused on child literacy gains and a range of other outcomes, such as improved orientation to reading or improved socio-emotional development; and initiatives seeking gains both from children and parents. In this last category are included initiatives which seek to improve child literacy and parenting skills, as well as programmes which seek to improve child literacy, parenting skills and parental literacy. The former – programmes seeking to improve child literacy and parenting skills – are sometimes referred to as "two-

pronged” programmes, because they have two primary objectives (Camilleri and Spiteri, 2003). Initiatives with three primary objectives – improved child literacy, improved parenting skills and improved parental literacy – can therefore be referred to as “three-pronged” programmes (ibid).

Child literacy objectives

- 3.3.25 The Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme was targeted at children in German Grade 4 (usually aged 9-10 years old), and aimed to foster prerequisites of reading such as vocabulary, word fluency, meta-cognitive strategies and reading motivation, as well as text comprehension skills and the ability to discuss text orally. According to McElvany and Artelt (2009), who developed the intervention, “the programme’s conceptual framework [combined] guided reading aloud with an implicit strategy-training component (strategies are used, but not discussed explicitly), thus bringing together two elements that have proved successful for reading training in other contexts” (p. 82). In keeping with ideas of scaffolding and cognitive apprenticeship, parents adopt the role of the “more knowledgeable other” in order to help their children improve (Vygotsky, 1978). However, McElvany and Artelt acknowledge that because most parents lack didactic training and the necessary content knowledge, implementation quality was a challenge. In order to maintain consistently high implementation quality, the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme sessions were highly standardised and structured. In a two-year follow-up study, children participating in the programme showed meaningful literacy improvements.
- 3.3.26 In a Dutch intervention, 32 families with kindergarten children genetically at higher risk of developing dyslexia took part in a programme called Sounding Sounds and Jolly Letters (Klinkende Klanken en Lollige Letters) (Regtvoort and van der Leij, 2007). Sounding Sounds and Jolly Letters was a home-based, computer-assisted reading intervention, and was an adaptation of a Danish programme known as “Towards initial reading: phonological awareness”. However, the Danish version was set in school classrooms and did not utilise parents; rather, it was administered by school staff.
- 3.3.27 The short-term benefits of the Dutch programme proved impressive, with children in the intervention group making more progress in phonemic awareness and letter knowledge than those in the control group of at risk children. Progress was significant enough that children in the intervention group developed their literacy skills at the same rate as children in another control group who were not at risk of reading problems. These results were similar to those of the Danish programme on which this intervention was modelled (Elbro and Petersen, 2004). However, gains from the home-based Dutch programme proved short lived. After kindergarten,

children were tested in grades 1 and 2. Trained at-risk children not only did not keep up with untrained, not-at-risk children; they also lost all the gains made on untrained, at-risk children.

Initiatives focusing on improved child literacy and better parenting skills

- 3.3.28 Turkey has been a pioneer in family literacy. A particularly important example from that country was the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP), which has been the subject of longitudinal investigation for more than two decades. TEEP was an intervention with mothers of low socio-economic status and low education (Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2001). As in the later Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP), the mother was seen as the key mediating variable impacting the desired outcomes: children's cognitive development, school performance and socio-emotional development. The intervention focuses on training to improve mothers' capacity to promote these outcomes, along with improved communication skills and empowerment of the mother. Children in this study were three or five years old when it began. Results have been extremely impressive. Between ages 13-15, children whose mothers had been trained by TEEP showed significantly higher mean vocabulary scores and were far more likely to still be attending school. At ages 25-27, individuals whose mothers had been trained continued to show higher vocabulary test performance, and were almost 60% more likely to have attended university.
- 3.3.29 The Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP), a home-based early childhood education and parent involvement service for parents with limited formal education, has built on the success of TEEP (see e.g. Kağıtçıbaşı et al., 2001; Brooks et al., 2008). The programme focuses on mother-child interaction, particularly with regard to promoting children's cognitive and linguistic skills through the mediation of the mother and encouraging mothers to interact and communicate effectively with their children. Training is aimed at developing mothers' cognitive skills, text-level abstract language skills and print-related skills. Mothers are trained to co-work with their children on a range of tasks including: book reading; letter and word recognition; making one-to-one correspondences; and copying numbers, letters and shapes. The programme also seeks to explore the effects of different socio-economic backgrounds on children's cognitive and pre-literacy skills, literacy acquisition and later academic achievements. As with TEEP, MOCEP's outcomes have been very impressive, both with regard to child literacy and in other educational and non-educational domains (Bekman, 2003).
- 3.3.30 In the Netherlands, the Opstap ("Step Up") programme offers home-based parenting support based on the Israeli HIPPY model, which supports literacy development and school readiness through home-based support from trained volunteers (Boddy et al.,

2009). The “Step Up” programme is focused on school readiness, and strives to help parents improve their children’s cognitive and socio-emotional development through the assistance of para-professionals known as “neighbourhood mothers”. Activities are highly structured, to make it easier for parents with poor skills to replicate them. The programme has proved moderately successful in terms of child literacy gains for Turkish-Dutch children, but less so for Moroccan-Dutch children (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). Potential reasons for this divergence are discussed in chapters 4-8.

- 3.3.31 The UK SPOKES programme (Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools) was targeted at children just beginning primary school, and aimed to address two issues in one intervention: reading difficulties and behavioural problems. Sylva and colleagues (2008) point to research suggesting that the best way of addressing “co-morbid” situations in which children have both reading difficulties and behaviour problems is to develop interventions in which both issues are tackled together.
- 3.3.32 The programme was important for a variety of reasons, including its focus on urban children with multiple high risk factors. This programme was specifically implemented in “a community characterised by marked social disadvantage to parents whose children were at further risk of poor outcomes and social exclusion due to their tendencies to disruptive behaviour” (pp. 449-50). Significantly, the intervention was a true randomised controlled trial. Sylva et al. (2008) observed that 40% of the families identified through the recruitment screening process took part in the SPOKES programme which they classify as a “good result” (p.452), particularly considering that parents had not been seeking help at the time when they were contacted. The generally positive take-up rate may be a product of the programmes’ positive recruitment strategy: parents were approached on the basis of giving their children a better start in life, rather than being told that their children had difficulties or problems.
- 3.3.33 The programme reduced behavioural problems and improved children’s reading and writing skills. Literacy improvements were relatively small, but were meaningful: in one year the intervention group showed an average reading improvement equivalent to 6 months of reading age; Sylva et al. argue that this is a “substantial gain” given the fairly short duration of the literacy aspect of the programme. Despite the success of this programme, it does not appear to have been taken up widely. We were only able to find a very small number of examples of implementation in recent years.

- 3.3.34 Looking more broadly at early childhood education initiatives aimed at improving children's cognitive skills and socio-emotional development, one of the most famous interventions was the Perry/High Scope preschool program, conducted in the USA. While most interventions were classroom-based, teachers also made weekly 1.5 hour home visits with mothers and children. During these visits, mothers were taught how to implement the curriculum in the home. The initiative was extremely well documented, with a very large amount of valuable data collected. Recently, James Heckman and colleagues have re-analysed this data (2009), producing important messages with potential relevance not only for preschool programmes, but all initiatives which aim to improve children's cognitive outcomes, both in the short and long-term.
- 3.3.35 After conducting secondary analysis of data from the Perry/High Scope preschool program, Heckman and colleagues (2009) argue that the key to improve long-term outcomes, including cognitive outcomes, was the programme's influence on non-cognitive skill development in childhood. Through the method of "active participative learning", in which children and adults work as equal partners utilising a "plan-do-review" approach to tasks, children experience improvements in key, highly influential non-cognitive traits such as self-regulation and planning. The importance of these traits, both in influencing long-term cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, has been emphasised repeatedly in the psychological literature, and is now also a key focus in studies of adult behaviour and employability.
- 3.3.36 Heckman et al.'s (2009) conclusion is that while the programme's combined impetus on cognitive and non-cognitive skills did indeed contribute to short-term cognitive gains as measured through IQ, the key to long-term gains in cognitive outcomes – for example, improved academic performance – was the programme's attention to children's non-cognitive development. This suggests that if parental support programmes aimed at affecting improvements in disadvantaged children's literacy want to ensure that those literacy gains do not fade over time, then such programmes may benefit from including a socio-emotional component. It also suggests that while cognitive gains may be short lived, academic outcomes traditionally attributed to cognitive gains are not necessarily so. Improved non-cognitive traits appear to contribute to a range of improved educational outcomes. This suggests that programmes which contain a socio-emotional development component may enable improved literacy performance by helping children to develop the non-cognitive skills which improve general academic performance, such as self-regulation, focus and planning skills.

Parallel track family literacy interventions

- 3.3.37 An underlying assumption of parallel track or “three-pronged” family literacy programmes is that parents with poor literacy skills exacerbate the educational difficulties of their children; reaching both generations with educational programmes is seen as a way of breaking the “cycle of disadvantage” (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). In this regard, such programmes are an excellent example of “joined-up” policymaking, in which it is understood that literacy problems have a wide range of causes and consequences, and cannot be addressed uni-directionally.
- 3.3.38 Swain et al (2009) assessed the impacts and effectiveness of government-funded parallel track family literacy programmes in England. The research evaluated the impact of short (30-49 hours) and long (72-96 hours) family literacy courses, finding that despite the short length of these programmes both parents and children made progress in reading and writing, and for children (for boys and girls and for children for whom English is an additional language) this progress was substantial. This evaluation found that the amount of progress on standard courses was not significantly different from that on short courses. Brooks (2002) has also noted that courses longer than three months did not show proportionally greater effect than those up to three months in length.
- 3.3.39 Earlier family literacy research in the UK includes evaluations of the UK Basic Skills Agency’s Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes (Brooks et al., 1996, 1997). These evaluations found literacy gains which the researchers judged to be greater than would have been expected from normal progress.
- 3.3.40 In another early example of family literacy in the UK, one London borough (Haringey) ran a programme in which parents of children in the second year of compulsory school were encouraged to listen to their children read aloud for a short period, several times a week, from reading material selected and sent home by the teacher (Brooks, 2002). The approach was found to be highly effective, much more so than extra teacher help with reading in school. A major factor in the success of the programme appears to have been the motivation provided by the parent’s close attention to the child’s development. The original project provided little in the way of guidance to parents on how exactly to share books with their children, and subsequent schemes have refined this part of the approach.
- 3.3.41 The Birth to School Study was a longitudinal evaluation of the UK’s Peers Early Education Project (PEEP). Outcomes were measured annually and compared to those in a control group without access to PEEP. The study found that children from the PEEP group made significantly greater progress in a range of literacy outcomes

(Evangelou 2007, pp.599, 601). Parents who attended PEEP sessions reported a significantly enhanced view of their parent-child interaction (when the children were aged 1) and were rated significantly higher on the quality of their care-giving environment (when the children were aged 2). These outcomes emerged prior to any of the child outcomes related to progress. The findings suggest that “support for better quality relationships between parents and children is an effective strategy which can promote learning” (Evangelou 2007, p.605).

Book gifting initiatives

- 3.3.42 Book giving initiatives in the UK started in 1992 with the Bookstart project in Birmingham, which gave books to families of 6- to 9-month-old babies via health clinics and health visitors. Analysis of initial questionnaires given to parents when they received the pack and six months later showed that, as a result of Bookstart, 71% of parents bought more books for their children and 28% spent more time sharing books with their children. Interviews conducted two years later with a small sub-sample of parents (29 families) revealed that Bookstart children were more likely to look at books as their favourite activity than control group children were, and that Bookstart parents shared books with their children and visited the library more frequently than the non-Bookstart group. In observations, Bookstart parents were found to be employing positive strategies that would help children to develop later reading competence and their children took more interest in the book, joined in more and asked more questions.
- 3.3.43 A further follow-up study, carried out when the first Bookstart children were 5 years of age and in primary school, compared baseline literacy assessments (in speaking and listening; reading and writing) carried out on school-entry of a small sub-sample of the original Bookstart babies (41 children) with those of a matched control group who were not involved in the intervention (Moore and Wade, 2003). The Bookstart group produced better results (although not statistically significant) in speaking and listening, reading (highly statistically significant) and writing (not statistically significant): taken together the three scores in English were highly statistically significant, with no Bookstart child scoring either the lowest possible scores and no child from the comparison group achieving the highest possible scores. Later research conducted with a further small sub-sample of children when they completed their first national cognitive assessments at age 7 showed the Bookstart children to be significantly ahead in all assessments.

3.4 Research gaps

- 3.4.1 As emphasised by all meta-analyses, there are large and important gaps in our research knowledge regarding the benefits of family literacy programmes. While the majority of meta-analyses conclude that family literacy programmes are effective, insufficient evidence is available from primary studies to understand why, when, where and for whom they are effective.
- 3.4.2 The quality of reporting in meta-analyses varies significantly, and while outcomes may be somewhat inconsistent across reviews, one consistent feature of all reviews is their conclusion that most primary studies lack methodological rigour. For example, Mattingly et al (2002) argue that the evaluation design quality of many of the studies they found was too weak to allow researchers or other programme evaluators to measure programmes' efficacy (see e.g. P. 568). Other reviewers, e.g. Fishel and Ramirez (2005), have made similar complaints. In most cases, the lack of information about participant and intervention characteristics is a product of limited data collection and/or reporting in primary studies.

Worrying lack of high-quality European research

- 3.4.3 The lack of methodologically robust primary studies investigating these issues is particularly a problem in Europe, meaning that meta-analyses must draw most of their research from North America. This potentially reduces the generalisability of findings for Europe.
- 3.4.4 All but two relevant meta-analyses were conducted by researchers based in the United States or Canada. The exceptions were two Netherlands-based reviews: van Steensel et al's forthcoming meta-analysis of family literacy programmes and Blok et al's broader review of the impacts of delivery mode and other programme characteristics on early childhood interventions.
- 3.4.5 However, even in these two Europe-based meta-analyses, almost all the primary studies included were undertaken outside Europe (generally in North America). The lack of European primary studies in meta-analyses strongly suggests that there is a dearth of high-quality, outcome-focused quantitative research on European parental intervention programmes designed to improve child literacy. Notable exceptions include the large body of research conducted on various Turkish programmes, including the Mother-Child Education Programme, Dutch research on the Opstap programme in its various incarnations, and UK research on a range of programmes.

3.4.6 This apparent lack of high-quality European quantitative research in this field is particularly worrying given the strikingly different cultural and policy environment found in the United States, where the welfare state generally offers less overall support to impoverished families. Because of this and other important policy differences, researchers and policymakers must be cautious about drawing conclusions from US research regarding what programmes would best work in Europe. However, in the absence of a large enough body of high quality European primary research, policymakers and researchers will continue to turn towards North America for clues.

3.5 Key messages for programme and policy development

3.5.1 This section summarises key messages arising from our review of the meta-analytic and primary research evidence. In this section, we focus on four key questions:

- How effective are family literacy programmes?
- What types of programmes are effective, and why?
- Do family literacy programmes work as well for disadvantaged children?
- What are our gaps in knowledge?

How effective are family literacy programmes?

3.5.2 All six of the meta-analyses included in our review found evidence of positive gains from family literacy interventions. Effect sizes for the six studies were as follows:

- 0.25 (van Steensel et al, forthcoming 2011)
- 0.33 (Manz et al, forthcoming 2011)
- 0.42 (Nye et al, 2006)
- 0.55 (Erion, 2006)
- 0.59 (Mol et al, 2008)
- 0.68 (Sénéchal and Young, 2008).

3.5.3 One of the meta-analyses (van Steensel et al, forthcoming 2011) found no gains in randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Nye et al (2006), on the other hand, included only RCTs in their review, and found an effect size of 0.42.

3.5.4 All but two of the effect sizes found in these six reviews are larger than the average effect size (0.4) for educational interventions (Hattie, 2009). This suggests that family literacy programmes are more effective than most types of interventions.

- 3.5.5 In most cases, family literacy programmes take place outside of school hours and therefore complement rather than compete with school-based interventions designed to improve child literacy. This suggests that national and European strategies to improve child literacy should not be limited to school-based initiatives, but should include family literacy programmes.
- 3.5.6 Turning from meta-analytic evidence to primary research, many rigorous studies have found quantitative evidence of child literacy gains (see e.g. Brooks et al, 2008 for a summary).
- 3.5.7 Particularly valuable longitudinal evidence is available from Turkey, where the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) have both produced large, long-term gains in child literacy development and related cognitive and non-cognitive areas (Kağitçibaşı et al, 2001, 2005; Bekman, 2003).

What types of programmes are effective, and why?

- 3.5.8 As yet, there is little meta-analytic evidence comparing the relative effectiveness of different types of family literacy initiatives. Of these six meta-analyses included in our review, only one focused on intervention type. Sénéchal and Young (2008) found that programmes which trained parents to teach their children specific reading skills had a very large impact on child literacy development (effect size = 1.18). Such programmes should be adapted and reduplicated in other settings in order to ascertain whether or not they can continue to produce large gains. Of particular interest was the fact that these programmes required surprisingly little staff time: parents received on average only 1-2 hours of training. The same researchers found above average results (in comparison to other educational interventions) for programmes in which parents listened to their children reading. These programmes produced a combined effect size of 0.51. However, they found limited benefits programmes in which parents read to their children (effect size = 0.18).
- 3.5.9 In their meta-analysis Blok et al (2005) concluded that training in parenting skills led to significantly larger cognitive gains for children. (However, it should be noted that this meta-analysis focused on a range of child cognitive outcomes, not just literacy.)
- 3.5.10 Despite the many research gaps plaguing the field of family literacy, there is a relatively large and growing body of methodologically robust primary research demonstrating the value of programmes which include training in parenting skills. In particular, quantitative research on the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) has indicated that improving

parents' capacity to provide socio-emotional support to their children is correlated with sustained, child long-term literacy gains (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2001, 2005). Desforges and Abouchar (2003), in their review of parenting interventions, conclude that parenting skills training which encourages "good at-home parenting" is most likely to produce lasting cognitive benefits. Good at-home parenting establishes a child's self-concept as a learner, enabling the development of key non-cognitive qualities which support learning (Heckman et al, 2009).

- 3.5.11 Other types of family literacy interventions have been shown to produce long-term child literacy gains. These include putting initiatives such as the UK's Bookstart, which has been transferred to a number of other countries, both in Europe and elsewhere.

Does family disadvantage influence the impacts of family literacy programmes?

- 3.5.12 The meta-analytic evidence on this question is mixed. Two meta-analyses found that disadvantaged children experienced smaller gains than more advantaged children. When combining all the studies included in their review of dialogic reading programmes, Mol et al (2008) found a combined effect size of 0.59. However, when only looking at studies of disadvantaged children, the combined effect size was much lower: 0.13. Likewise, Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) found significant negative effects of disadvantage. Looking at socio-economic status, this meta-analysis found much stronger results for studies primarily including middle or higher socio-economic status families (effect size = 0.39) as compared to studies primarily including low-income families (0.14). Manz et al also investigated the impact of race/ethnicity (albeit it should be noted that this was in an American context). Studies including primarily White participants had much better outcomes than did studies including primarily ethnic minority participants: 0.64 versus 0.16. Van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) suggest that the lack of gains may result from difficulties faced by disadvantaged parents in successfully implementing family literacy programmes.
- 3.5.13 In contrast, Sénéchal and Young (2008), who found particularly strong gains overall, concluded that these gains were equally large for low socio-economic status children and for children classified as experiencing reading problems or considered to be at risk of such problems. Jaynes (2005), who looked at academic outcomes in general as opposed to literacy outcomes, found that urban pupils, who were primarily disadvantaged and ethnic minority, benefited significantly from parental support programmes.

- 3.5.14 Primary research evidence (see e.g. Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2005) indicates that disadvantaged children can and do benefit from family literacy initiatives. For example, the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and MOCEP are targeted only at disadvantaged families, and have shown large gains (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2005). However, there is evidence that among the Turkish programmes' target group of disadvantaged children, the least cognitively able have not made gains. In the Netherlands, Opstap has produced gains for Turkish-Dutch children, but not for their Moroccan-Dutch peers (Eldering and Vedder, 1999).
- 3.5.15 Van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) suggest that disadvantaged families may find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended. This is also the conclusion of McElvany and Artelt (2009), who used video analysis to assess the implementation quality of a family literacy programme.
- 3.5.16 Blok and colleagues (2004) suggest that one of the advantages of including parental skills training in family literacy interventions targeting disadvantaged households is that such training may make programmes more attractive for high risk groups, improving attendance and overall parental involvement.

What are our gaps in knowledge?

- 3.5.17 There is a worrying lack of methodologically robust European research on family literacy initiatives. This means that meta-analyses, even those conducted by European researchers, must rely primarily on non-European studies for their data. It also means that policymakers and researchers are unable to answer a range of questions regarding which family literacy programmes are most effective, why, for whom, and under what conditions.
- 3.5.18 There are also large gaps in our understanding of how well programmes are implemented, particularly in disadvantaged households, and how important implementation quality is to programme success.

Chapter 4 Policy issues and institutions

4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Chapters 4-8 discuss, compare and analyse European policies and programmes aimed at improving the literacy and literacy support skills of parents of children at ISCED levels 0-1. Each chapter concludes with key messages regarding the themes, issues and findings discussed in that chapter.
- 4.1.2 This discussion and analysis will draw on lessons learned from all three strands of this research project: 1) research review; 2) case studies; and 3) semi-structured, qualitative interviews conducted with family literacy policy actors and stakeholders throughout Europe. Our discussion of these themes is also informed by material presented at an expert seminar on family literacy, hosted by our research team in September 2010. Attendees at this seminar included researchers, policymakers and programme leaders working in a range of European countries. A full list of attendees is presented in Appendix 4.
- 4.1.3 In the discussion and analysis which draw on these sources, we have adopted a thematic approach, seeking to highlight key lessons and messages relevant to a range of topics and themes. Not surprisingly, different strands of our research produced data that were useful in different ways. Interviews with policymakers and other senior policy and programme stakeholders were particularly useful when analysing some aspects of family literacy policymaking and programme development, and less useful regarding other aspects. The stakeholders we interviewed were able to provide particularly helpful insights into the policy process, and into the often complex interactions and inter-relationships between policies and programmes.
- 4.1.4 In contrast, our research review provided little data on policy and programme development, but a great deal of information on programme outcomes, and the ways in which participant and intervention variables influenced those outcomes. The case studies we conducted provided information in both areas.

4.2 Family literacy policy contexts and approaches

Complex policy problems

- 4.2.1 Analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of adult literacy policies around the globe is a challenging task for a number of reasons. First, and perhaps most importantly, adult literacy can be viewed as what Peters (2005) defined as a "complex policy problem". Complex policy problems are those which have neither straightforward causes nor straightforward solutions, in part because they are caused by and impact upon issues and actions across a broad range of policy fields, complicating the potential for coherent government action. Child literacy development is influenced by a range of factors, both educational and otherwise; these include socioeconomic status, migrant status and parental education levels. Poor literacy development in turn produces a range of negative outcomes across a range of policy fields, including early school leaving, poor health, early childbearing and lower socioeconomic status.
- 4.2.2 Because of their complexity, including the fact that they cross over into a range of policy fields, complex policy problems often need an intervening factor (Peters, 2005) to activate the process of actively seeking policy solutions to the problem. This can be particularly true if the policy levers available to policymakers are deemed "difficult to pull". As Waldfogel (2006) has observed in her analysis of educational interventions targeted at young children, interventions aimed at disadvantaged parents offer the potential for great gains but bring with them a range of challenges not faced by those seeking to implement interventions in schools and early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres. Parents' literacy-related skills, behaviours and attitudes tend to be deeply ingrained, and the product of a range of interlinked influences. At the same time, policymakers lack the legal capacity to dictate what parents do and how they do it, at least as regards educational activities in the home; schools and ECEC centres can be controlled in a way that homes cannot.
- 4.2.3 In addition, it has traditionally been held in countries throughout Europe and the world that education is the provenance of schools rather than parents. Only in the last few decades has research evidence indicated how central and essential a role parental activities play in child literacy development.
- 4.2.4 Other intervening policy factors include: the growing and consistent body of research showing the strong correlations between familial disadvantage and child literacy acquisition; long-term structural changes such as the transition from industrial economies to knowledge economies, necessitating greater literacy skills

for employability; the current economic crisis, and international measures such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

- 4.2.5 With regard to the latter, one of the German policy stakeholders interviewed for this project emphasised the ways in which that country's poor PISA results spurred increased policy and research interest in literacy interventions, including family literacy. Out of that interest grew a range of projects, including the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme.
- 4.2.6 However, as both our interview respondents from Germany emphasised, that country has not yet developed a concerted response to the problem of intergenerational transmission of educational disadvantage. In part this is because the Lander make education policy at a regional level. However, even at that level, only the city-state of Hamburg appears to have developed a fairly coherent family literacy programme and policy. In other regions, family literacy interventions exist primarily as short-term projects, not as policy.
- 4.2.7 Complex policy problems force governments to act in new ways. According to our German respondents, Germany has been slow to adapt to new problems related to being a migrant country with fairly high levels of educational inequality. As we shall see in this analysis, other countries have made greater efforts, and greater gains.
- 4.2.8 In the following sections, we shall seek to compare and analyse policy developments aimed at improving young children's literacy acquisition through parental support. These policy developments take place not in a vacuum, but in the complex world of policy-making, with its many conflicting interests, actors and institutions. As one of our interview respondents from Turkey observed: "We have to realise that we live in these complex environments, and we are not isolated from what goes on in the rest of these environments. So if, for example, the leadership at the Ministry of Education, is prioritising a number of other things, which they often do, then you will be affected by that."
- 4.2.9 In Ireland, our respondent argued that a chief reason why family literacy has received limited policy attention is the fact that the country has been slow to recognise the importance of early acquisition of literacy in general. This lack of attention to this issue is not specific to family literacy, but is a feature of the broader policy context. For example, Ireland trails most European countries in provision of ECEC, and has only in the last year introduced free pre-school provision.

- 4.2.10 Contextual factors such as this, in Ireland and in some other countries, represent a historically slowness in understanding and acknowledging the critical importance of early years development in shaping individuals' life chances and lifecourses. However, most modern policymakers and politicians are now well aware of these issues, and support the provision of universal, high quality early childhood education and care, at least for some age groups, as recommended in numerous national and European policy documents (see e.g. EACEA 2009). Because policies related to children have such strong and overlapping impacts on each other, this increased understanding offers the potential for more robust policy approaches to family literacy. More mundanely, but perhaps equally importantly, it also helps to provide the practical mechanisms required for family literacy programmes to be feasible for parents – for example, by making it more likely that multi-child families have access to free childcare for their youngest children while older children engaged in family literacy activities with their parents.
- 4.2.11 Conflicting priorities can affect a range of issues, such as the allocation of budget to family literacy policies and programmes, and the capacity for family literacy specialist to get the time and attention of government decision-makers. For example, when senior policy makers' or politicians' attention is focused on other areas, it can be difficult for family literacy specialist to find the "policy champions" often required to move a policy area from the margins to a more central, institutionalised position.
- 4.2.12 Even when family literacy is well entrenched in policy strategies and institutional structures, the broader policy context can have large and potentially mortal impacts on policies and programmes. For example, in the Netherlands, increased policy and political interest in ECEC in recent years has meant that family literacy programmes have suffered funding cuts, with many having to disband or reorganise themselves along more affordable – and possibly less effective – models.
- 4.2.13 As Viv Bird, Director of the UK's Booktrust observed in an interview, nothing can be taken for granted, even when policies and programmes are as successful as Bookstart has been. Broader policy changes may have foreseen or unforeseen impacts on family literacy programmes, particularly during times of cutbacks in government spending. During such periods, Bird observes, governments will continue focusing on early intervention, because they understand how important it is to life chances. However, their focus may shift – for example, placing greater emphasis on classroom-based interventions such as phonics, and less on family-based initiatives. (Unfortunately, Ms Bird's observations proved prescient: as this report was being written, the UK government announced the withdrawal of all

funding for Booktrust in England. Following public uproar, the government has, at the time of writing, reversed this decision.)

Where family literacy policy is situated in national policy landscapes

- 4.2.14 A key question for each Member State is: what is the place of an intergenerational focus on child literacy acquisition and opportunities? Is the impact of parents seen as central, or is it seen as a marginal or ignored altogether? That is, do families and their effects have an identified, well understood and key position in institutional structures and approaches to early childhood literacy acquisition? Or are the role, influence and potential impacts of the family marginalised in a Member State's policy structure and approach?
- 4.2.15 In many countries, the answers to these questions are changing. Policymakers in some Member States, such as Malta, note that as few as two decades ago, children's cognitive development was seen solely as the remit of the education system, and the education system was seen as being solely about schools. What's more, schools had a "closed doors" policy as regards parental engagement and involvement: parents on one side of the gate, children and educationalist on the other. In this way, schools were a "black box" which parents were not permitted to peer inside. Doing so would impinge on educationalists' professional autonomy, and – so it was believed – would add nothing to the child's education, which was seen as occurring only at school or via school-initiated activities such as homework.
- 4.2.16 Not all Member States have become more welcoming of parental involvement in education, however. In Cyprus, schools still generally operate a "closed doors" policy. While there has been a certain amount of rhetoric devoted to increased parental involvement, this has not led to concrete changes in policy and practice. Nor have there been strong pressures from within Cyprus to adapt more open approaches to parental involvement seen in other European countries. According to our Cypriot interview subject, while policy trends in Europe may have shaped Cypriot policy rhetoric to some degree, only bottom-up, locally-generated pressures are likely to make a significant impact on actual policy-making. This suggests that policy transfer or borrowing within the EU is not inevitable.
- 4.2.17 In our interviews, respondents in several countries argued that despite parental involvement being seen as important, family literacy continues to lack a solid policy home. For many respondents, family literacy suffers from having diverse interest and stakeholders distributed across the policy spectrum – that is, it is seen as being too widely disbursed over the policy landscape, thus limiting its strength and capacity to impact on broader, more powerful policy agendas. In contrast, respondents from the

UK's Booktrust argued that for their book gifting programmes, this could be seen as an advantage, because such programmes, like other family literacy programmes, can provide benefits for a range of policy departments.

- 4.2.18 However, a frequent problem of dispersal across the policy spectrum is that family literacy policies and programmes can lack natural, strongly positioned champions within the policy-making community. Experiences in Ireland suggest that this weakness can be partially overcome through the existence of strong, non-governmental family literacy policy advocates such as the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). However, even in Ireland, NALA, which is a relatively well entrenched and powerful policy-influencing organisation, represents only a small proportion of the potential types of family literacy initiatives: NALA's emphasis in Ireland is on parallel learning Family Literacy programmes, in which children and parents aim to improve their literacy skills. To our knowledge, in no European country is the full panoply of family literacy initiatives represented at national policy level by one or more relatively influential organisations. Instead, organisations tend to lobby for one particular type of intervention, or a small number of intervention types. Such is the case, for example, in Turkey.
- 4.2.19 In some countries, including Malta, full integration with primary school education policy is seen as a positive strategy for ensuring the long-term existence of family literacy on the policy agenda. "Family literacy will always be the Cinderella," argues our Malta respondent. That is, it will always be viewed by mainstream education policymakers as an outsider, and possibly even an interloper. Family literacy is focused on families and children, rather than a particular institutional structure such as the school system. This makes it an uncomfortable fit.
- 4.2.20 Because of its outsider status and the challenges associated with making it fit coherently into currently existing policy institutional structures, our Maltese respondent argues that family literacy programmes should consciously aim to complement compulsory education – and to present itself as primarily a complement. It is argued that establishing this image – or “brand”, if you like – can enhance the likelihood of long-term policy sustainability, in part through enabling family literacy to have a clear – and powerful – institutional home, and in part through making it clear that family literacy sees itself as subsidiary to the main institutional structures.
- 4.2.21 However, as we will discuss in later sections, this is not always feasible, and may, depending on educationalist' attitudes towards family-centred programmes, be inadvisable in some countries. It may be the case that in Malta such an approach is

made more feasible by two factors. First, in that country all elements of lifelong learning are part of the Ministry of Education. This is in contrast, for example, to the situation in England, where family learning is seen as part of the Adult Learning policy ambit, and is thus controlled not by the Department of Education, but by the Department of Business, Industry and Skills.

- 4.2.22 The second factor relates to a combination of two issues: Member State size, and individual influences on national policy-making. In Malta, the number of influential educational policy actors is relatively small compared to some other Member States. Furthermore, an accident of history has meant that a key figure in Maltese family literacy policy development now plays a senior, broader role in the Ministry of Education, thus opening the door to a level of family literacy policy integration that might be less feasible in a country where family literacy policy activists have much less contact with and/or influence on senior Department of Education decision-makers.
- 4.2.23 In Turkey, where the Mother-Child Education Programme has moved from being a small project to being nationwide policy, family education is situated primarily within the non-formal general directorate of the Ministry of Education; however general directorates for primary school and counselling also have responsibilities for some aspects of family education. A future goal with regard to further embedding family literacy policy in the Turkish policy ecosystem, according to one of our respondents, is to see family literacy viewed not primarily as the responsibility of the non-formal directorate but of the Ministry as a whole. This is due to issues of legitimacy and stature. As our respondent observes, "non-formal is not seen as real education". This is true not only in Turkey but in most and probably all Member States, with the possible exception of the Nordic countries.

Cross-departmental policymaking and programme development

- 4.2.24 In this section we look at the numerous challenges and occasional successes related to family literacy's inconsistent and occasionally diffuse and/or marginalised place in European countries' policy ecosystems. We also discuss the desire of and need for family literacy policymakers and programme leaders to work with policymakers in a range of government departments and policy actors in a range of different institutions.
- 4.2.25 Respondents from all countries surveyed for this project highlighted the challenges of working with and/or establishing a foothold in policy fields such as early childhood education and care (ECEC), primary schooling, and health. In terms of policy inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes, family literacy is by nature a cross-departmental

discipline. As our respondent from England observed, "family learning is not just about education, it is about all policy areas".

4.2.26 Furthermore, it involves a broad range of policy actors and stakeholders, not just policymakers within government. For example, in Ireland the leading proponent of and coordinating agency for family literacy programmes is the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), an NGO. In Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Programme has long been administered by the Mother Child Educational Foundation, with research and evaluations of the programme carried out by Turkish universities. Supra-national organisations such as the World Bank have also played a key role in MOCEP's development. As is discussed elsewhere in this report, non-governmental organisations such as NALA can be highly beneficial both to programme development and to family literacy policy development, as they can serve as coordinating agencies representing the interest of a broad range of family literacy programme developers, carving out "policy space" and representing the field in policy forums.

Using family literacy initiatives to address broader policy concerns

4.2.27 Policies and programmes are more likely to be successful when they meet the needs of the populace and policymakers, ensuring both bottom-up and top-down demand. This is particularly true when programmes can help to address a range of policy issues.

4.2.28 A number of the programmes investigated in our case studies had objectives focused not just on literacy and education, but also on supporting the improved integration of migrant families. The Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP), for example, has been transferred to five European countries – Cyprus, Germany, France, Belgium (French-speaking), and Switzerland – and to a number of Middle Eastern countries. In Europe, the programme has a range of integration-focused aims (Bekman and Kocak, 2010). First, it seeks to help Turkish mothers integrate into the society to which they have immigrated.

4.2.29 The programme also helps mothers to develop parenting skills and cultural understandings required to adapt to the new cultures influence on their children's behaviour. This can be an important issue for families who have migrated from cultures such as Turkey, in which child rearing emphasises obedience and discipline, to Member States where greater emphasis is placed on inculcating child autonomy and independence.

- 4.2.30 Further, MOCEP seeks to supplement current integration policies in countries of migration, to promote Turkish migrant adaptation to the new culture. However, while promoting adaptation, the programme also helps encourage mother tongue literacy development. This is in part to address a problem frequently arising for second and third-generation children in migrant communities: while performing poorly in the language of the country in which they reside, they may also lack fluency in their mother tongue – meaning that they suffer poor literacy in both of the languages available to them.
- 4.2.31 In our case studies, we found that several programmes sought to encourage integration and thereby help meet policy goals in this area by focusing on local schools as instruments of community cohesion and social inclusion. For example, in the Netherlands, Opstap initiatives work with resources which mirror and build on literacy work undertaken by the children in school. Furthermore, the initiative seeks to build parents' skills and confidence, thereby providing them with the human capital required to become more involved in their child's school and school community. This process is a virtuous circle: becoming more involved in the school community build social capital, which encourages the development of better parental language skills, self-confidence and other forms of human capital (Balatti, et al, 2009).
- 4.2.32 The positive impacts that family literacy can and does have on migrant integration may be particularly relevant in Member States such as Denmark and the Netherlands where the prevalent culture encourages community interaction and involvement, but where some immigrant groups are more inwardly focused. Family literacy programmes can help to limit the tensions sometimes associated with these conflicting orientations.

Conflicting policy agendas

- 4.2.33 In our interviews with family literacy policy actors, conflicting policy interest and agendas were consistently cited as a barrier to coherent and sustainable family literacy policy and programme development. All departments and institutions charged with responsibilities for child development seem to have their own, generally conflicting, views on what is best for children, and on how much or how little they should work with other stakeholders. A typical response to our interviews with policy actors was that of our respondent from Ireland, who said that in her country there has been a "reluctance to have a shared stakeholder approach" – a reluctance rooted in conflicts between policymakers focused on primary education and those focused on ECEC. Such debates can be vociferous, fuelled by conflicting

professional backgrounds and institutional focuses. For example, in England, ECEC tends to have a social health perspective rather than an educational one, and tends to be suspicious of policies which it feels will place an academic burden on young children. The same tends to be true in Germany. In the debate between providers of ECEC and primary education, it was argued in England, less powerful interests, particularly those focused on the role of the family in child development, "got squeezed out".

- 4.2.34 In England, policy conflicts have centred not on debate between ECEC and primary education, but on conflicts between adult learning, which is the source of family literacy funding streams, and the Department of Education, which controls funding for schools and ECEC programmes such as Sure Start. According to our English interview respondent, there is "no conversation" between the two departments. Several years ago, family literacy policy actors attempted to renew the National Family Learning Policy Steering Group, which had previously existed when family literacy was part of the Department of Education. According to our respondent, the Department of Education refused to participate in the Steering Group arguing that family literacy – which the Department saw as a policy targeted at adults – was outside their remit. Therefore, they did not authorise anyone from their department to take part in the Steering Group.
- 4.2.35 In Ireland, the predominance of educationalists from the school sector in this policy space, coupled with the much greater power and influence held by schools, means that policy actors focused on the role of parents tend to be pushed to the margins of the debate. Arguments that the child literacy landscape must include policies and programmes to help disadvantaged parents support their children's development tend to fall on deaf ears when directed at institutions run by educationalist, with parents being seen less as an opportunity than as a "further burden on resources", according to our Irish interview subject. This is despite policy rhetoric in Ireland emphasising the importance of parents. As this interviewee reported: "We have a lot of policies that say we recognise parents as first teachers, but we don't do anything to support them in that role." The outcome tends to be a policy focus not on the "whole child" or "whole family", but one centred more on institutions, e.g. schools or ECEC centres.
- 4.2.36 Such a conflict between departments focused on children and those focused on adults may be a particular problem in countries where family literacy programmes and policies focus as much on parental literacy outcomes as outcomes for children. We speak here of parallel track family literacy initiatives, such as those in the UK and Ireland.

Childhood-wide policy-making

- 4.2.37 One of the key goals in a cross-departmental, “joined-up” policy approach is to ensure that the child's needs provide the guiding framework for all interventions, rather than departmental structures providing that framework. This implies aiming for a “childhood-wide” approach, in which children and families receive consistent, coherent and complementary support from the full range of different departments and agencies they come in contact with.
- 4.2.38 Such an approach faces a range of organisational, institutional, and professional challenges. For example, observes our respondent from Ireland, “the state is reluctant to enter into contracts with parents”. For ideological reasons, states may decide that a home's front door is a boundary that cannot or should not be crossed, so policies need to be organised along institutional, departmental lines. Our Irish interviewee continues: “It is easier for the state to have a contract with an institution as opposed to having a contract with the home.” However, as research on disadvantaged populations makes clear (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006), this means that many families either do not access services or only access them partially. It also means that services are less likely to be coordinated and coherent from the family's perspective. Furthermore, as we have seen in our analysis of interview data, it increases the likelihood that departments will engage in narrow thinking – with, for example, specialists in child health focusing almost exclusively on medical measures and initiatives, and overlooking the potential for reading for pleasure to positively influence child health through a range of mechanisms, including improved parent-child bonding and improved child socio-emotional development.
- 4.2.39 At the level of national policy, a key objective – at least from the family literacy perspective – is that knowledge about the family-related inputs and outcomes underpins policy in a range of areas, such as ECEC, Education, Health, and Communities. In addition to informing policies in these areas, family literacy policy should ideally be written into key strategy documents in as full a range of departments as is feasible.
- 4.2.40 Policymaking tends to be silo-focused - i.e. based more around the needs of government departments than service recipients –, but not always. For example, earlier this decade the UK briefly had a Department of Children, Schools and Families, which at least theoretically acknowledged the weaknesses inherent in separating out different aspects of children's educational development and general well-being. However, with the recent change of UK government, this department has been disbanded, and a Department of Education is back in place.

- 4.2.41 Netherlands policy making provides a strong example of childhood-wide policymaking, in that different services aim to work together for the benefit of the child across a range of areas. A prime example of this is the coordination between the health service and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. Even for very young children, i.e. those aged from birth to 2 years, policy provides mechanisms for a focus on literacy development. For example, at birth the health care centre draws up a summary description of the family situation, with information on parental education, income, home language, books in the home, and health-related issues such as parental illness and stress. This information is used to determine if the family is at greater risk of suffering a range of disadvantages, including poor child literacy. If so, literacy support is offered.
- 4.2.42 Throughout this process in the Netherlands, the policy emphasis is on creating obligations for municipalities, rather than obligations for parents. For parents, the emphasis is on opportunities and guidance. However, there has recently been some discussion in the Netherlands about shifting more responsibility towards parents.
- 4.2.43 In Turkey, the childhood-wide approach has been taken even further in the development of education policy. As related to us in an interview with a senior figure at the Ministry of Education, in crafting a new, more holistic education policy the Ministry brought together experts not only on education but from "all parties that provide services to the family". Policy was then crafted taking into account the opinions of educators, children themselves, and families. According to the Minister: "Our biggest success is that while providing education to the family, we are also focused on supporting the family from other aspects, such as their health and economically." The Minister continued: "It is important to view the family holistically, to bring public and private parties together... to take the family as a whole."
- 4.2.44 In the UK, our Birmingham case study programme, "Birmingham Churches Training Together", actively sought integration on two different levels: integration of disadvantaged migrant families into the broader community, and integration of the numerous services required by those families. Regarding the latter, the aim is to establish partnerships with schools, children centres and other local organisations, so that parents and children can more readily access the full range of services they need. The programme seeks to help a broad range of families, including groups who are particularly disadvantaged, e.g. asylum seekers, refugees and maternal victims of domestic violence.

Childhood-long policy-making

- 4.2.45 In addition to segmenting a single phase of childhood into different areas based on departmental organisation – e.g. education, health, socio-emotional development – silo-based policy strategies tend to divide childhood into non-continuous, decontextualised phases. Despite European policy emphasis on lifelong learning, what could be called a lifestage approach is still the norm in Member States, providing limited space for lifelong and intergenerational approaches to education and skill development.
- 4.2.46 Potentially more useful strategy is one which takes a "childhood-long" approach to policy-making. In Turkey, policy makers are increasingly seeking to craft policies which look at the child holistically from 0 to 18. In this report, we refer to this approach as "childhood-long policy-making".
- 4.2.47 In Turkey, whereas there were previously separate policy focuses for children aged 0-3, 3-6, 7-11 and 12-18, all age groups are now addressed under a shared policy agenda, in the hopes that this will improve policy-making while also improving efficiency. One hope we would have from such an approach is that it would focus energy on avoiding the so-called "washout affect", where gains made through family literacy or ECEC initiatives are lost in the first years of primary school.

Policy actors and stakeholders

- 4.2.48 In Chapter 2, we discussed the importance of considering the actions, interest and opinions of a broad range of policy actors and stakeholders, not just government policymakers. In many countries, there was criticism regarding non-governmental policy actors' lack of access to policy space dominated by government departments.
- 4.2.49 For example, in Romania, it was observed that the education system is extremely slow to react to new ideas, and is characterised by a high level of bureaucracy and centralisation. This means that professional associations, NGOs and private sector organisations are less able to contribute to educational developments – contributing, for example, to the continued lack of policy development regarding family literacy. According to our Romanian respondents, this also contributed towards teachers' still limited understanding of the role of parents in child literacy development. In Romania, neither initial teacher training programmes nor ongoing professional development opportunities offered by central government provide training regarding families and parents, and alternative organisations that might provide such training do not yet have a place at the policy table.

4.2.50 This is not the case in all Member States. For example, in Ireland the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) plays an important role in advocating about the importance of parents to child literacy development. In Ireland, the existence of a non-governmental agency such as NALA has contributed to family literacy policy gains, with the organisation able to represent the field in a way that few individual programmes, no matter how successful, would be able to do.

Policy departments: working with schools and ECEC

4.2.51 Specialists in primary education policy and practice often have limited interest in or understanding of the role of families. Despite interest from some teachers or headteachers, such attitudes are often systemic and deeply institutionalised. Romania, for example, is one of many countries in which initial and ongoing teacher training provides teachers with little or no information about families. In Germany, an interview respondent observed that the country "really does not have a tradition of family literacy at all", with the recent exception of Hamburg, and the even more recent 26 million Euro funding of a German version of Bookstart through 2018. While Germany does have a range of policies designed to support families, their agendas tend not extend to child literacy development. In part, our respondent attributed this to Germany's slow policy development in the field of early childhood education and care, which has only gained a significant place on the policy agenda in the last few years.

4.2.52 Our respondent from England had similar complaints, indicating that even countries with relatively long traditions of family literacy activity struggle to have family literacy taken seriously by the school system – even though family literacy may be taken very seriously by individual schools. This is unfortunate, as better understanding family literacy issues would help schools better work with parents. As observed by our England respondent, "Everybody wants the best for their child, they just need the best way to do the best for their child, don't they?" Systemic family literacy policies and training would enable schools to help parents discover how best to help their children develop their literacy and other academic skills.

4.2.53 One challenge in this regard, and one that is perhaps salient in most efforts at cross-policy working, is that policymakers and practitioners tend not only to be unfamiliar with or to underestimate the potential gains that could come from other policy areas; they also tend to overestimate the gains achievable by their own policy area. For example, many specialists in schools policy not only tend to be unfamiliar with research, policies and programmes centred around the role of families, they also tend to be overly optimistic about the potential for school systems to "solve" the problems of disadvantage. Family literacy policymakers and practitioners are

themselves sometimes guilty of this practice. Seeing the clear and manifold socio-emotional, educational and other gains produced by their programmes and policies, they sometimes over estimate the literacy-specific gains that can be produced by those programmes, particularly in the short-term and for disadvantaged children.

- 4.2.54 The Maltese case provides an example: programme leaders were overly optimistic about the potential short-term quantitatively measured literacy gains that were likely to be produced by their programme. At the same time, they underestimated the broader, more difficult to measure gains such as child socio-emotional development, parental self-efficacy, parental empowerment and parental commitment to their child's education.
- 4.2.55 Being unable to deliver the promised child literacy gains was a setback for Maltese family literacy policy and programme development. Following that setback, family literacy was reconceptualised so that it was offered to government not as a stand-alone solution to literacy acquisition problems in Malta, but as a key component in a revised, broader educational approach to early literacy acquisition – one which increased schools' focus on the issue while simultaneously positioning family literacy programmes as an important complement to schools' new and greater emphasis on child literacy.
- 4.2.56 In part, the current Maltese emphasis on family literacy as a complement to primary school education arose through an unexpected area of failure in early Maltese family literacy initiatives. Those initiatives, like those of today, strived to help schools and school teachers better understand families and their impacts on child literacy acquisition, and aimed to develop complementariness between pedagogies and lessons used in family literacy courses and primary schools. One of the mechanisms for achieving these aims was using primary school teachers as family literacy trainers. As our Malta respondent observes: "We thought it would be obvious that these day school teachers, once they were back in the classroom, would realise what a wonderful tool [family literacy] was, and implement it in their classrooms." However, that happened only in a very small minority of cases – "because the school structure, and the syllabus, and the whole ethos, was not ready for the transfer". Even when day school teachers understood firsthand what was being taught in family literacy courses, they did not attempt to build on this in their primary school lessons – there were too many structural barriers preventing them from doing so.
- 4.2.57 Now, with the benefit of hindsight, Malta is focusing more of its energies on ensuring that family literacy and primary school are complementary not just in terms of pedagogies and materials, but in terms of structure. In particular, as part of the

development of a National Literacy Framework, family literacy programmes have been redeveloped and reconceptualised so that schools commission them and feel ownership for them, and thus view them as part of their own structure, rather than something outside themselves. Furthermore, the new national curriculum framework refers explicitly to the types of relationships that should exist between home and school, with an emphasis on parental empowerment. Such developments have been possible in Malta in part due to key policymakers who were instrumental in the early days of Maltese family literacy policy development, now working in the Department of Education.

- 4.2.58 Close links between family literacy and compulsory education policy have also been developed in Turkey, where the Minister argues that "family education programmes need to be tied to a countrywide policy and be a part of the regular education system the way early childhood, primary and secondary education all are." He continues: "Family education programmes need to be perceived as [core] education policies in themselves, to have budgets and materials allocated specifically for them, and to be given greater importance." As family education programmes have grown in stature in Turkey, this objective has become more realistic. According to the Minister: "The political decision-makers and directors have an increasing belief in family education programmes, which has eased our job in developing and implementing" them.
- 4.2.59 Several of our case study initiatives strived to complement schools' literacy work and broader goals. In the latter category fall issues such as parental involvement in schools and integration of migrant families. The Reading Friends initiative in Norway, for example, is now offered in approximately 200 schools, after having been launched in one school in 2000. Among the reasons for its successful spread are the programme's promotion of home language and culture, its support for the inclusion of migrant children, and the opportunities it affords for collaboration with their parents. These elements of the programme help schools comply with government requirements. By helping schools meet a range of policy needs and obligations, Reading Friends increases its value and sustainability. The programme also fits into the school curriculum.
- 4.2.60 In the Netherlands, Opstap utilises resources which complement and build upon literacy work children do in school, thereby making the initiative attractive to schools, as they see the potential for pupil gains. The programme further complements schools by providing them with a mechanism for increasing the parental involvement of disadvantaged families, and increasing those families'

interest in and support for early literacy development.

- 4.2.61 In most cases, third-party overviews of Member States' education systems make little mention of parents, focusing instead only on institutional structures such as schools and early childhood education and care systems. For example, the national education overviews available through Eurydice (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/eurybase_en.php#description) make little or no mention of family literacy programmes and their contribution to the education of children, even in countries such as the Netherlands and Turkey where such programmes are relatively well-known. Advocates for family literacy should encourage the producers of national education overviews to broaden their scope enough to include discussions of family-centred education initiatives, particularly when such initiatives are funded by government and are seen as potentially valuable tools in reducing educational inequalities and achieving national and European targets.

Policy departments: working with health services

- 4.2.62 As is clear from the success of Booktrust and other book gifting programmes that have developed throughout Europe, linking family literacy policies and programmes with national Health departments can produce a robust service that benefits very large numbers of families.
- 4.2.63 In our snapshot case study of Booktrust, we detailed many of the policy-related challenges and opportunities inherent in such joined-up working. Such challenges and opportunities exist both at national level and at local level. Regarding the latter, the key emphasis is less on policy-making than on policy implementation and the fulfilment of responsibilities dictated by policymakers. At its most basic, the Booktrust model of partnering with the health service means that health visitors give book packs to the families of very young children.
- 4.2.64 This model varies from country to country – for example, in Germany, Bookstart packs are provided by paediatricians. According to information provided in our German case study of Lesestart (Bookstart), the programme benefits from the strong local networks paediatricians tend to have, both with parents utilising their health services, and with local businesses and civic organisations. Paediatricians also offer continuity, in that parents and children tend to see the same paediatrician numerous times in the first years of the child's life, and to develop a trusting relationship with that paediatrician. As noted in the Netherlands and the UK, disadvantaged parents are often more likely to trust members of the health service than educationalists.

- 4.2.65 In other cases, local health visitors take a more active role, for example taking parents with poor literacy to the local library so that they feel more comfortable about visiting it with the children, and so that they can discover that libraries need not be intimidating –that they have a wide range of fine opportunities aimed at encouraging a love of stories and reading in young children, such as Rhyme Time sessions.
- 4.2.66 On a broader level, the Netherlands has recently adopted a childhood-wide policy and practice model in which health professionals working with very young children are trained to focus on a range of issues potentially affecting child development, including family literacy issues. Through the Taalkracht (Languagepower!) Programme, nurses at healthcare centres have been trained to recognise the signs of low literacy in families, and are trained in ways to sensitively discuss the issue and its attendant risks with families.
- 4.2.67 The emphasis in this latter aspect of training is to ensure that the message conveyed is not "You are a poor reader, therefore you are a bad parent." Instead, the emphasis is on a non-deficit approach. Nurses are trained in providing information to parents about their unique and essential role in their child's cognitive and socio-emotional development. They are also trained in how best to help parents access local resources, such as libraries and institutions providing language courses.
- 4.2.68 Furthermore, healthcare centres do not simply hand out information about what programmes are available and where they may be accessed. Parents are led to courses that may be suitable for them. Such courses combine training in parenting skills with lessons in literacy. In part this is to help overcome the stigma of needing literacy help. Standalone literacy courses tend to be unpopular with parents. As one Dutch policymaker observed to our research team, policymakers in the Netherlands have learned that such programmes do not get taken up in sufficient numbers by disadvantaged parents. Integrated programmes which layer literacy instruction on top of parenting skills are significantly more popular. Such integrated programmes focus on a range of child development areas, including literacy, numeracy, motor skills and socio-emotional development.
- 4.2.69 These examples from the Netherlands, the UK, Germany and elsewhere represent a welcome transition from a tendency of early years health and development specialists in some countries to focus on clinical aspects of the child's health, without paying enough attention to the potential impacts of the immediate environment, i.e. the family, on child development. For example, in the UK the recent National Year of Speaking and Listening, which kicked off in January 2010, had a predominantly

clinical health centred view of oracy, with an attendant focus on speech and language difficulties, leaving little space for complementary views of speaking and listening as key components and steppingstones in the development of child literacy.

Policy mechanisms enabling cross-departmental policy development

4.2.70 In Ireland, there have been a number of efforts to craft a shared stakeholder approach to issues of child education and development. A key mechanism has been the multiple stakeholder forum, which were cited as an often challenging but occasionally valuable means through which the family literacy policy has been developed.

4.2.71 As we have discussed above, family literacy advocates tend to find themselves pushed to the margins by stronger political actors. Policy forums can provide a mechanism whereby relatively weak actors can at least get a seat at the table and attempt to advance their interests. For example, in Ireland our respondent reports that through participation in a committee focused on educational disadvantage, it was able to move the family literacy agenda forward and get family literacy, as a Programme, mentioned in the DESH National Plan. This was the first time that the Department of Education put in place a national programme for family literacy, an advance attributed by our respondent to recommendations to the Minister made by the educational disadvantage committee. Up until that point, family literacy advocates had lacked the opportunity to discuss with key policymakers what family literacy was, what it could achieve, and how it might contribute to the educational disadvantage agenda.

4.2.72 Policy forums such as this are not smooth processes – and as we saw in the case of England's failed Family Literacy Policy Steering Group, they may not even make it off the ground. One key weakness of such policy forums, as observed by our Ireland respondent, is the fact that in many if not most cases, "departments don't sit on these entities as partners. They may only sit on them in the context of the limitations of their role." That is, they may be there primarily or even solely to ensure that their interests are strictly protected, rather than to negotiate in order to reach a shared agreement. In Ireland, the educational disadvantage committee demanded high levels of time investment on the part of family literacy stakeholders, but in the end the gains to family literacy policy were worth the effort.

4.2.73 However, the Irish government eventually disbanded this committee, feeling that the process was too unwieldy, and overly burdensome to already overstretched policymakers. Whereas (relatively weak) family literacy policy advocates saw it as challenging, but as offering opportunities not otherwise available for those with

relatively limited access to key decision makers, key decision makers in government saw it primarily as a burden.

Partnerships

- 4.2.74 The above sections have touched on partnership working. In this section, we will focus more specifically on lessons learned about possibilities and risks associated with such partnerships, whether with government departments, private organisations, NGOs, or other stakeholders.
- 4.2.75 As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, several of the policy experts we interviewed argued that developing partnerships – and in particular the right partnerships – was the key to programme and policy sustainability. In Hamburg, the Family Literacy Programme (FLY) is an example of an initiative based on several partnerships. The project was created by the Hamburg Institute for Teacher Training, in cooperation with the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, and receive support from the German Bund-Länder Commission for Educational Planning and Research Promotion, as part of the policy initiative "Promotion of Children and Young Adults with Migrant Backgrounds".
- 4.2.76 The above sections have focused primarily on partnerships with governmental departments, so we will now turn our attention to partnerships with private industry. Booktrust is a particularly strong example of such an arrangement. This is evidenced through its funding model, where only approximately 1 in every 5 pounds comes from central government, with the majority of investment coming from private industry, particularly book publishers. Elsewhere in this report we provide more details of this relationship. Here, we will emphasise a few key points.
- 4.2.77 One, partnerships with private corporations can be extremely valuable. In Booktrust's case, it would be economically unfeasible to have a universal book gifting programme without book publishers' willingness to provide their books to Booktrust at a highly discounted rate.
- 4.2.78 Two, for sustainability's sake it is essential that private partners see themselves as gaining significant value from the partnership. Corporate Social Responsibility may not be enough, except in the short-term. This is a problem potentially faced by "Every Czech Reads To Kids".
- 4.2.79 It is perhaps telling that while Bookstart benefited greatly from its two-year partnership with Sainsbury's, the British supermarket chain, that relationship lasted only two years. Sainsbury's was meeting Corporate Social Responsibility goals

through the relationship, but the relationship was not helping it achieve its core business goals. In contrast, book publishers clearly benefit from book gifting programmes, as these programmes help instil a culture of reading and help advance each publisher's brand.

- 4.2.80 Three, gains for the private partner cannot come at the sake of losses in quality or integrity for the family literacy programme. Booktrust successfully maintains very high quality assurance standards and exercises full control over its own book packs. For example, publishers can nominate any books they choose, but are allowed no say in the process of selecting books for packs.

Non-governmental policy actors

- 4.2.81 In Romania, the literacy experts we interviewed noted that their country suffered from the presence of systemic barriers limiting the capacity of non-governmental agencies to contribute to family literacy policy development. The highly centralised Romanian education system leaves little policy space for non-departmental influences. While the Romanian case may be particularly bad, our interviews and research indicates that most and possibly all European countries suffer from systemic barriers limiting family literacy policy development, even if these barriers are only in the form of the much greater policy strength of schools-focused policymakers, which tends to keep family literacy on the margins of policy agendas, albeit to varying degrees in different Member States.
- 4.2.82 Given this seemingly ubiquitous policy challenge, our analysis suggests that NGOs may be able to play a particularly important role in family literacy policy development. Elsewhere in this report, we discuss the role of non-governmental policy activists and policy pioneers in pushing forward family literacy agendas and expanding the parameters of educational policy debates to include family literacy. In some cases, such as Romania, this is through the efforts of isolated individuals importing policy messages from other countries. (See Chapter 7 for a discussion of such "policy pioneers".)
- 4.2.83 In other cases, NGOs such as NALA, Booktrust and the Mother-Child Educational Foundation have succeeded in championing particular family literacy programmes with policymakers. While these organisations have not, to our knowledge, sought to champion the full range of family literacy provision, it may be the case that these efforts will create policy space for a broader range of family literacy initiatives. However, this remains to be seen.

- 4.2.84 Looking at the potential contributions of NGOs to advancing family literacy policy, organisations such as Booktrust and the Mother-Child Educational Foundation have, as discussed in Chapter 7, helped move programmes from project to national policy. More broadly though, NGOs can create relationships and carve out policy spaces that might not exist otherwise – for example, by bringing private industry and government departments together to work in concert with the NGO.
- 4.2.85 Booktrust provides an excellent example of this process: if the Department of Education directly encouraged book publishers to provide highly discounted children's books so that it could distribute them to all young children, publishers would almost surely refuse, in part because of the manifold complexities and challenges associated with working with government. Booktrust, on the other hand, is able to work as an intermediary between government and publishers, taking charge of negotiations and ensuring that government and private industry receive maximum benefit for minimal effort.
- 4.2.86 At a more local level, NGOs can help bring together different policy actors for the greater good. Because their roles are not limited by departmental or institutional strictures, NGOs can take and help to develop a more holistic, community-focused approach to problems such as child literacy and parental support. The very fact of engaging in such local, cross-organisational partnership efforts helps to create a sense of community among otherwise disparate actors and organisations. Furthermore, NGOs such as Booktrust are viewed as altruistic organisations, seeking neither to gain profit nor political advantage through their programmes. With regard to the latter, for example, senior Booktrust figures were keen to stress in our interviews that the organisation takes great pains to avoid affiliation with any political party, even when political parties themselves have sought out such affiliation.
- 4.2.87 All of these options are of course limited in countries which have relatively undeveloped voluntary sectors.

Managing family literacy partnerships

- 4.2.88 According to the Director of Booktrust, the capacity of voluntary sector organisations to create and manage partnerships is one of the key lessons governments can learn from analysing the family literacy policy landscape. Our interviews highlighted a number of key principles policy actors and programme leaders may want to keep in mind when forming and managing partnerships, whether with government departments, private industry, NGOs or some combination of the three. In such

partnerships, it helps to keep a range of key questions in mind. These include the following:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What can each partner bring to the partnership?
- What can each partner gain from the partnership?
- What are our key guidelines regarding programme implementation and quality, from which we will not stray?

4.2.89 Questions such as these encourage family literacy leaders to think not only in terms of their own needs and values, but those of their partners. As a Turkish respondent observes, the keys are to see issues from partners' perspectives and to "speak their language rather our own language". This may mean providing them with types of data they are particularly interested in, even if focusing on such data seems a distraction for programme leaders.

4.2.90 In managing such partnerships, says the Chief Executive of the Mother-Child Educational Foundation, it is important that family literacy organisations keep a sense of perspective. "Especially in NGOs," she says, "we have the tendency to think that we are holier than thou, and can do everything in the best way. Sometimes you need to let go, let go and let your partners try to find a way to take this on [i.e. to do the agreed work]. It may not be the perfect way, but it will mean that it's probably going to be reaching more individuals than you would by yourself."

4.2.91 Partnerships require trust, in both/all directions. However, this does not mean giving up one's principles. For example, in the UK Bookstart has a strong partnership with the Department of Health. At times, this has led to requests from that department to include health-centred messages in the book packs. Such requests have been rebuffed, on the principle that the purpose of the book packs is to promote a love of reading; educational messages, whether about health or other areas of development, would dilute the purpose of the pack, discomfit other partners, and potentially cause recipients to place less value on the packs, because they would see them as instructional rather than pleasurable.

4.2.92 In addition to trust, partnerships, require strategy. For example, family literacy leaders may want to develop incentives to shape partner behaviour. In Turkey, for example, this is an issue regarding recruitment of parents. Recruiters from partner organisations are not always keen to target harder to reach families. Training also matters. Implementation partners may need extra training to help them meet the needs of more disadvantaged families.

4.2.93 A similar issue may arise regarding programme fidelity and quality. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, policy makers tend to favour "one size fits all" policies, as they are easier to craft and administer. In Turkey, however, this raised the possibility that the most disadvantaged families would not be adequately served by MOCEP, as meeting the needs of those families requires different approaches. Therefore the Mother-Child Education Foundation ensured that there was a separate section of the programme for the most disadvantaged, including families with the biggest literacy problems.

4.3 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

This section provides an overview of key messages in this chapter. Key messages are divided by theme, as follows: Policy context; Partnerships with schools and the health service; and Policy champions.

Policy context

- 4.3.1 Poor child literacy can be characterised as a complex policy problem, in that neither its causes nor its consequences are readily isolated and addressed. Poor literacy is generally caused by the complex interaction of a range of factors spanning a range of policy fields. In turn, it often contributes to problems in a variety of policy fields – e.g. education, employment and health.
- 4.3.2 Many European countries are experiencing increased interest in the impact of parents on child literacy development. This interest has been stimulated by a range of educational, social and economic factors, including: results of PISA and other surveys; the growing body of research evidence demonstrating parental impacts on child literacy; changing population make-up, including rising migration; increased importance of education in modern societies.
- 4.3.3 However, family literacy remains a marginal field, even in countries where parental support policies and programmes are most developed.
- 4.3.4 In part because of family literacy's marginal status, broader policy contexts and factors strongly influence policy and programme success in the field. For example, in the Netherlands, increased interest in early childhood education and care has led to decreased funding for family literacy programmes.
- 4.3.5 As evidenced in Ireland, policy makers in relatively marginal fields such as family literacy may benefit from participating in policy forums, as these forums can provide a means through which relatively weak policy actors can attempt to advance their

interests. Since

- 4.3.6 Family literacy has different policy "homes" in different Member States. For example, in England and Ireland, family literacy is the responsibility of adult literacy policymakers. In Malta, family literacy is overseen by the Ministry of Education. In Turkey, an interview respondent suggested that family literacy policy in that country would be taken even more seriously if it moved out of the control of the non-formal education directorate, as "non-formal is not seen as real education".
- 4.3.7 Both in education and in other policy areas, there is evidence of considerable rhetoric regarding the importance of parents to child development. However, relatively little of this rhetoric translates into policy-making that puts families at the centre of the process. In part this is due to outdated organisational thinking and ways of working which put institutions rather than people at the centre of the policy process. But it is also a product of the complex challenges associated with crafting and maintaining family-centred policies. As one interview respondent observed, "It is easier for the state to have a contract with an institution as opposed to having a contract with the home."

Partnerships with schools and the health service

- 4.3.8 Because family literacy problems are caused by a range of influences across a range of policy areas, and because the positive outcomes of family literacy initiatives benefit a range of policy areas, the field is likely to benefit from improved cross-departmental (aka "joined-up") policy working. However, despite the positive rhetoric in a number of countries about joined-up policy working, there are significant institutional and structural barriers to the practice.
- 4.3.9 In some Member States, for example the Netherlands, there have been admirable strides towards "childhood-wide" policy-making which seeks to develop interconnected policies and programmes based not on institutional or organisational lines, but on a holistic view of child development, both educationally and otherwise. There have also been efforts at "childhood-long" policy-making, a process which seeks to look at and attempt to shape child development not in discrete age bands but over the entire course of childhood, from birth to 18.
- 4.3.10 Several interview respondents reported that even in countries with relatively strong traditions of family literacy policy development, family literacy was generally not taken seriously by the school system – even if it was taken seriously by individual schools. Family literacy tends to be viewed in terms of projects, rather than as an

integral part of or complement to the education system.

- 4.3.11 This was the experience reported by the Parenting Profession Can Be Learned programme in Romania, which is localised in one school (see our case study in Chapter 10). Staff at that school, including teachers, counsellor and headteacher, recognise the importance of parental involvement to child literacy development, and also see the strong potential of family literacy interventions to encourage the enjoyment of reading and learning and to stimulate further academic interest and ambition. However, the school receives no support or guidance from local or national education policymakers or institutions. Nor does the programme receive government funding. This means that staff do most of their family literacy project work for free, as gift time. This clearly raises serious issues regarding programme sustainability, and makes it highly unlikely that the programme could be expanded – a "gift time-based model" may work in one location for a particular period of time, but cannot serve as the basis for a systemic approach.
- 4.3.12 In Malta, the emphasis has been on positioning family literacy as an institutional complement to the school system. Family literacy policymakers have actively sought to institutionalise family literacy in the education system by forming contracts with schools.
- 4.3.13 School policy experts tend to be unfamiliar with potential gains associated with family literacy. Alternately, some schools may be uninterested, as they see the family as outside their remit.
- 4.3.14 Policymakers in most and perhaps all fields may be guilty of underestimating the gains that can be made in fields they are less familiar with, and overestimating gains that are likely to be made in their own field.
- 4.3.15 In both the Netherlands and the UK, family literacy programmes have successfully worked with Health Services to ensure greater coverage of family literacy policy. The UK's Bookstart programme, for example, utilises home health visitors to provide free book packs to all children in their first year of life.
- 4.3.16 Working in coordination with nurses and other health professionals offers a range of advantages. These include nearly universal access to homes, and the increased trust disadvantaged parents tend to feel towards health visitors in comparison to educationalists.

Policy champions

- 4.3.17 Several interview respondents highlighted the importance of developing strong partnerships with governmental, NGOs and/or the private sector. It was emphasised that partners, particularly in the private sector but also including local and national government, must see themselves as gaining significant value from the partnership. Successful initiatives are those which add value to partners and clearly demonstrate that such value has been added.
- 4.3.18 In countries such as Ireland, Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK, family literacy policy development has benefited from the presence of NGOs serving as policy champions. However, in each of these countries, the NGOs in question have championed not family literacy in general, but one specific type of programme. We could find no evidence in any country of policy champions working to advance the interest of a broad range of family literacy intervention types.
- 4.3.19 Respondents in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic both stressed the positive impact of celebrity endorsement and other forms of media exposure in generating publicity for family literacy initiatives.

Chapter 5 Policy and programme objectives, characteristics and success factors

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 In our research review, we compared and analysed findings from meta-analyses of family literacy initiatives. The majority of these meta-analyses have found that family literacy programmes are effective at improving child literacy skills. Comparing the gains associated with family literacy programmes to those associated with a broad range of other educational interventions, we found that family literacy initiatives tend to be more effective than most educational interventions.
- 5.1.2 In our analysis we observed that the impacts of family literacy programmes tend to be greater than those of most other interventions. As Hattie (1999) finds, the mean effect size for educational interventions overall is 0.4, with the mode effect size being 0.3. Five of the six known meta-analyses of family literacy programmes find a combined effect size greater than 0.3, with four finding a combined effect size greater than 0.4. In three meta-analyses, the combined effect size is greater than 0.5. (For a detailed discussion of these issues, including an explanation of the meaning of effect sizes, please see Chapter 3.)
- 5.1.3 These data strongly suggest not only that family literacy interventions are effective, but that they are typically more effective than school-based interventions. Even this conclusion may somewhat underestimate the potential impact of family literacy programmes. When comparing school-based interventions with each other, one must take account of opportunity cost: generally speaking, if one intervention is implemented, another will not be. This is not the case when comparing the impacts of family literacy programmes with school-based programmes: implementing one of the former does not imply not implementing one of the latter. Because the programmes are implemented in different environments, there is little or none of the opportunity cost associated with comparisons of school-based interventions.
- 5.1.4 This suggests that a particularly effective approach for policymakers would be to encourage evidence-based initiatives at home and at school, and to see the former as complementing the latter.

5.1.5 In Chapter 4, we discussed a range of policy contexts and institutions influencing family literacy policy. In Chapter 5, we look at programme-related variables influencing family literacy provision. However, as provision is also shaped by policy objectives, we also look at "policy in intent" (Veeman, 2004), by which we mean the goals, strategies, guidelines and tools created by policymakers in order to improve parents' ability to support their children's early literacy development. In particular, we will look at policy and programme objectives, before moving on to programme variables.

5.2 Policy objectives and programme objectives

5.2.1 Many family literacy interventions have a range of objectives. For example, of the 41 studies reviewed in the meta-analysis conducted by Mattingly et al (2002), the majority had multiple intervention activities and objectives, with the authors of this review citing a mean of 3.4 different intervention components. A programme might include interventions to improve a child's academic performance in reading and maths specifically, as well as improving parenting skills. In the latter category, we see in MOCEP and other programmes efforts to improve cognitively-focused parenting skills as well as socio-emotionally focused parenting skills. Some initiatives, such as the Reading Friends programme in Norway (see Chapter 10, Case Studies), include both parent interventions and peer interventions.

5.2.2 Policy and programme environments include a variety of initiative types – for example, any one country may feature several types of family literacy provision. At the level of national and/or regional policy, we did not find evidence that family literacy initiatives were coordinated. That is, governments did not appear to actively seek to facilitate the existence of a range of purposefully complementing programme types. Instead, programmes, including successful nationwide ones, existed largely without reference to their place and role in a broader landscape or ecosystem of family literacy provision. For example, in the UK there is widespread support for the bookgifting programmes provided by Booktrust, but there appears to be little if any discussion of how such programmes might fit into broader, coherent family literacy strategy including a range of other programmes. This lack of a coherent strategy was evident in the recent UK debate over whether or not Booktrust would continue to receive government subsidy: the debate featured little or no discussion of other types of family literacy provision and how those initiatives did or did not complement book gifting programmes, and vice-versa. (See www.guardian.co.uk/books/booktrust for an overview of this debate.)

5.2.3 In the following discussion we discuss key features of the main approaches to family literacy provision, highlighting examples and comparing strengths and weaknesses.

Objectives for children

5.2.4 Family literacy policies aim to achieve a range of different objectives for children. The following sections provide an overview of these objectives, and a brief discussion of research findings for different intervention types. For a fuller discussion of research findings, please see Chapter 3.

Improvements in literacy only

5.2.5 Our research review highlighted a number of programmes focused specifically on improving child literacy. A range of techniques and types of initiatives address this objective. In these initiatives, the emphasis is on teaching parents specific techniques or behaviours that will help to improve their child's literacy skills. Such initiatives may have specific sub-foci, such as improving vocabulary, coding skills or comprehension skills.

5.2.6 Particularly popular are dialogic reading initiatives, which emphasise the importance not only of parents reading to children, but how parents read to children. In dialogic reading, instead of the parent reading linearly to a silent, passive child, the adult involves the child in the storytelling process, generally through a combination of prompts and repetitions. Findings from our research review indicate that dialogic reading initiatives appear to benefit very young children (2-3-year-olds). However, by the time children are aged 4-5 dialogic reading appears to have little or no impact on quantitatively assessed child literacy skills

Literacy and other cognitive skills

5.2.7 The research review highlighted a number of initiatives which focused not specifically on improving child literacy, but which aimed to improve a range of cognitive and/or educational outcomes. For example, the meta-analysis conducted by Nye et al (2006) included a number of initiatives aimed at improving primary school pupils' maths skills as well as their literacy skills. While Nye and colleagues did not explore this issue in detail, we suspect that initiatives targeting both reading and maths are likely to focus their efforts on altering general education-focused parenting behaviours and interaction techniques, as opposed to developing specific literacy-focused techniques.

Literacy and non-cognitive skills: links between child socio-emotional development and literacy gains

- 5.2.8 Perhaps the most well-known and successful example of an approach to family literacy which includes emphasis both on the child's cognitive and socio-emotional development is the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) in Turkey. (For a description and discussion of this initiative, see the case study summary in Chapter 10, and the full case study in Appendix 2).
- 5.2.9 In our qualitative interviews, Turkish respondents highlighted what they saw as the advantages of taking a holistic approach in family literacy programmes. The aim, said one, is "to influence a child's development from every aspect cognitive, spiritual, psychological and physical domains, communication as well as preparation for school." Turkey's biggest success, it was argued in one interview, is that while MOCEP focuses primarily on education, "it is not only education that we provide". The programme supports children and families in a wide range of areas which influence literacy.
- 5.2.10 The MOCEP approach highlights the cross-policy nature of influences shaping child literacy achievement, and also takes central account of the influence of parenting styles, attitudes and behaviours on child development. The programme aims not just to improve parents' literacy and literacy support skills, but also to improve their general parenting skills.
- 5.2.11 As researchers such as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) have argued, good general parenting skills may be the key variable in shaping child educational (including literacy) development. In Turkey, research indicates that mothers participating in MOCEP tend to experience positive changes in a range of parenting variables, including: child rearing methods, attitudes and behaviours adopted towards their children, self-confidence, frequency of interaction with the children, quality of interaction with their children, and organisation of the home environment to meet children's' needs.
- 5.2.12 Programmes such as MOCEP tend to view child socio-emotional development as an important complement or precursor to sustainable gains in literacy and other cognitive areas. To cite another example, the UK's Supporting Parents on Kids' Education in Schools (SPOKES) initiative was based on research suggesting that the best way of addressing "co-morbid" situations – in which children have both reading difficulties and behavioural problems – is to develop interventions in which both issues are tackled together (Sylva et al, 2008). SPOKES was delivered in the UK between 2001 and 2002, and was targeted at urban children with multiple high risk

factors, who were just beginning primary school. The programme, which was evaluated via randomised controlled trial, reduced behavioural problems and improved children's reading and writing skills. Literacy improvements were meaningful: in one year the intervention group showed an average reading improvement equivalent to 6 months of reading age.

- 5.2.13 Looking more broadly at early childhood education initiatives aimed at improving children's cognitive skills and socio-emotional development, one of the most famous interventions was the Perry/High Scope preschool Programme, conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA (Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997). While this was not primarily a parent support Programme, teachers did make weekly 1.5 hour home visits with mothers and children. During these visits, mothers were taught how to implement the curriculum in the home. Though the initiative was American, it was extremely well documented, with a large amount of valuable data collected, not just during the lifetime of the programme but for years afterwards. In the most recent data collection, subjects were 42. Thus the initiative may provide useful lessons for European researchers and policymakers.
- 5.2.14 Recently, James Heckman and colleagues have re-analysed this data, producing important messages with potential relevance not only for preschool programmes, but all initiatives which aim to improve children's cognitive outcomes, both in the short and long-term (2009).
- 5.2.15 After conducting extensive secondary analysis of data collected over a number of years, Heckman and colleagues argue that the key to improve long-term outcomes, including cognitive outcomes, was the programme's influence on non-cognitive skill development in childhood, such as self-regulation and planning. The importance of these traits, both in influencing long-term cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, has been emphasised repeatedly in the psychological literature, and is now also a key focus in studies of adult behaviour and employability.
- 5.2.16 Heckman et al's conclusion is that while the programme's combined emphasis on cognitive and non-cognitive skills did indeed contribute to short-term cognitive gains as measured through IQ, the key to long-term gains in cognitive outcomes, e.g. improved academic performance, was the programme's attention to children's socio-emotional development, e.g. through the development of traits such as self-regulation and planning. This suggests that if parental support programmes aimed at affecting improvements in disadvantaged children's literacy want to most effectively ensure that those literacy gains do not fade over time, then such programmes may benefit from including a socio-emotional component.

- 5.2.17 It also suggests that while cognitive gains may be short lived, particularly among disadvantaged children facing multiple, childhood-long barriers to academic success, educational and other social outcomes can be positively influenced through non-cognitive components of holistic initiatives. Improved non-cognitive traits appear to contribute to a range of improved outcomes, including academic achievements such as test scores which were once assumed to be based purely on cognitive skills.
- 5.2.18 Other research has drawn similar conclusions (EACEA, 2009), finding that curricula including a strong focus on child socio-emotional development produced better long-term gains than either a "laissez faire" curricula or more academically focused, didactic programmes. Looking once again at data from the Perry High/Scope initiative, Schweinhart and Weikart (1997) compared that programme's focus on socio-emotional development with two other programmes : one having a more overtly academic focus and the other giving freer rein to teachers and thus categorised as "laissez faire". The researchers found that in the short-term, both the academic and the socio-emotional programmes led to better – and roughly equal – cognitive gains. However, in the long term, students benefited most from the curriculum which included an emphasis on socio-emotional development. As in Heckman et al's research, these gains were attributed to improved socio-emotional processes, such as improved self-regulation.

Objectives for parents

- 5.2.19 A focus on child socio-emotional development alongside literacy development may require a greater emphasis on parent training, in comparison to programmes interested only in child literacy development – in which, parents tend to be viewed instrumentally. The latter category of initiatives may seek to improve literacy-centred parenting techniques or behaviours, but only for the purposes of improving children's literacy experiences and/or outcomes. Improved parental techniques or behaviours are seen as important, but only in as much as they affect children's experiences and/or outcomes.
- 5.2.20 Many other initiatives view parents as co-targets of the intervention. For example, the Mother-Child Education Programme in Turkey seeks to improve children's cognitive skills while also improving mothers' parenting skills – and the programme views improvements in the latter as a necessary prerequisite to sustainable improvements in the former. Parallel track family literacy programmes such as those in England and Ireland seek improvements in parents' literacy skills as well as children's.

Programmes focusing on effective parenting and improved parenting skills

- 5.2.21 Powell (2004) argues that children and parents both benefit from programmes which devote time and resources to addressing parents' behaviours and beliefs; this is because these behaviours and beliefs have both direct and indirect effects on parents' ability to positively influence their children's literacy development. According to Powell, one of the key messages arising from research is that programmes can benefit from focusing on parents' beliefs about child development processes and their own role in supporting children's learning. In a review of UK research, Desforges and Abouchar (2003) concluded that the most effective programmes aimed at supporting child academic development were those which focused not on improving parents' cognitive skills but on improving general parenting skills. This may be because it is more challenging to make significant improvements to parents' cognitive abilities than it is to improve their parenting skills.
- 5.2.22 Brooks et al (2008), in their global review of family literacy initiatives, noted particularly impressive results reported by programmes which worked with mothers in "traditional" family settings. Such programmes in Turkey and other countries, including FLAME in Chicago, sought gains in children's literacy, but incorporated these academic aims into a broader vision of effective parenting
- 5.2.23 In more traditional families, argued Brooks and colleagues, "It is easy to see that a broadly conceived and well structured programme could benefit such women, giving them contact with their peers in a situation that enables them to build self-esteem by developing parenting skills and [participating] more fully in everyday life" (p. 29). In a study of Turkey's MOCEP, for example, mothers participating in the initiative reported increased self-esteem, while those in the control group reported a decline. They have also reported being better, stronger parents, and more confident in their relationships with their husbands and other family members (see e.g. Bekman and Kocak, 2010). Brooks et al (2008) suggest that the increase self-esteem in the intervention group is likely the product of the aspects of the programme which aimed to improve general rather than academically focused parenting skills.
- 5.2.24 Powell (2004) expresses confidence about the power of parenting education to improve parenting skills, but argues that altering deeply ingrained beliefs and practices may require considerable resources. Looking at evaluations of the American Even Start initiative, for example, she argues that the parenting education on offer in such programmes, which amounts to an average of 173 hours per year, "is less intense than probably needed for significant change" (p. 167). For Powell, this

suggests that the baseline level of systematic attention to parenting needs to be raised.

- 5.2.25 Several of the experts we interviewed argued that parental empowerment was a key outcome of programmes, and suggested that significant changes could be achieved in less time than Powell indicates. In the UK, for example, parents on parallel track Family Literacy programmes reported feeling empowered by the additional knowledge and understanding they had of their child's schoolwork (Swain et al, 2009).
- 5.2.26 In Malta, our interview respondent emphasised gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy experienced by disadvantaged mothers, many of whom were from vulnerable communities. For these mothers, he emphasised, even small gains represented major achievements. The Maltese family literacy programme did not have parental empowerment as a core objective, focusing instead on parents' capacity to directly support their children, but such empowerment was a widespread and somewhat unexpected outcome of the initiative.
- 5.2.27 Turning to evidence from our research review, Blok et al (2005) found that parental support programmes which focused not just on academic outcomes, but which also included training in parenting skills, led to markedly larger positive effects in children's cognitive gains, with the benefits being equivalent to an improvement of 0.7 standard deviations. This is a large gain in general social science terms, and could be considered a very large improvement in educational terms. (For a discussion of how to interpret quantitatively measured gains in literacy, please see Chapter 3.) Unfortunately, the studies included in Blok et al's meta-analysis did not provide enough information about parenting skill training (also referred to as parenting coaching) to enable the reviewers to draw conclusions about how and why such training shaped intervention outcomes.
- 5.2.28 However, drawing on previous literature, Blok and colleagues did discuss potential mechanisms. In particular, they pointed to the likely importance of an emotionally supportive home environment in encouraging and supporting cognitive gains. As Van Tuijl and Leseman (2004) have hypothesised, embedding parenting skills training in cognitively focused programmes may improve parental emotional support, with positive knock-on effects for academic outcomes.
- 5.2.29 Another possible explanation cited by Blok and colleagues is related to implementation quality. It may be the case that the inclusion of parenting coaching in academically focused programmes increases the attractiveness of such

programmes for high risk groups, improving attendance and overall parental involvement. That is, training in parenting skills may increase some parents' involvement in and commitment to the programme, thus improving treatment integrity and quality. This hypothesis is consistent with evidence from an English evaluation of that country's Family Literacy initiative, indicating that parents were attracted to programmes primarily by the possibility of improving their capacity to help their children succeed.

- 5.2.30 Interestingly, while Blok et al found a large positive effect for the inclusion of parent coaching, they found no such effect for other forms of family support, including economic, social and health related. This may suggest that improving some forms of capital matters more than improving others.

Improved parental literacy

- 5.2.31 In England and Ireland, many family literacy programmes are “parallel track”, in that they actively seek to improve parents' literacy skills as well as children's. The standard model of Family Literacy provision in England (and Wales) has three strands: sessions for parents, sessions for children, and joint sessions. The model also has three core objectives: improving parents' literacy skills, improving children's literacy skills and development, and improving parents' ability to help their children's literacy development. Under the influence of Skills for Life, England's adult basic skills strategy since 2001, boosting parents' skills has tended to be the government's top priority. This is in large part a result of Family Literacy being situated in England's adult literacy policy stream rather than in the Department of Education.
- 5.2.32 In England, policy makers have encouraged parents participating in such programmes to seek to gain literacy and/or numeracy qualifications, and have discouraged programme leaders from recruiting parents who already possess target qualifications. There is evidence that participation on such family literacy programmes does frequently lead to literacy qualifications for parents. Such qualifications may be a vital first step towards participating in other forms of adult learning and gaining additional qualifications. They can also serve to increase parents' confidence regarding their own capacity to learn. Thus far, however, there has been little evidence either for or against the capacity of family literacy programmes to significantly improve parents' literacy skills. However, a number of research studies have concluded that the family literacy programmes in England have improved child literacy skills (see e.g. Brooks et al, 2008).
- 5.2.33 However, a review of UK research conducted by Desforges and Abouchar (2003) concluded that the most effective programmes for supporting child academic

development were those which focused not on improving parents' cognitive skills but on improving general parenting skills. This, coupled with evidence cited above regarding the benefits of parenting skills training, would appear to suggest that initiatives which seek to educate parents and children should focus on literacy only for the latter, and parenting skills for the former.

- 5.2.34 However, there are solid arguments in favour of the inclusion of a focus on improving parents' literacy skills in some family literacy programmes. In our Irish case study, for example, programme leaders stressed that a focus on parental literacy alongside child literacy has the potential to help both the parent and child see the former as a successful learner, thus providing positive role modelling for the child and improved self-confidence, self-efficacy and orientation to learning for the parent.
- 5.2.35 Including an emphasis on parental skills also help support national and European policy strategies regarding learning throughout the life course, and may help encourage a culture of lifelong learning. In addition, parental basic skills learning supports specific European policy strategies such as One Step Up, which encourages educational participation and progression for adults, and the Adult Learning Action Plan (European Council, 2007).

Strategies for working with parents

- 5.2.36 Summarising the research literature on strategies for working with parents, Powell (2004, p. 161) laments the "thin empirical base [available] for formulating recommendations"; however, he suggests a range of theory-driven approaches which may show positive benefits. These are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3. Here, we provide a brief overview of potentially useful strategies aimed at changing parenting behaviours and literacy-related habits.
- 5.2.37 Powell's first suggestion is to incorporate family perspectives. This is based on the "long-standing social work principle" (p. 162) of "beginning where the client is". According to Powell, parenting education components of family literacy programmes need to build on parents' views and intentions. However, we would add that such programmes also need to help parents expand their horizons and broaden their views, as in the case of MOCEP. "Beginning where the family is" is only a useful strategy if you then seek to move them forward; leaving them where they began benefits no one.

- 5.2.38 One way of building on parents' views is to use guided discussion. There is evidence (Powell, 2004) that professionally guided, group-based discussion has greater positive impact on child rearing attitudes – particularly openness and flexibility – than do tightly structured curricula used in home visit approaches. As Powell observes, "focused discussion among parents allows individuals to rework their existing beliefs in order to accommodate new ideas from peers or programme staff" (p. 162). This is one of the key tenets of MOCEP, and has been cited as one of the primary reasons for the programme's success.
- 5.2.39 Cognitively, however, Powell suggests that when working with disadvantaged families, the most effective programmes provide concrete, systematic instruction for parents, an issue also discussed in Chapter 5, which looks at programme structure. Again, this corresponds with feedback provided to us in interviews with programme leaders, who argued that poorly educated parents tended to benefit more from structured curricula. In MOCEP and other initiatives, Powell's precepts are evidenced in programmes which provide semi-structured, group-based discussion regarding childrearing, alongside highly structured educational activities for families to undertake in the home. Here we see programmes that are both holistic and highly structured.
- 5.2.40 Powell also points to research encouraging frequent and sustained interaction with parents. Because parenting practices and beliefs are habitual and deeply ingrained, meaningful change is likely to require long-term, relatively intense efforts. As Powell observes, new knowledge about child development often conflicts with parents' existing beliefs, and may initially be rejected or dismissed. "Meaningful change comes slowly," he argues (p. 163). In terms of parenting behaviour, this suggests that sustained changes are more likely when interventions feature frequent and regular trainer-parent interactions. For example, Powell notes one study which found a "tipping point" of 11 or more contacts over a three month or longer period.
- 5.2.41 One strategy for working with parents and improving their capacity to successfully implement family literacy programmes is to provide formative feedback to those parents. In our review of the research, only Sénéchal and Young's 2008 meta-analysis looked at the impact of feedback; these authors found evidence neither for nor against providing ongoing feedback to parents. However, their sample, which included only 14 studies, is too small an evidence base from which to draw conclusions. Given the very strong research support for the powerful impact of classroom-based formative feedback on educational outcomes (see e.g. Hattie, 1999; Hattie, 2003; and Black and Wiliam, 1998), this is an issue worth researching in greater detail.

Duration of parent training

- 5.2.42 In his review of a range of parent tutoring interventions, Erion (2006) found that longer training sessions for parents appear to improve outcomes, but only by a small amount. However, Erion's review includes programmes targeting outcomes other than child literacy, and we were unable to assess the impact of the amount of training parents received in literacy interventions.
- 5.2.43 In contrast to Erion's finding that more parent training was associated with better outcomes, Sénéchal and Young's review of family literacy programmes (2008) found that programmes in which training for parents lasted 1-2 hours were associated with better outcomes than those in which parent training lasted between three and eight hours. The true explanation for this surprising finding likely has little to do with the amount of training parents received and everything to do with the fact that two-thirds of the programmes which offered parents only 1-2 hours of training were programmes in which parents were trained to teach their children specific literacy skills. As Sénéchal and Young found, these types of programmes produced by far the largest positive outcomes in her review, with a combined effect size of 1.18.
- 5.2.44 While Sénéchal and Young do not emphasise this correlation, treating it more as a confounding variable than as an interesting finding, the potential implications of this association are both interesting and exciting. Parental training is resource intensive, but in Sénéchal and Young's review, it was found that family literacy programmes demanding very limited amounts of such training tended to have excellent results. This does not imply that more training is worse training; rather it suggests that particular types of programmes delivered to particular participants may require very limited doses of resource-intensive activities, yet may still function excellently.

Quality of parent training

- 5.2.45 It was understandably difficult for reviewers to analyse the impact of the quality of training received by parents, as few primary studies provided any information on this programme characteristic. For example, Erion notes that many of the studies included in his meta-analysis reported that parents were provided with corrective feedback during training. However, only three studies reported that parents achieved some level of mastery in the techniques required by their intervention. As Erion somewhat trenchantly observes, "Noting a training feature was implemented does not mean parents benefited from the training" (p. 97).
- 5.2.46 In general, most primary studies do not appear to seek to evaluate the quality of the "training dose" given to parents, concerning themselves more -- if at all -- with the size (i.e. length) of that dose. This is understandable: researchers have limited time

and budgets, and evaluating training quality is both resource intensive and fairly subjective. It may be the case that most research studies neither can nor should not seek to do this important issue justice; rather that some studies should seek to focus specifically on this and other matters pertaining to intervention quality. One rare example of this approach is McElvany and van Steensel's 2009 analysis of implementation quality in family literacy programmes.

Type of intervention

- 5.2.47 One of the most intriguing findings from our review of meta-analyses is Sénéchal and Young's conclusion that training parents to teach their children to read was more than twice as effective as programmes which encouraged parents to listen to their children to read, and six times more effective than those which encouraged parents to read to their children. In Sénéchal and Young's review, programmes in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children also tended to demand only a small amount of parent training, usually 1-2 hours, suggesting that such programmes may be less resource intensive than one might expect.
- 5.2.48 Alongside the benefits of training parents to teach reading skills to their children, the potential policy efficacy of programmes encouraging parents to listen to their children read should not be underestimated. Sénéchal and Young found an effect size for such programmes of 0.51, well above the mean effect size for educational interventions of 0.4. As Sénéchal and Young observe, their finding of positive effects from parents listening to their children read supports the findings of earlier reviews.

Intervention site

- 5.2.49 Sylva et al (2008) suggest that because the home environment is an important predictor of children's literacy development, programmes based in the home are likely to be more effective than centre-based alternatives. This is a logical fallacy. As Waldfogel (2006) observes in her review of early childhood policy and programmes, home-based policy levers may theoretically be more powerful than school-based policy levers, but the former are often significantly harder to pull. That is, the home is the most important environment in a child's life, but it is also the most difficult to change through policy interventions.
- 5.2.50 Policymakers may view the home as a particularly promising educational setting because it enables parents and their children to "engage in adaptive, intensive interaction and learning" (McElvany and Artelt, 2009, p. 81). Within this setting, the intensity of educational interactions between parent and child should theoretically

be greater than in group or classroom settings, and the private, one-to-one nature of home-based interventions better enables parents to provide children with specific, direct feedback. Furthermore, parent-child reading interactions can help establish parents as positive role models for their children and to develop the habit of positive reading behaviour within the family (ibid).

- 5.2.51 However, research evidence suggests that many parents, particularly those suffering disadvantage, either do not or cannot implement intervention techniques with the intensity, quality and/or frequency envisioned by programme developers. While "the family clearly has great potential as an educational setting, parents are not teachers" (McElvany and Artelt, 2009, p. 81). Many parents have poor reading skills of their own, and many more are likely to lack an understanding of how best to help their children develop their own reading. Furthermore, as highlighted by research on Opstap Opnieuw in the Netherlands (see e.g. van Tuijl and Leseman, 2004), many parents may be too busy with work or childrearing to carry out interventions as intended. As van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) have noted, giving parents training in an intervention technique is one thing, but ensuring that they remained true to this training in the home is quite another.
- 5.2.52 Among the meta-analyses included in our review, only two focused on intervention site as a key variable. Blok and colleagues (2005) found that centre-based and combined centre-and home-based programmes had markedly greater impact than did home-based programmes. These authors point to the greater intensity of the centre-based and combined home and centre programmes included in their review, also noting that such programmes appeared more likely to continue beyond kindergarten into primary school. According to Blok et al, this finding quantitatively confirms conclusions reached in earlier narrative syntheses.
- 5.2.53 However, a meta-analysis by Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) drew the opposite conclusion, finding that home-based interventions had a much larger effect than did combined home-and centre-based interventions: the former had an effect size of 0.47, compared to 0.13 for the latter.
- 5.2.54 Some primary research has suggested that home-based programmes can be more effective than those in other sites. For example, Lonigan and Whitehurst (1998) suggest that home environments can be the most effective because parents can better tailor their approach to their own child in a home-based, one-to-one context. However, Lonigan and Whitehurst were writing about dialogic reading, which appears to be appropriate only for very young age groups.

- 5.2.55 Looking at other primary research, Morgan et al (2009), in their analysis of the REAL programme in North England, observed that centre based meetings were poorly attended by mothers and fathers. In contrast, it was relatively easy to arrange home visits, which were scheduled to fit with the preferences and needs of each family. The author suggests that with regard to centre-based meetings, it may be necessary to "examine the kinds of activities in which fathers and mothers are asked to participate".
- 5.2.56 In contrast, evaluations of Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme have found centre-based meetings to be well attended, both in Turkey and in other countries where the programme now exists.
- 5.2.57 Given the conflicting findings in this area, we do not feel that research evidence warrants conclusion one way or the other on this issue.

Home visits

- 5.2.58 As a method of providing services to families, home visiting has an extensive pedigree, not only in health and social services but also in education (Bryant and Wasik, 2004). Advantages of home visiting include the fact that is family focused, meeting parents on their own terms in their own homes at times suitable for their own schedules. Home visitors can gain a great deal of information about the child's home learning environment and cultural and/or socio-economic issues that may impact on the child's literacy development. Home visitors can identify and potentially build on family strengths uncovered on visits that may not be evident in classrooms or centres, particularly if parents lack confidence in educational settings. Additionally, home visitors can make judgements about how best to tailor programme materials to suit the needs, beliefs and capabilities of families. Here, we focus on some key issues affecting the quality and feasibility of home visiting in family literacy interventions.
- 5.2.59 Ensuring implementation quality in home visiting activities can be challenging. Home visitors may not necessarily share and/or successfully articulate key programme tenets, particularly with regard to parenting styles. Ensuring implementation quality in home visiting activities can be challenging. A study of the Parents As Teachers programme in the US used video evidence to find that home visitors tended to focus more on providing social support rather than on changing parenting behaviour (Bryant and Wasik, 2004). To ensure the latter, argue Bryant and Wasik, programmes must specify the focuses and procedures they demand from trainers in the home, and must make it clear to trainers how these procedures are important to achieving

desired programme outcomes. The authors argue that staff quality, training and supervision or particularly important in this regard: "hiring excellent home visitors, then training and supervising them well, are the best ways to accomplish this objective". A similar argument has been made by leaders of MOCEP and family literacy programmes in Malta, who argue that their initiatives can only succeed if staffed by well-trained professionals. Of course, this raises significant issues regarding budgets and resources.

Intervention duration

5.2.60 Though common sense would appear to dictate that longer interventions produce better outcomes than shorter ones, as van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) note that there is no evidence from previous research in this field that this is the case. In part this is due to the lack of reliable, high-quality information from primary studies. However, four of the meta-analyses included in this report -- those by Erion, Blok et al, Nye et al, and Sénéchal and Young -- looked for effects of programme links, but found none.

5.2.61 Also commenting on intervention length, Nye et al suggested that the positive effect on reading they found in their systematic review (0.42) was "striking when one considers that the median length of parent involvement was only 11 weeks" (p. 21). Data from this meta-analysis and other pieces of research provide compelling evidence for relatively significant benefits in exchange for relatively limited resources expended over relatively short period of time. Further research is needed to develop a better understanding of the interrelationships between programme length, types of interventions, and parent training.

Intervention intensity

5.2.62 Looking at intensity of services, key questions are how often should trainers visit families, and for how many weeks or months should the process last. One piece of research highlighted by Bryant and Wasik found that for low income parents of young children, weekly home visits were most effective, while there was no difference between the impacts of bimonthly or monthly visits. Looking at the literature as a whole, Bryant and Wasik draw two conclusions. First is the likelihood of a "dosage effect" (p. 341) in home visiting programmes: greater participation tends to lead to better outcomes. Second, there is likely to be an intensity threshold below which many services lose their impact.

5.2.63 Brooks et al (2008) observed that among the programmes included in their review, those which were more intensive, for example those developed by the Basic Skills

Agency in the UK, did not appear to achieve notably greater gains than less intensive interventions, such as MOCEP and REAL.

Intervention timing

- 5.2.64 As with programme duration, contradictory views are expressed regarding the ideal time for programme initiation. According to Bekman (2003), there may be periods or windows in parents' lives when they are more open to new information about child rearing. She suggests that immediately before or after the birth of a child may be particularly good times to introduce some types of support.
- 5.2.65 The Mother-Child Education Programme is provided for families of children who are just shy of beginning formal schooling, on the basis that mothers are particularly likely to be receptive to information at this time -- particularly information related to their children's academic and cognitive development.
- 5.2.66 However, it should be noted that contextual and cultural factors may play a role in determining the "best" times to introduce a child literacy programme. For example, as noted elsewhere in this report, many parents who do not themselves have good educational backgrounds feel that children are not ready to begin their academic development until at or near the age to begin formal schooling. Programme targeted at pre-primary children from such families may need a component focused on changing parents' attitudes to early education.

Programme structure and flexibility

- 5.2.67 In the Netherlands, our respondent argued that disadvantaged families generally need more structured programmes than more advantaged families. Middle-class children and parents, she felt, tend to have a range of experiences and resources that make them better equipped for less structured programmes. For example, such children and parents may be more able to choose for themselves how to interpret and undertake particular tasks. More disadvantaged families, our respondent argued, are likely to need more input from the teacher and tend to benefit from more structure. This argument is supported by evidence from researchers such as Toomey (1993), who found that giving parents written information containing simple, specific techniques for helping their children during shared reading yielded greater benefits than providing parents with more general information alone.
- 5.2.68 In Turkey, MOCEP has opted for a highly structured educational model, to ensure that underconfident and/or poorly educated parents have clear signposts and can readily understand what is expected of them and how to perform literacy tasks with their children.

- 5.2.69 In Berlin, the Parent-Child Reading Programme also opted for a highly structured approach which was seen as easy for parents to adopt and implement. Programme leaders have cited this approach as one of the likely factors influencing the initiative's long-term positive impact. (While the initiative itself was short lived, assessment of child progress taken two years after participation found that children in the experimental group continued to outperform children in the control group (McElvany and Artelt, 2009).) Speaking to us in an interview, one Berlin Parent-Child Programme leader argued that parents should not be asked to implement a programme they are not well enough educated to feel comfortable with. For example, programmes encouraging collaborative talk do so because of the evidenced benefits of the practice, but research on implementation quality, reported our respondent, indicates that elaboration was often on a very low level.
- 5.2.70 This has implications for the development of programmes targeted at disadvantaged families. Programmes based on evidence collected from relatively advantaged families may not provide the structure possibly required by less advantaged families. Such an argument is not unique to family literacy programmes; it also appears in policy debates about schools, for example the United States' "Knowledge is Power Program" (KIPP) charter schools, which are targeted at disadvantaged children and feature highly structured learning environments in which targeted outcomes include not only quantifiably measured test results but also the acquisition of attributes, dispositions and understandings associated with groups who do well in formal education.

Trainer quality

- 5.2.71 In interviews with researchers, stakeholders with extensive expertise about the Mother-Child Education Programme in Turkey argued that the programme could not have achieved its ongoing level of success if it were dependent on volunteer trainers. A similar argument was that in Malta, where our interview respondent reflected on early efforts to incorporate volunteer tutors into family literacy provision. These efforts were unsustainable, he argued, for two primary reasons.
- 5.2.72 First, volunteers required significant levels of training, feedback and supervision, meaning that more managerial time had to be invested in those functions. Therefore, despite volunteers being ostensibly free, return on resource investment was poor, particularly given the limited hours that most volunteers contributed to the programme. Second, Maltese programme leaders felt that it was ethically inappropriate to leave such an important issue as family literacy attainment in the hands of volunteers, as opposed to professional teachers. Following their

experiment with volunteers, Maltese family literacy programme leaders concluded that "there is really no shortcut around funding professionals to do their professional work. If you want proper work to be done, you have to pay proper money to proper people."

- 5.2.73 This has implications for programme size. In Malta, our interview respondent concluded that it is better to have a smaller, better programme incorporating professional staff than to attempt to stretch funds by using volunteer tutors. A similar conclusion has been drawn by Turkey's MOCEP, and when interviewed about key factors shaping the successful transferral of the programme outside of Turkey, researchers have emphasised that transferred programmes need professional rather than volunteers staff.
- 5.2.74 In both these cases, hard choices have been made between having slightly smaller programmes depended on professional staff or larger ones utilising more volunteers. The core issue is programme quality: policymakers and programme leaders must agree on a set of core principles which must be maintained as programmes expand or are transferred to new contexts. For many and possibly all programmes, this will include decisions about staff professionalization.
- 5.2.75 Looking at how broader policy context and decisions affect long-term staff quality, an argument advanced by our Dutch respondent is that policymakers tend to err on the side of haste when evaluating programmes and determining if they should continue to receive funding and policy backing. She argues that the pursuit of clearly measurable short-term literacy gains distracts resources and attention from the development of programme quality and trainer quality.
- 5.2.76 Programme longevity is necessary not only for the achievement of long-term gains, but also so that family literacy teachers get the time and pedagogical experiences required to improve their skills. Working with disadvantaged families to improve children's literacy is a complex and challenging task, one which benefits greatly from experience. Sustainable programmes help build a strong and skilled family literacy teaching workforce.
- 5.2.77 Bryant and Wasik (2004) have summarised research regarding the quality of family literacy trainers engaged in home visits. These authors indicate that staff engaged in a home visits need a number of competencies, including "the fundamental helping skills of observation, listening and questioning" (p. 342). Home visitors also need training in specific techniques for modelling, role-playing, using personal examples

and home work. Of particular importance is training in behavioural change strategies targeted at parents.

- 5.2.78 Home visitors may not necessarily share and/or successfully articulate key programme tenets, particularly with regard to parenting styles. A study of the Parents As Teachers programme in the US used video evidence to find that home visitors tended to focus more on providing social support than on changing parenting behaviour (Bryant and Wasik, 2004). To ensure the latter, argue Bryant and Wasik, programmes must specify the focuses and procedures they demand from trainers in the home, and must make it clear to trainers how these procedures are important to achieving desired programme outcomes. The authors argue that staff quality, training and supervision are particularly important in this regard: "hiring excellent home visitors, then training and supervising them well, are the best ways to accomplish this objective". A similar argument has been made by leaders of MOCEP and family literacy programmes in Malta, who argue that their initiatives can only succeed if staffed by well-trained professionals. Of course, this raises significant issues regarding budgets and resources.
- 5.2.79 Looking more specifically at staff training and supervision, Bryant and Wasik argue that pre-service and in-service training for home visitors is particularly important, because few educational institutions provide training in home visiting. The same might also be said about the lack of theoretical discussion provided on this issue by educational institutions.

Implementation quality

- 5.2.80 Speaking in an interview, Professor Nele McElvany of Germany argued that if they are to get the most out of the family literacy initiatives, policymakers and programme leaders need to pay greater attention to the role of implementation quality. One key issue regarding implementation quality is that which could be characterised as "implementation feasibility". Programmes developed by researchers to test hypotheses tend to be well resourced, both in terms of funding and the skills and knowledge of programme staff. Such programmes can produce valuable gains and provide useful research knowledge, but may be difficult to sustain and/or expand, as they require greater resources than tend to be available outside the domain of research grants.
- 5.2.81 In the development of the Berlin Parent-Child Reading initiative, programme leaders and researchers working on the project sought to craft an intervention which could be relatively easily implemented on the tight budgets that tend to be the norm in family literacy. The programme developers actively sought to avoid creating a

programme that worked well under ideal conditions but which was unfeasible to roll out on a grander scale. Thus the level of training received by parents was kept at a level deemed feasible for "real world" programmes. It is useful when researchers adopt this approach to programme development and evaluation, as it means that they are assessing the benefits of programmes likely to exist under real-world conditions, rather than in a metaphorical laboratory. In the case of Berlin, the programme did achieve meaningful long-term gains.

- 5.2.82 As van Steensel and co-authors (forthcoming 2011) observe, even though implementation quality likely plays a central role in determining whether or not programmes are successful, information about implementation quality and consistency is only very rarely provided. This is a serious methodological weakness. As van Steensel et al note, the manner in which parents and children carry out programme activities remains a matter of speculation -- a black box -- and needs to be the subject of future research.
- 5.2.83 Erion (2006) echoes van Steensel's call for greater attention to implementation quality, and argues in favour of research which includes "quantifiable checks on how well parents have mastered tutoring skills prior to the start of tutoring" (p. 100). Studies need some way of assessing how well parents implement programme aims, both in order to get a better understanding of why programmes do and do not work, and in order to see if programmes themselves work, at least on the key metric of successfully enabling or facilitating parents to carry out programme aims and bring programme theories into real-world practice.
- 5.2.84 Pointing to research in the field of behavioural interventions, Van Otterloo and colleagues (2006) have observed that implementation quality has been found to be strongly correlated with the size of intervention outcomes.
- 5.2.85 They further argue that implementation quality should be addressed through three mechanisms: promotion of the importance of implementation quality, both before and during the intervention; monitoring/verification that implementation quality is being maintained during the intervention; and finally, assessing and reporting the level of implementation quality.

5.3 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

- 5.3.1 This section provides an overview of key messages in this chapter. Key messages are divided by theme, as follows: Policy and programme objectives; Parenting skills; and Implementation quality.

Policy and programme objectives

- 5.3.2 At the level of national or regional policy, we did not find evidence that family literacy initiatives were coordinated. That is, governments did not appear to actively seek to facilitate the existence of a range of purposefully complementary programme types.
- 5.3.3 Member States would benefit from the development of coherent national family literacy policies which include and support a range of complementary programme types. In particular, we would recommend that each Member State seek to develop a family literacy policy landscape which includes a complementary mix of the three following approaches: 1) a universal, nationwide bookgifting or shared parent-child reading initiative, to encourage a culture of reading and learning; 2) holistic, "wrap-around" family literacy initiatives targeted at disadvantaged families, and focused on achieving the twin, complementary aims of: a) improving child literacy; b) improving parenting skills, particularly with regard to supporting child socio-emotional and cognitive development; and 3) a range of targeted, less resource intensive family literacy programmes aimed solely at improving child literacy skills.
- 5.3.4 As discussed in our research review, the majority of meta-analyses indicate that family literacy programmes are effective at improving child literacy skills. On average, family literacy programmes appear to be more effective than the majority of educational interventions. For a detailed discussion, comparison and analysis of these issues, see our research review, Chapter 3.
- 5.3.5 Family literacy initiatives aim to achieve a range of different objectives for children and parents. Many family literacy programmes focus only on improvement in child literacy, while others focus on achieving a range of objectives. Additional objectives include improved child socio-emotional development and improved parenting skills. Parallel track family literacy programmes such as those in England and Ireland seek improvements in parents' literacy skills as well as children's.
- 5.3.6 Different types of family literacy programme have proven successful in improving child literacy skills. These include bookgifting initiatives, shared parent-child book reading programs, interventions which aim to improve child literacy while also improving parenting skills, and programmes which aim to improve child literacy and parental literacy simultaneously.
- 5.3.7 Different types of family literacy interventions are likely to produce different outcomes. In one meta-analysis, S n chal and Young (2008) found that training

parents to teach their children to read was more than twice as effective as programmes which encouraged parents to listen to their children to read, and six times more effective than those which encouraged parents to read to their children. However, more research would be required in order to determine the generalisability of these findings, particularly with regard to disadvantaged families.

- 5.3.8 The experts we interviewed for this project all suggested that disadvantaged families benefited from programmes with highly structured educational models, which ensured that parents had clear guidelines about tasks and techniques, and could readily understand how to perform literacy tasks with their children.
- 5.3.9 Research on parallel track family literacy programmes – i.e. programmes which seek to improve child and parental literacy skills – has found improvements for the former but limited evidence for the latter.

Parenting skills

- 5.3.10 The Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) has run in Turkey for nearly two decades and has now been implemented in five Western European states. In this Programme, the development of parenting skills is seen as an essential prerequisite to the achievement of long-term child literacy gains.
- 5.3.11 In an influential review of the literature, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) concluded that general parenting skills may be the key variable in shaping child educational (including literacy) development.
- 5.3.12 The Perry/High Scope preschool programme is perhaps the most well documented early childhood intervention ever run. While this was not primarily a parent support Programme, teachers did make weekly 1.5 hour home visits with mothers and children, during which mothers were taught how to implement the curriculum in the home. Following recent analyses of programme data, Heckman and colleagues (2009) have concluded that the key to positive long-term outcomes across a range of policy fields was the programme's influence on non-cognitive skill development in childhood.
- 5.3.13 Even in programmes in which it was not a core objective, parental empowerment of disadvantaged mothers was a commonly cited outcome of family literacy initiatives. Benefits included improved self-esteem, self-efficacy and confidence in dealing with the school system.

5.3.14 Research has suggested that the inclusion of parenting skills training in family literacy programmes increases the attractiveness of such programmes for disadvantaged parents, improving recruitment and attendance. Training in parenting skills may increase some disadvantaged parents' involvement in and commitment to the programme, thus improving implementation quality.

Implementation

5.3.15 One key issue for programme developers and policy makers to consider is that of implementation feasibility: are parents able to implement programme tasks and techniques well enough to achieve programme objectives?

5.3.16 Most family literacy programmes collect very little useful data on implementation quality, particularly with regard to how well parents carry out tasks in which they have been trained.

5.3.17 Research on the impact of intervention site has produced conflicting findings. For example, a meta-analysis by Blok et al (2005) found that centre-based and combined centre- and home-based programmes produced greater benefits than did programmes based only in the home. In contrast, another meta-analysis (Manz et al, forthcoming 2011) drew the opposite conclusion.

5.3.18 Interviewees who discussed trainer quality and professionalisation agreed that maintaining high levels of programme quality was not feasible if initiatives were dependent on volunteers to carry out key work.

Chapter 6 Programme participants

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Chapters 6 and 7 focus on “policy in implementation” (Veeman, 2004) – that is, how policies have been implemented in real-world circumstances, and the contextual, cultural, participant-related and other variables which have influenced policy and programme outcomes. In addressing a range of variables and themes, we will seek to highlight key factors contributing to policy/programme success and failure, and to analyse the reasons underlying these outcomes.

6.1.2 Chapter 6 concludes with key messages.

6.2 Disadvantaged families

6.2.1 Research suggests that programmes developed for and/or piloted on relatively advantaged families may provide misleading messages with regard to what provision would work best for more disadvantaged families. At least in part, this is because such programmes require skills, habits and behaviours that better educated parents have developed over a lifetime, and which are difficult to impart via a small number of training sessions.

6.2.2 As discussed in Chapter 6, educational sociologists and psychologists generally argue that parents do not just differ in skills, they differ in habitus - that is, in attitudes, understandings and instincts/behaviours developed both consciously and unconsciously over a lifetime (Bourdieu, 1990). And while disadvantage is not determinative of such attitudes and understandings, it has been shown to be predictive with regard to the field of literacy (Parsons and Bynner, 2008).

6.2.3 For van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) one of the key negative impacts of disadvantage is its potential to reduce the quality of programme implementation. These researchers hypothesise that the disadvantaged families included in their meta-analysis found it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended by programme developers. Video research on implementation quality supports this hypothesis, with McElvany and Artelt finding that "neither the structure of the conversations between parent and child, the quantity of parental feedback, nor the extent of parental guidance" in the family literacy programme they reviewed was of

sufficiently good quality (2009, p. 428).

- 6.2.4 Poor implementation quality may be not just a product of limited parental skills and orientation to educational activities. In their review of the impacts of parental involvement on child educational outcomes, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) highlight British research indicating that children from middle-class families were more accepting of parent-initiated educational activities than were working-class children, with the latter less willing to "go along" with parent-initiated exchanges. However, this rejection of parental initiatives had a strong gender aspect: while working-class boys and girls both tended to block parental overtures, girls had a tendency to initiate some level of involvement of their own accord. This led the researchers to conclude that working-class children in the UK were less acquiescent than middle-class children to parental involvement, and more autonomous with regard to taking and/or being given control of their parents' involvement.
- 6.2.5 Looking at the impact of socio-economic status, only eight of 16 studies included sufficient data to establish participating families' economic levels. Of those eight, five studies focused on low income families, while three included a range of middle to high income families. Sénéchal and Young found no difference in programme impacts between low-and middle-high income groups – that is, interventions appear to work just as well for low SES children as for middle-high SES children.
- 6.2.6 Of the studies included in Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis, four were conducted with children who were experiencing reading difficulties or who were deemed to be at risk for reading problems. 11 studies were conducted with children deemed to be developing normally in their reading. Sénéchal and Young found no difference in programme impact between these two groups, suggesting that interventions work just as well for disadvantaged readers as for children with normal or better reading skills.
- 6.2.7 Jeynes (2005), who included only studies of urban, disadvantaged children, found that family-based educational interventions did benefit such children.
- 6.2.8 However, Manz et al found significant effects of socio-economic disadvantage. Studies including primarily middle or high socio-economic status families achieved a combined mean effect size of 0.39, nearly 3 times greater than that of studies including primarily low income participants (0.14). Manz et al argue that these data indicate a clear need to develop and test programmes which are better targeted at the most needy families.

- 6.2.9 In their meta-analysis of dialogic reading programmes, Mol et al found much poorer results for children from disadvantaged families: while the combined mean effect size for all studies in this review was 0.59, the effect for the seven studies of children at risk was much lower: 0.13.
- 6.2.10 Van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) suggest that disadvantaged families may find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended. This was the conclusion of McElvany and Artelt (2009), who used video analysis to assess the implementation quality of a family literacy programme. McElvany and Artelt found unsatisfactory implementation in a range of key areas: the structure of conversations between parent and child, and the amount of parental feedback, and the extent of parental guidance.
- 6.2.11 In 1996, the Netherlands replaced Opstap (the Dutch version of HIPPY) with a revised family literacy Programme, sometimes still referred to as Opstap, but also sometimes called Opstap Opnieuw (Step up Anew). The new initiative used many of the same mechanisms as the original Opstap, but with modifications aimed at improving context relevance – these included a revised curriculum. According to Eldering and Vedder, the revised programme featured more complex materials and tasks, raising the possibility for those authors that poorly educated mothers would "probably be further excluded from participation" (1999, p. 276).
- 6.2.12 Disadvantage is heterogenous: not all disadvantaged families are equally disadvantaged, and not all such families will respond the same to specific programmes. For example, research in the Netherlands on the impacts of Opstap Opnieuw (Eldering and Vedder, 1999) has found that, on average, the programme produces benefits for Turkish-Dutch families, but not for the Moroccan-Dutch peers.
- 6.2.13 In the 19-year follow-up of The Turkish Early Enrichment Project, researchers found significant differences in programme benefits, dependent on child cognitive ability as assessed at the start of the programme, when children were aged 4-6 (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2009). All children participating in the programme were from deprived backgrounds, and overall the cognitive and non-cognitive gains associated with participation were very strong. Children experienced long-term benefits extending into adulthood across a range of policy areas, including educational attainment, occupational status, age of beginning gainful employment, and some indicators of integration into modern urban life. However, individuals in the bottom 25% of the cognitive distribution as children did not display any positive programme benefits 19 years later. The authors suggest that multiply disadvantaged children who also

manifest poor cognitive skills may require more intensive intervention.

- 6.2.14 In our interviews with policy and programme leaders, it was clear that they believed that programmes and policies must be adapted to meet the particular needs of particular groups. In some cases, these adaptations relate to physical capabilities – for example, Bookstart UK produces special materials for children or parents who are blind and children who are deaf. However, as the organisation has observed, without additional funding it is impossible to meet the needs of all physically disabled groups – for example, Bookstart would like to produce materials for deaf-blind children or parents, but has as yet been unable to secure funding for this purpose. This highlights the importance of partnerships. Bookstart UK has successfully formed partnerships with national charities for the blind and for the deaf, enabling it to better meet the needs of those charities' core groups.
- 6.2.15 Most disadvantage is not predicated on physical disability, however, but on issues such as poverty, inequality and migrant status. Regarding the latter, Bookstart UK offers book packs and parental guidance in 29 languages.
- 6.2.16 In Turkey, a significant percentage of mothers are illiterate, particularly in the Eastern and South Eastern regions; in addition, many families in these areas do not speak Turkish as their mother tongue. For families in these regions who need specially tailored support, the government offers adapted provision. However, as a Turkish respondent reports, ensuring that a large, national programme can be tailored to meet local or individual family needs is a challenge. When MOCEP made the transition from being a project to being national policy, programme leaders and policymakers negotiated extensively over the range of flexibility that the programme would feature. In general, policymakers prefer a one size fits all approach, because such programmes are easier to administer – and administrative complexity is a serious policy challenge, particularly in larger countries. The likelihood of having a one size fits all policy in Turkey was exacerbated by the fact that policy-making in the country is highly centralised, here, with top-down approaches being the norm.
- 6.2.17 To ensure that as wide a range of families as possible could be served by the national family literacy Programme, MOCEP programme leaders worked with government policymakers to include a range of programme variations – for example, provision specifically designed for mothers with little or no reading literacy.
- 6.2.18 A key issue regarding targeting programmes are disadvantaged families is that of recruitment. While well honed recruitment strategies offer the possibility of

reducing educational disadvantage, inappropriate recruitment tactics run the risk of increasing educational inequality.

- 6.2.19 Some programmes targeted at a range of abilities have also sought to address within-group heterogeneity. For example, in the Berlin Parent-Child initiative, children and parents were allowed to choose either a relatively easy or relatively difficult reading for each lesson.

6.3 Language of instruction

- 6.3.1 Immigrant, and indeed indigenous, families who do not speak the national language or who prefer to speak another have the right, in most European countries, to be served in their mother tongue. However, in some countries, there is either legislative or political pressure to provide instruction focused on children in the official language. For example, in Turkey children cannot legally be taught in Kurdish. Policymakers in the Netherlands point to an underlying political emphasis on the importance of the Dutch language. In general, programmes are encouraged to focus on Dutch. However, there is some acceptance of research evidence showing the value of supporting literacy development in the home language. In contrast, German family literacy experts point to Bremen and Berlin, where governments apply no pressure to focus first on German.
- 6.3.2 Good examples of programmes delivered at least partly in the mother tongue for families of immigrant backgrounds are the MoCEP/AÇEV Turkish-language programmes in Belgium and Switzerland, as well as Opstap in the Netherlands. The *Family Literacy for New Groups* study (Brooks et al, 1999) in England found that some provision was bilingual, in the sense that one of the staff (whether a teacher or an assistant) could speak both English and one or both of home languages of participants (Urdu and/or Mirpuri Punjabi). Results from this group were at least as good as, and in some respects better than, those for monolingual English-speaking families in the evaluation of the English Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes.
- 6.3.3 However, Opstap, which is targeted at Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch families, has faced a particular challenge: migrants from Morocco to the Netherlands tend to be Berber, and the Berber language lacks a written code. Opstap must therefore provide written lesson material either in Arabic or Dutch, but most Moroccan-Dutch families participating in the programme are skilled readers in neither of those two languages. This is cited as one of the key reasons underlying poorer Opstap

outcomes for Moroccan-Dutch children as compared to Turkish-Dutch children (Eldering and Vedder, 1999).

- 6.3.4 Providing a range of options for language of instruction may not always be practicable. For example, it is estimated that more than 150 native languages are spoken by schoolchildren in London. It would not be feasible to offer a range of native-language family literacy courses for such a broad linguistic spectrum. In other areas, however, the challenge is less daunting. For example, in Hamburg, most immigrants speak either Turkish or Russian as their native language. Here, it would be feasible to offer tailored native language programmes.

6.4 Fathers

- 6.4.1 Many experts in family literacy argue that fathers should be more involved in parental literacy programmes. This view is understandable, particularly given the relatively poor literacy performance of boys compared to girls. It may be the case that under ideal circumstances, this is a goal worth pursuing, both for policymakers and programme leaders. However, policies and programmes are not developed and sustained under ideal conditions. Resources for family literacy programmes tend to be scarce at the best of times, and are likely to be even scarcer during times of economic austerity. It is under these conditions of resource scarcity that policymakers must determine whether or not to strive to increase fathers' involvement in family literacy programmes.
- 6.4.2 We would argue that, in most instances, doing so results in too many opportunity costs, i.e. opportunities forgone. Because fathers have proved resistant to recruitment, engagement efforts targeted at them tend to be resource intensive. These same resources could be more efficiently deployed in recruiting more mothers, or in improving programme implementation and/or evaluation.
- 6.4.3 What makes this realistic policy approach more palatable is the finding from research projects such as that of Morgan et al (2009) that fathers are far less resistant to engaging in family literacy practices than they are to engaging in family literacy programmes. While fathers tend not to be outwardly visible participants in their children's literacy activities, evidence suggests that the majority of fathers are engaged in at least some home-based literacy activities with their children (Morgan et al, 2009). One possible approach, therefore, would be to place less emphasis on recruiting reluctant fathers and more on showing participating mothers how to increase the extent of fathers' family literacy activities in the home. For example,

teachers on family literacy programmes to encourage mothers could encourage their partners to increase their family literacy activities in the home. Mothers could be encouraged, for instance, to select some books that fathers might particularly like to read with their child. Additionally, programmes could experiment with the formal inclusion of a short session aimed at teaching mothers techniques for engaging fathers and literacy activities with their children.

6.4.4 There is an argument, made for instance by our interviewee in Malta, that the absence of men from family literacy programmes, while unfortunate in some ways, can also be seen as a benefit. Family literacy programmes without men can be a safe haven for women, especially in countries where women tend to be repressed and/or dispossessed. "In Malta we have found this to be incredibly liberating for women. We should see this as a plus, not a minus." In that country, mothers became empowered through their experiences and activities in all-female family literacy groups. Based on this, our Maltese respondent argues that men should be more involved in their children's education and literacy development, but not at the expense of this haven for women.

6.4.5 Mothers in Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Programme provides just such a haven for women. However, Turkey also offers a widespread and successful Father Support Programme, serving a yearly target of 6,000 fathers and children. The programme aims to increase fathers' awareness of their importance to their child's academic and socio-emotional development (Koçak, 2004), and has been positively evaluated. This suggests that there is a place for father-focused family literacy interventions, as a complement to the primary offer.

6.4.6 When fathers do wish to participate in family literacy programmes, this may have implications for programme structure and implementation, depending on cultural issues. For example, in the Netherlands, our case study sites reported that some fathers have asked to attend provision. Mixed mother-father programmes would have serious implications for the Turkish and Moroccan groups who are the primary users of Opstap Opnieuw; thus it might be necessary to create father-only programmes, as in Turkey. In other cultural settings, however, and for other cultural groups, mixed sex interventions are more feasible.

6.5 Child gender

6.5.1 Despite a policy context in which there are troubling gender differences in literacy acquisition, only two of the meta-analyses we reviewed specifically mentioned child

gender as a participant characteristic in family literacy programmes. Neither of these two studies – Nye et al (2006) and Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) – reported any impact of gender on programme outcomes. We were unable to determine whether this suggested that gender had no impact on outcomes or whether primary study characteristics made it too difficult for the reviewers to analyse gender's impact. We suspect the latter, as any evidence on gender would be of interest, whether the finding was that gender had an impact of programme outcomes or did not.

- 6.5.2 In Turkey, the Mother-Child Education Programme reported larger literacy gains for girls than boys. Brooks et al (2008) suggests this may be an artefact of the general tendency for girls to develop language skills more rapidly than boys, or it may be a product of mothers being the role models in this programme.
- 6.5.3 In their review of the impacts of parental involvement on child educational outcomes, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) found strong gender differences with regard to children's attitudes towards parental involvement. Girls in the UK were "much more actively in support", and were particularly likely to be in favour of initiatives encouraging parental involvement in the home (p. 48).
- 6.5.4 Desforges and Abouchaar also highlight British research indicating that children from middle-class families were more accepting of parent-initiated educational activities than were working-class children, with the latter less willing to "go along" with parent-initiated exchanges. However, this rejection of parental initiatives had a strong gender aspect: while both boys and girls tended to block parental overtures, girls had a tendency to initiate some level of involvement of their own accord.

6.6 Child age

- 6.6.1 The best age at which to target interventions appears to vary depending on programme type, and may be influenced by a range of other variables. In England and Turkey, family literacy programmes have had particular success when targeted at the year immediately prior to school entry (Brooks et al, 2008). In England, the Demonstration Programmes in 1994-95 had great success also with children a year younger than that (Brooks et al, 1996).
- 6.6.2 Programmes targeted at preschoolers may also benefit from a lack of "initiative competition" from school programmes. In England, family literacy policy makers have found that pressures of initiatives such as the national curriculum and the National Literacy Strategy has made schools increasingly unwilling to release children

in Grade 1 and above from their 'official' classes, even to attend provision which held out the promise of accelerating their progress in some of those classes.

- 6.6.3 As expected, Mol et al's review of dialogic reading programmes found that older children (those aged 4-5) benefited less from dialogic reading than children aged 2-3. In their review, children aged 4-5 experienced a small effect size of only 0.14, roughly one third of the effect size for 2-3 year olds (0.50).
- 6.6.4 These results suggest that dialogic reading is best targeted at very young children, while other programme types focus on slightly older participants. However, as Mol et al note, dialogic reading programmes did not appear to benefit disadvantaged 2-3-year-olds; it may be the case that these children and/or their parents are not yet ready for dialogic reading techniques. Mol and colleagues suggest that researchers should investigate whether or not dialogic reading programmes focused on disadvantaged four-five-year-olds have a positive effect.
- 6.6.5 Looking at a broad array of family literacy programmes, van Steensel and colleagues found a larger mean effect size for children in primary school than for those in pre-primary. The same was true for Fishel and Ramirez (2005) in their review of parental support programmes.
- 6.6.6 In contrast, UK programmes targeted at families of 11-year-olds were a failure, suffering significant problems regarding recruitment and motivation, both of children and parents (ref). In their review of the impacts of parental involvement on child educational outcomes, Desforges and Abouchar (2003) offer a possible explanation for this: as children age they become less comfortable with parental involvement, particularly centre-or school-based involvement.

6.7 Dyslexia

- 6.7.1 Although dyslexia runs in families (van Otterloo et al, 2009), very little of the European primary research we found investigated family literacy interventions targeted at children who were dyslexic or who were at heightened risk of dyslexia. One exception was a study of the Dutch Sounding Sounds and Jolly Letters (Klinkende Klanken en Lollige Letters) intervention, which was a home-based intervention aimed at children at increased risk of dyslexia (characterised in this instance as having at least one parent who self-reported as dyslexic). Sounding Sounds and Jolly Letters was an adaptation of a Danish programme known as "Towards initial reading: phonological awareness". However, the Danish version was

set in school classrooms and did not utilise parents.

- 6.7.2 The Dutch Programme, which was designed to take about 10 minutes a day, five days a week for 14 weeks, led to moderate literacy gains in children. Importantly, the programme appeared to be readily implementable by parents.

6.8 Recruitment

- 6.8.1 In our review of research we found several discussions regarding the challenges of recruiting disadvantaged families. For example, the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme (McElvany and Artelt, 2009) experienced significant recruitment problems: only 34% of families contacted registered for the Programme, and only one third of those who registered actually participated. Most importantly, participation was selective: children with higher socio-economic status and better reading ability were more likely to participate than were disadvantaged children, despite significant efforts to recruit the latter. Interestingly, while engagement was selective, participation and completion were not: disadvantaged families who started the programme were just as likely to complete it as were more advantaged families. Furthermore, disadvantaged children saw equal or greater benefits from programme participation than did more privileged children.
- 6.8.2 These findings suggest that participation in such programmes can reduce educational inequality, but that selective participation/recruitment has the potential to add to it. As McElvany and Artelt (2009) note, given the socially biased selection issues shaping participation rates in the Programme, it could be argued that such a programme not only fails to reduce disadvantaged, but actually increases it, by providing better off families with yet another resource to utilise in their pursuit of capital for their children. The key question then becomes one not of programme quality or mechanism, but one of how to best recruit and retain disadvantaged families. Ideas the authors suggest include recruitment strategies tailored to specific groups, materials tailored to specific groups, incentives, supervision, and the involvement of schools. Regarding the latter, in an interview with one of the programme developers she noted that the Berlin programme sought to highlight to parents the initiative's independence from the school system, in the hopes that this would encourage participation by parents who thought less highly of the school. Unfortunately, as the project was relatively short lived, it was not possible to properly test this hypothesis by later attempting to more overtly link the programme to schools.

- 6.8.3 More successfully, in the UK's SPOKES Programme, which focused both on improving child reading literacy and reducing child behaviour problems, 40% of the families identified through the initiative's recruitment screening process took part in the programme. Sylva et al (2008) categorised this as a "good result" (p. 452), particularly considering that parents had not been seeking help at the time when they were contacted. Nor were parents, many of whom were in full-time work, offered any rewards for joining the programme. The evaluators suggest that the relatively strong take-up rate may be a product of the programme's positive recruitment strategy: parents were approached on the basis of giving their children a better start in life rather than being told that their children had difficulties or problems.
- 6.8.4 Summarising the research literature on strategies for working with parents, Powell (2004, page 161) suggest that one key to recruitment is to provide a range of supports. He points, for example, to research which found that providing childcare and transportation to family literacy programmes led to 10% higher recruitment and participation among lower income parents. Such "external to the classroom" supports are likely to be particularly valuable and important in countries with smaller welfare states, such as Ireland, the UK and Eastern European Member States, as these are the countries which are most likely to lack such support as part of the broader policy environment. It may be the case that in such contexts, family literacy programmes need to pay greater attention to such issues, and devote greater resources to them. Add some text from family literacy research resource citing mallows 2008
- 6.8.5 Just as broader policy contexts can be a barrier to recruitment, so too can family literacy policy restrictions. In England, programmes are discouraged from recruiting well-or even moderately-educated families for state-funded Family Literacy programmes. Officially speaking, the government's Family Literacy initiative is only open to families in which parents lack qualifications equivalent to completion of secondary school, but many schools report that they do not strictly observe these restrictions, as doing so would unfairly penalise some children who need literacy help (Swain et al, 2009).
- 6.8.6 Recruitment problems can also be caused by programme staff. In Turkey, our interviewees reported⁵ that some Ministry of Education staff were not sufficiently motivated to recruit harder to reach families, for example those in rural areas. Instead, some recruiters preferred to focus on areas and family types where recruitment was easier. In part, this is a reflection of the initiative's success: urban parents who had heard of the programme and its successes were relatively eager to

join. However, as with recruitment problems in Berlin, the relatively greater eagerness of urban families to participate in MOCEP could add to educational inequality, at least between urban and rural groups.

6.9 Targeting programmes at particular groups

- 6.9.1 Jeynes (2005) suggests that educators and policymakers should only support parental involvement programmes if such programmes have positive influences for "virtually all groups" (p. 240). However, a question must be raised as to whether such a demand, while admirable, is too stringent. Evidence from the Netherlands suggests that due to different family and socio-economic characteristics, the Opstap Opnieuw programme does appear to be effective for Turkish parents, but not for Moroccan families. Does this imply that this programme should be jettisoned in favour of one that could at least in theory work for both main types of immigrant group? Or does it rather imply that because of the heterogeneity of the disadvantaged, national policymakers should steer clear of "one size fits all" approaches?
- 6.9.2 To be fair to Jeynes, he is likely arguing not that a specific intervention type needs to show positive impacts for virtually all types of participants, but rather that if policymakers are to support parental literacy interventions in general, it is important that such interventions do not benefit only a small number of groups, especially if this would add to rather than reduce currently existing educational inequalities.
- 6.9.3 Improving children's educational outcomes through parenting support programmes is challenging, though, as the evidence in this report shows, studies – at least those which are methodologically robust enough to be included in meta-analyses – show that family literacy interventions typically produce greater gains than most educational initiatives. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that educational interventions in and of themselves do not and probably cannot have a predictable dose-response impact on participants in the way that medicines do. The dose-response relationship is radically more variable when applied in a social pathway than when applied in a biological one. Instead, impacts are the product of complex interactions between programme types, programme qualities, participant characteristics, and broader social circumstances and contexts.
- 6.9.4 This is one of the complexities that makes evidenced-based education more challenging than evidence-based medicine: families and educational systems are

inextricably embedded in a wide range of social and cultural inequalities (Pawson, 2002). Programme gains must be made within the challenging environment of disadvantage at all levels: individual, family, cultural and even national. Landing a helicopter on a helipad is presumably straightforward for a trained pilot -- but not when that helipad is on the bow of a ship being tossed by heavy waves. Educational initiatives targeting the disadvantaged face analogous challenges.

- 6.9.5 Context matters immensely, as do participant and intervention characteristics. Programmes do not exist in a vacuum, and the same initiative may succeed or fail depending on a wide range of variables which it has no control over. As Pawson observes, it is "quite routine" (p. 167) for a programme to work well for one group of participants but not at all for another group. We can see evidence of this in the Dutch implementation of *Opstap Opnieuw*, which showed positive effect sizes for Turkish-Dutch families but not for their Moroccan-Dutch counterparts. As Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) argue, such findings emphasise the need for greater attention to the cultural validity and specificity of family literacy interventions, to ensure that such interventions meet the specific needs of particular groups.
- 6.9.6 Influenced by their own experiences as programme developers and/or policy actors, of several of the experts we interviewed suggested that programmes need to be tailored for and targeted at particular groups if they are to succeed. This could involve modifications to a nationwide programme, as in Turkey, where MOCEP includes variations for mothers who are completely or almost completely print illiterate.
- 6.9.7 It could also involve flexibility in a specific local programme. In Germany, for example, the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme offered families a choice of two lessons each session. Each lesson contained the same text content and type of questions, but the versions were available in different lengths. The idea behind this approach was that rather than tailoring sessions to more or less educated parents, materials were tailored so as to best meet the needs of higher or lower achieving child readers. Importantly, children and parents were allowed to decide each session what length of text they preferred. This allowed for improvement over time as originally poor readers got better, but also meant that families could opt for a shorter, less demanding session some weeks if they needed to for practical reasons, such as other commitments.
- 6.9.8 As discussed previously, disadvantaged populations are not homogeneous; nor, obviously, are migrant populations. Evaluators of *Opstap Opnieuw* have concluded that Moroccan-Dutch families tend to face a range of barriers that are less likely to

be faced by Turkish-Dutch families, and that the programme has not been constructed to overcome such barriers. Rather than attempting to create a programme that work for both groups, a more suitable approach might be to modify Opstap Opnieuw so that it had two main variants: one targeted at Turkish-Dutch families and one targeted at Moroccan-Dutch families.

- 6.9.9 Given the larger barriers faced by the latter group, it would also be sensible to have different expected outcomes against which each variant is evaluated. For example, a programme targeted at Moroccan-Dutch families might focus more on increasing participation, and less on quantitatively measured child literacy improvements.
- 6.9.10 In some countries or areas it is potentially feasible to devise (somewhat) different programmes for different immigrant groups. For example, in Hamburg, most immigrants are of Turkish or either Russian descent. This would suggest that if one programme did not work for both groups, two might. However, a "multiplicity of programmes" approach would not be feasible in more diverse countries or cities. London, for example, is home to far too wide a range of immigrant groups (speaking 150+ home languages) to tailor a top-down, multi-programme policy for even a large minority of those languages.
- 6.9.11 Another challenge to feasibility may be more surmountable. As Turkey's MOCEP evolved from a successful project to national policy, government policymakers were inevitably tempted to standardise delivery, so as to make the programme easier to administer and evaluate. However, programme leaders successfully argued that successful implementation, particularly for the most disadvantaged households, required programme variants targeted at particular groups, e.g. illiterate mothers and non-Turkish-speaking families.

6.10 Developing a culture of reading and learning: roles and potential impacts of family literacy policy and programmes

- 6.10.1 In the Netherlands, our respondent argued that one of the central goals of family literacy programmes is to help instil a culture of reading and learning in families that may not have such a culture, or may view this as the job of schools rather than parents.
- 6.10.2 This respondent argued that while programmes targeted primarily at middle-class families might be able to achieve quantitatively measured child literacy improvements relatively quickly, programmes targeted at more disadvantaged

families may fail to do so, because the objectives of these programmes need to be more basic: 1) showing parents and children that reading can be fun; and 2) showing parents that reading can be a source of pleasurable bonding between parent and child.

- 6.10.3 In the UK, our respondent argued that coherent, cross-department, childhood-wide family policy should focus on the notion of the "learning family". Diane Reay of Cambridge University has written extensively on the challenges associated with such an ambition. Reay's evidence indicates that the vast majority of disadvantaged parents want to help their children succeed academically, and are very anxious to find ways of doing so (see e.g. Reay, 1998). What separates these parents from more advantaged parents, she concludes, is not attitudes or aspirations. Instead, it is cultural knowledge and social capital.
- 6.10.4 In comparing advantaged and disadvantaged parents in England, Reay found that the key difference between the two groups was the former's much better understanding of how to relate to schools and school staff in ways that would benefit their children's educational development. For example, Reay found that disadvantaged parents tended to lack confidence when meeting with teachers. In such meetings, poorly educated parents were less likely to be assertive about their child's needs or getting extra help when their child was struggling.
- 6.10.5 Furthermore, disadvantaged parents were more likely to see teachers and schools as being the "experts" about their child's education. Such parents viewed themselves as the experts regarding non-educational issues, but were more likely than advantaged parents to trust teachers to "solve" their children's educational problems. Even when schools did not seem to be paying enough attention to their children's educational development, disadvantaged parents lacked the confidence, skills and connections – i.e. the cultural and social capital – to effect change.
- 6.10.6 Research in the UK (Peters *et al.*, 2008) has found that two-thirds of parents would like to be more involved in their child's education – and this was particularly true of parents from disadvantaged groups. Many such parents, Reay notes, want to help their children, but did not know how – either when dealing with school bureaucracies or when at home alone with their children, looking at unfinished homework. In contrast, more advantaged parents were far more assertive when their children were struggling in school, and felt confident enough in their dealings with teachers and other school staff to demand extra tuition or other forms of assistance for their children. They were also less likely to trust teachers' assertions

that their children "would eventually catch up"; instead, more advantaged parents trusted their own instincts about their child's educational development.

- 6.10.7 In addition to lacking necessary social and cultural capital, poorly educated parents often lack what could be called "literacy about literacy". By this we mean that they lack a good understanding of how important early literacy development is in determining children's life chances. As has been noted repeatedly in research around the world, and as is highlighted in our research review, well educated parents tend to be very aware of the importance of early literacy development, and engaged in a wide range of behaviours designed to encourage it. Much of this understanding appears to be engendered by what Bourdieu referred to as habitus (1990). Briefly, habitus can be thought of as a set or system of dispositions inculcated in individuals throughout the course of their lives. Such dispositions tend to be strongly influenced by class and educational background, and as has been reported by a number of researchers in a range of countries – see e.g. Reay (1999) and Lareau (2003) – disadvantaged parents are less likely to possess an education-focused habitus. As observed by our respondent in the UK, when such parents are told about the manifold ways in which engaging in early literacy activities such as nursery rhymes is correlated with later reading ability, they often say "Why didn't anybody tell us this?"
- 6.10.8 In many countries, of course, parents are told this. But in the real world, such a message can seem both complex and even confusing. Regarding the latter, research evidence shows that many poorly educated parents believe that parents and schools have separate responsibilities, with the former responsible for the moral and physical well-being of their children, while schools are responsible for academic development. Many disadvantaged parents believe that they not only cannot but should not seek to play a central role in literacy development, which is seen as part of the school's domain. Given this reality, providing messages about the importance of parental involvement in literacy activities is important but not enough. Humans are most likely to change their deeply held behaviours and beliefs not simply through hearing new messages or ideas, but through engaging in practices which bring those messages to life – practices such as family literacy programmes. As public health experts are well aware, information is rarely sufficient when seeking to effect widespread behaviour change. A combination of personal incentives and structural changes is also required.
- 6.10.9 In England, the government's Family Literacy programme seeks to improve children's literacy skills while also improving adult literacy skills. Objectives include improving the academic performance of the former and actively encouraging parents to gain

qualifications. An evaluation of the programme found that while some participating parents develop the confidence or interest required to go on to additional adult education, most parents participated in the programme because they were seeking a way to be more involved in their child's academic activities, and to contribute to their child's educational development (Swain et al, 2009).

6.10.10 Our analysis of findings from England's evaluation of its Family Literacy programme strongly suggests that while the programme was making only a limited contribution to the development of parental literacy skills and parents' achievement of qualifications, it was providing disadvantaged parents with a mechanism through which they could develop a range of supportive competencies and capabilities. Among these were improved self-confidence, both with regard to helping their children with their reading and writing, and with regard to speaking with teachers and other school staff about problems their children were having. Furthermore, through these school-based programmes, parents were able to get to know teachers and other school staff, making them more confident in their dealings with them, and greatly reducing the sense of fear and alienation many poorly educated parents said they had traditionally felt towards schools. In these programmes, parents' human capital – in terms of literacy skills – may or may not have grown, but their cultural and social capital did increase meaningfully, and it was these latter forms of capital which most help them support their children's literacy development.

6.10.11 In Birmingham, UK, a small, local initiative featured in Chapter 10, the “Parent and Child Language Group”, gives disadvantaged parents a mechanism through which they can play a more active, integrated role in community life, interacting with others at their child's school or daycare centre. The Birmingham programme encourages the development of parental literacy skills alongside those of children, but also works to increase parents' and children's interest in reading and learning for pleasure

6.10.12 In between the micro- and the macro- is the meso-, or community, level. Because Bookstart activities involve local libraries and childcare centres, and because the service is universal, it has the capacity to bring together local parents from a range of backgrounds and with a range of capabilities. As reported by a Bookstart respondent: "Families feel part of something bigger. There is a common factor that is binding in communities across all levels of confidence. Having the opportunity to meet with other parents of young children, and being part of something together through sharing stories and singing rhymes, builds a community feel."

6.10.13 In Turkey, one of our respondent argued that MOCEP helps instil a culture of learning in participating families and communities, but also in society at large, particularly among the disadvantaged families who most need the programme. Families who are not part of the programme see the positive benefits experienced by participants, so join the programme themselves. As the programme spread, so too do its positive messages about reading, education and good parenting practices. We see evidence of this phenomenon on in both Turkey and England, where MOCEP and Bookstart have widespread cultural cachet and resonance. In the latter case, the initiative is viewed by many as a welfare state service as opposed to an initiative (see e.g. www.guardian.co.uk/booktrust). That is, the programme has established an institutional place in the national psyche. Such cultural resonance helps encourage views of shared reading as normal, natural and suitable for all types of families, not just those with a predilection for formal education.

6.10.14 This is similar to another Bookstart goal, that of encouraging a celebration of reading on the micro, meso and macro levels. At the micro level, the focus is the family. At the macro level, Bookstart aims to instil a sense of "national celebration" around stories and reading. This is also a core goal of the Every Czech Reads to Kids initiatives. In encouraging a celebration of reading, such initiatives help to improve the possibilities for nationwide social and cultural transformation with regard to attitudes to reading, and therefore attitudes to learning. Such large-scale transformation is inevitably a slow, and possibly glacial, process, but it is a necessary one given the rising importance of literacy to the economic and non-economic well-being of all European nations (ref EC 2020).

6.10.15 There appears to be no evidence regarding the societal-level impact of family literacy programmes on parental attitudes to participation in child-centred literacy activities. However, in the field of adult education there is some compelling evidence that the presence of a large number of readily accessible learning options contributes to a higher level of participation by the disadvantaged. A "culture of participation and improvement" is encouraged through the widespread availability of adult education options, and through societal norms which encourage participation, even among the poorly educated. In Nordic countries, this reduces barriers to participation.

6.10.16 In an analogous fashion, the widespread availability of family literacy programmes could potentially help shape cultural norms in such a way that participation in such programmes would seem more natural.

6.11 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

6.11.1 This section provides an overview of key messages in this chapter. Key messages are divided by theme, as follows: Context; Disadvantage; Mothers/fathers; and Encouraging a culture of reading and learning.

Context

6.11.2 While the evidence indicates that family literacy interventions typically produce greater gains than most educational initiatives, policymakers should not assume that a particular programme's reported impacts can be readily produced in a different context. Impacts are the product of complex interactions between programme types, participant characteristics, and broader social and economic factors.

6.11.3 In interviews, family literacy experts consistently argued that programmes and policies must be adapted to meet the specific needs of particular groups. Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) and other researchers make the same point, emphasising the need for increased attention to the cultural validity of family literacy initiatives.

6.11.4 Research findings may provide misleading messages and overly ambitious targets if outcomes for programmes including primarily well-educated families are used as benchmarks for programmes targeted primarily at disadvantaged families. Many disadvantaged parents lack not only economic resources, they also lack the social and cultural capital required to best support their children's literacy development.

Disadvantage

6.11.5 Meta-analyses of family literacy programmes have produced conflicting evidence regarding the impact of disadvantage on programme outcomes. While reviews by Manz et al (forthcoming 2011) and Mol et al (2008) found that family disadvantage reduced programme benefits, Sénéchal and Young (2008) and Jeynes (2005) both concluded that children from at risk families benefited as much as more advantaged children. In a primary research programme carried out in Berlin, McElvany and Artelt (2009) found that it was more difficult to recruit disadvantaged families – but once these families did join the programme, their children experienced equal or greater benefits, in comparison to more advantaged participants.

6.11.6 Research on implementation quality has found that disadvantaged families often find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended by programme developers.

- 6.11.7 Disadvantage is heterogeneous, and there is evidence that different types of disadvantage may affect programme outcomes in different ways. For example, in the Netherlands, the Opstap programme has shown positive gains for Turkish-Dutch children, but not for their Moroccan-Dutch peers.
- 6.11.8 For particularly disadvantaged families, family literacy policy may need to strive not for quantitatively identifiable short-term literacy gains, but other, more basic benefits. These might include improved parental attitudes to education, more time spent on shared reading, and improved parent-child bonding through reading activities.
- 6.11.9 Some researchers and programme leaders have reported difficulties in recruiting disadvantaged families onto programmes. In cases where advantaged families take up recruitment opportunities and disadvantaged families do not, the situation could actually increase educational inequality rather than decrease it.
- 6.11.10 Researchers have suggested a range of strategies for improving recruitment of disadvantaged families. These include providing childcare and transportation, and incentivising programme recruiters.

Mothers and fathers

- 6.11.11 Research evidence (Morgan et al, 2009) suggests that while fathers are generally resistant to engaging in family literacy programmes, they are less resistant to engaging in family literacy practices in the home. Some experts argue that in order to make best use of limited resources, policymakers should devote fewer resources to recruiting fathers onto formal programmes, using that time and money instead to recruit larger numbers of mothers. Under such an approach, one possible option would be to provide participating mothers with advice about how to better engage fathers in family literacy practices in the home.
- 6.11.12 In Malta, it was argued that mother-only family literacy programmes provide a haven wherein disadvantaged mothers can better develop parenting skills and improve self-confidence and self-efficacy. It was argued here that such steps to maternal empowerment were less likely to be taken in mixed-sex programmes.

Encouraging a culture of reading and learning

- 6.11.13 A core objective of initiatives such as Bookstart and Every Czech Reads To Kids is to encourage a celebration of reading for pleasure, at family, community and national levels. Such programmes seek primarily not to facilitate short-term literacy gains, but to contribute to a broader cultural shift in which reading and learning become seen

by all families, but particularly disadvantaged ones, as natural and fun. Such a cultural shift is required if European countries are to evolve into successful, equitable knowledge societies.

Chapter 7 Policy and programme sustainability, expansion and transfer

7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This chapter discusses and analyses issues related to programme sustainability, expansion and transfer. The chapter concludes with a summary of key messages.

7.2 Sustainability

7.2.1 In analysing what is required for the sustainability of family literacy programmes and policies, we can ask ourselves what programme components need to be in place in order to achieve longevity. In our research and analysis, we found five key factors shaping sustainability: funding, programme quality, partnerships, research-based evidence of success, and media/public support.

Funding

7.2.2 Policymakers must engage in challenging balancing acts with regard to resources, particularly in times of economic austerity. Under such conditions, there is often strong pressure to cut programmes that do not show large and clear economic returns. Even programmes widely regarded as very successful, such as the UK's Bookstart, may face major cuts, as evidenced by recent threats (since recanted) by that country's government to cut all funding for Booktrust, the charity which administers Bookstart and other book gifting programmes.

7.2.3 There may also be pressure to attempt to save money on currently existing programmes by eliminating programme elements not seen by policymakers as essential. This may be a particular risk for holistic programmes which include objectives other than those specifically focused on child literacy development. In such cases, it may be particularly helpful for programme leaders and policymakers to be able to point to empirical research evidence demonstrating the benefits of such programmes and the reasons underlying these benefits.

7.2.4 As one respondent from Romania observed, a key problem in her country is the short-term nature of available funding: "When the financing is over, the activities in

the project end, so [programmes are not] sustainable for long periods of time.” Similar stories can be told in many, and probably all, Member States. Small, local projects depend on grant funding for their survival. When these come to an end, so too do the programmes, no matter how beneficial they may be. This has potential impacts not only on individual programmes, but on the development of the entire field of family literacy within Member States. A potential analogy can be drawn with the development of policy in another relatively marginalised field, adult literacy.

- 7.2.5 In most developed countries, adult literacy policy-making began in earnest in the 1970s, with significant increases in policy attention and development coming in the late 1990s (following the publication of data from international literacy assessment tool such as the International Adult Literacy Survey, IALS) and throughout the decade of 2000-2010. In many developed countries around the world, this trend has manifested itself in the development of coherent, albeit often still marginal, adult literacy policy. However, even in some countries manifesting significant interest in adult literacy, such as Canada, there has been very little policy progress in the field. In Canada, this is due in part to funding strategies which do not encourage sustainable, long-term policies and programmes, but which instead encourage a focus on short-term projects. In Canada, there has been the hope that such a focus would lead to more long-term development through a sort of "survival of the fittest" selection process, but in the absence of concerted policy efforts at either national or provincial levels, this has not happened. This is despite Canada's significant interest in adult literacy issues and its world-leading research output in the field. The key message here is that programme success does not necessarily lead to sustainability, particularly in marginal fields: policy mechanisms, particularly with regard to funding, must be put in place to encourage sustainability.
- 7.2.6 Another key issue regarding funding involves the distribution of available funds. In many countries, for example, local governments receive relatively small amounts of money from central government to fund local family literacy programmes. This means they have to make difficult decisions about rationing - for example choosing either to fund a small number of projects for several years, or a larger number of projects serving a larger number of families, but for only one year. Similar challenges are faced at EU level.
- 7.2.7 A third funding issue potentially affecting sustainability is that of the differing costs of different types of family literacy programme. In England and Ireland, for example, family literacy provision is particularly expensive because it is based on a model in which both children and parents are expected to improve their literacy skills. To achieve this goal, children and parents receive separate instruction, in addition to

joint, child and parent together instruction. Such provision is more expensive than, for example, programmes in which parents are given a short period of training in dialogic reading, and in which goals for literacy gains are limited to children. In England, there has been some recent experimentation with shorter, more focused family literacy interventions which have more limited goals than typical English 92-hour programmes. (An example of such experimentation is England's Keeping up with the Kids Programme, which cost approximately 10% what standard 92-hour programmes cost.)

- 7.2.8 Holistic family literacy programmes such as the Mother-Child Education Programme, which include both child literacy education and parenting skills training, are also relatively expensive. However, evidence does suggest that this type of programme provides particularly strong long-term benefits.
- 7.2.9 A fourth issue is that concerning government department or departments control family literacy funding. In Turkey, it is planned that in the near future family literacy programmes will be put under not only the Ministry of Education's budget but will draw funds from many other institutional budgets. According to our respondent from the Ministry, this will enhance programme sustainability. In other countries, such as Malta, it is argued that family literacy programmes have benefited greatly and have gained far greater legitimacy through being seen as a small but important part of the Department of Education and receiving its funding from that department. In England, our respondent argues that family literacy funding should not be controlled by the Department of Education. Instead, she suggested a range of complementary funding streams reflecting family literacy's broad benefits; such funding sources would include budgets for Local Communities and for Health. Such an approach would require extensive cross-department cooperation. At least some of such cooperation is evidenced in the Netherlands, where the Departments of Education and Health work together to provide family literacy support. In that country, the Department of Education has chosen to fund Health Service contributions to identifying potential problems regarding early literacy development.

Partnerships

- 7.2.10 In interviews, several policy actors pointed to the key importance of strong partnerships in producing programme sustainability. In Chapter 4, we looked at partnerships with a range of agencies, actors and institutions. The key message from our analysis is that if programmes and policies are to be sustainable, partnerships must be in place. "Whether it be with the communities or the state or the private sector", argued a Turkish respondent, "there has to be some form of partnership". It

would be very difficult for any programme to be sustainable if it was working in isolation, she continued.

- 7.2.11 In Malta, it was argued that to avoid the "washout effect", in which family literacy programme gains are lost when children begin school, it is important to strive for partnerships and arrangements that ensure continuity between family literacy programmes and compulsory education. This has the potential not only to minimise the washout effect but also to ensure that family literacy is seen as part of education's institutional structure. And because the emphasis is on building linkages and continuity between programmes and institutions (family literacy programmes and school) that already exist, new programmes do not need to be created, meaning additional funding commitments are minimal.
- 7.2.12 Creating such partnerships is not easy, despite their capacity to produce gains for both parties. When schools lack an open and welcoming policy on parental involvement, or appear to have limited understanding or interest in the role of families, partnership building can prove very difficult. Malta has achieved what few countries have, in making the relationship between a primary school and family literacy programmes systemic. In many other cases, such partnerships are dependent on individuals and personalities, for example enlightened headteachers. Such personality-dependent partnerships tend to be characteristic of relatively marginal fields such as family literacy, and also tend to be highly unsustainable, as they rely on individual goodwill and continuity of responsibilities and workload. Based on our analysis, we would suggest long-term systematisation or institutionalisation of family literacy messages by including information about family literacy in primary school teachers' initial teacher training.
- 7.2.13 In interviews, representatives from Booktrust placed a great deal of emphasis on the role of partnerships in developing programme sustainability. In particular, they emphasised the advantages to be had in working with partners from a range of sectors, including government departments and private book publishers. A key strength of the relationships they have developed over time with such organisations relates to institutional positioning. For example, Bookstart organisers work directly with book publishers and with government, but do not seek to bring government and book publishers together. Rather, Bookstart works directly with book publishers to create a mutually beneficial relationship, and does the same thing with government, at both national and local levels, while ensuring that the work it does with each organisation feeds into the programme's objectives. This improves efficiency, in large part by ensuring that all negotiations involve only two stakeholders, rather than three or more. It also makes the process less onerous for

partners in government and private industries, as it reduces the complexity of their own negotiations and involvement. The message here is that it is generally more efficient to conduct two bipartite negotiations with such partners than to conduct one tripartite negotiation.

- 7.2.14 Most importantly, however, all partners must feel that they are gaining value from the partnership. Charity is generally unsustainable in the long term, and can negatively affect programmes' sense of agency. Bookstart has developed a model of partnership working that furthers sustainability by focusing, in its communications with national and local public servants, not on why the programme should be supported by policymakers, but how the programme supports policymakers and other public servants in achieving their own goals and work-related responsibilities. That is, the emphasis is less on saying "our programme is worthy of your support" (although that clearly is a key message) and more on showing how "our programme can support you in your role as a public servant, and make achieving your goals and targets easier". As the Director of Booktrust observes, the whole programme should be seen as "a conduit for government policy", helping a number of departments meet a range of objectives.
- 7.2.15 Booktrust has a national development manager who works across policy areas at national level, aiming to show public servants working in departments such as Health, Education and Communities ways in which Bookstart and other book gifting programmes can help achieve objectives in these areas. At local level, regional coordinators help libraries and health services to use Bookstart to meet obligations and achieve objectives, showing them how the programme fits into their area of work and what it will help them to achieve.
- 7.2.16 Furthermore, because Bookstart has managed to gain an important seat at many local and national policy tables, this has benefited partner institutions such as the library service, which overall has a relatively weaker policy position and would struggle by itself to get a seat at such policy tables.
- 7.2.17 This model of partnership working, in which programmes place strong emphasis on the value they can add to partner organisations, provides excellent lessons, but it also takes significant time to develop and requires constant vigilance. In Turkey, for example, one of our respondents observed that, "It really does take time to get [policymakers] to see your way of thinking and to understand how this is going to benefit them, their department or their work".

7.2.18 A key is "trying to speak their language rather than our own language", she argues, citing as an example policymakers' inevitable and nearly universal fixation on quantitative data: "We saw that they were very much concerned about numbers, so we put an emphasis on numbers as well." Once strong relationships were built, and trust had grown, the Mother-Child Education Foundation, administrators of MOCEP, found that policymakers were willing to listen to programme leaders with more open ears, and were less insistent on focusing on quantitative results: "They've come around a little bit more to saying that it's not just about that." A similar experience was related by Booktrust: as government trust in the programme grew over time, it became more interested in long-term, more intangible, less easily quantifiable outcomes of the Programme, and the programme felt less need to justify itself through more readily quantified outcomes.

7.2.19 In the case of Booktrust, as the programme grew from a local project to a national policy, programme leaders actively sought to find ways to add value to a range of policy agendas. The focus was on positioning the programme as a solution to a range of existing policy problems. In Malta, family literacy programmes and policy grew out of just such a focus. There, the starting point was not "we want to implement a family literacy program". Rather, the starting point was one of seeking the best and most efficient out-of-classroom solution to the problems of student underachievement in the classroom. Through a broad review of research, Maltese policymakers determined that a family literacy initiative would best help them achieve their aims.

7.2.20 However, as we shall see, it is essential that programme leaders and policymakers are clear to themselves and others what sorts of aims can realistically be achieved, so that they resist the temptation to overpromise, as happened in Malta.

Quality

7.2.21 Programme quality was cited as the third key factor affecting sustainability. In our research, two key, interrelated and at times conflicting issues arose regarding the importance of quality to programme sustainability. First was the importance of maintaining high-quality staff. Our respondent in Malta concluded that it is better to have a smaller, high-quality programme than to attempt to stretch the funding beyond core programme parameters agreed on by programme stakeholders. In the Maltese case core parameters included using professional teachers rather than volunteers, and having class sizes no larger than 12 families per class. "If we stretch beyond that, we know we will significantly reduce the effectiveness of the program," he noted.

- 7.2.22 In the Netherlands, the two programmes included in our case study stressed that paid, well trained and well supported paraprofessionals were essential to success. Due to competition with other education interventions for government funding, however, programmes are considering greater use of volunteers, but worry that this will reduce implementation quality.
- 7.2.23 While programme quality is essential to sustainability, we also found that policymakers and programme developers need to have an open mind about quality parameters. While it is essential that such parameters agreed upon by all key stakeholders and that quality does not drift below them, sustainability may also require policymakers and programme developers to adhere to the maxim that "The perfect is the enemy of the good." At times, this may require programme developers to avoid the temptation to control every single aspect of programmes carried out in partnership with other organisations. Again, the key here appears to be deciding what elements of the programme are essential, and which can be negotiated.
- 7.2.24 Our respondent from Turkey's Ministry of Education highlighted the importance of teacher quality. The former issue was discussed above. With regard to teacher quality, Turkey has found that as the Mother-Child Education Programme has expanded, maintaining its very high standards for teacher and supervisor quality has been challenging. To address this problem, Turkey is institutionalising the training of family literacy teachers by moving to make family literacy teacher training part of college pre-service teacher training programmes. In the meantime, it is avoiding trainer shortages by building on the pedagogical knowledge and previous training of other teachers, such as those in compulsory education, by giving them additional training so that they can lead family literacy groups.
- 7.2.25 Programme quality is also affected by fluctuations in funding. In some areas of the Netherlands, home-based parental support programmes existed for years, then lost their funding, and have now gained funding again after a gap of several years. Such fluctuations deplete human capital stores in the form of teacher and programme leader quality. As our respondent observed, "All this experience and knowledge has floated away somewhere, and now we have to rebuild it again". She observed that on a policy level, the most important thing to do in times of limited funding is to "keep going on, even on a small level", so as to maintain momentum and, as much as possible, policy profile.
- 7.2.26 Another issue which arose in interview discussions of programme quality was implementation feasibility. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

Research evidence

- 7.2.27 For programmes which have lasted for a lengthy time or expanded from small local projects to being part of national policy, having research-based evidence of efficacy has been key. In Turkey, the potential short and long-term impacts of MOCEP have been studied since family literacy programmes were first launched in the 1980s, due in large part to the early and central role of key universities and scholars in programme development and evaluation. Over the last several decades, Turkey has built up a large body of evidence showing the long term positive impacts of MOCEP. According to our interview respondents, this evidence has been central to the sustainability and expansion of the Programme, encouraging interest and investments from policymakers impressed by the initiative's return on investment.
- 7.2.28 Respondents from the UK's Bookstart programme offered similar messages, although the quantitative research base on that programme is much smaller. In contrast to MOCEP's ongoing series of methodologically robust assessments of impact, quantitative research on Bookstart is limited to a small number of studies conducted in the early years of the initiatives. However, these studies have been highly influential. As one respondent from Booktrust says: "That early research evidence was absolutely fundamental in getting government to take Bookstart seriously as a programme."
- 7.2.29 In other countries where the Bookstart model has been adopted, a similar strategy has been followed – one based on early piloting and evaluation as a way of providing evidence of programme efficacy to governments and encouraging policy commitment and funding. In Germany, this has recently led to extensive national funding through 2018 for a Bookstart programme.
- 7.2.30 In Malta, external research evidence showing the effectiveness of family literacy programmes was used as justification for beginning family literacy within the country. Ongoing evaluations of the new Maltese family literacy programme showed it was producing a range of positive outcomes. However, programme leaders were faced with a problem: they had promised greater results than the programme delivered, particularly with regard to quantifiable short-term improvements in child literacy.
- 7.2.31 We had "unreasonable expectations about the program", observed our respondent. The programme had been promoted to policymakers as a sort of wonder drug that would "solve our literacy attainment issues", rather than as an important component of a broader strategy for improving literacy attainment.

- 7.2.32 Policymakers and programme leaders in family literacy must be aware that, as noted earlier in this report, the causes of poor literacy attainment are complex, manifold and closely linked to broader socio-economic issues that education can only partly address. In Malta, programme leaders were able to show policymakers very strong results across a range of measures, including school preparedness, school attendance, family involvement, and improved home learning environments. However, they were not able to show the strong, short-term child literacy gains they had promised, and on which the initiative's substantial funding was based. This may have been a case of misunderstanding the complex relationships discussed elsewhere in this report between programme variables, participant variables and broader policy context. As detailed by our Maltese respondent, many of the parents participating in the early family literacy programme were disadvantaged mothers lacking not just education, but self-confidence and self-efficacy. One of the unexpected outcomes of the programme was the empowerment of these disadvantaged parents, giving them the skills and confidence to better support their children's literacy development.
- 7.2.33 Policymakers and programme developers who believe that a particular programme inevitably and straightforwardly yields a particular outcome are mistaken. Instead, they must be aware that programmes are highly likely to produce different outcomes for different participants, depending on those participants' characteristics and prior experiences.
- 7.2.34 Policymakers must also be aware that disadvantaged participants may only be able to achieve demonstrable literacy gains after important initial gains are made. This is one of the key messages arising from research on how public services can best be tailored to benefit disadvantaged families (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006). In the realm of family literacy, such gains include improved parent and child orientation to education in general and reading in particular, both for academic purposes and for pleasure.
- 7.2.35 Another such gain includes the simple but essential experience of successfully completing literacy-related tasks. As our interview respondent in Norway argued, some children associate reading with failure – and unless this association is overturned, these children are highly likely to suffer poor literacy throughout their lives. Instead of going from success to success in their educational careers, such children are more likely to do the opposite: "They never succeed, and the experience [academic failure] all day long and every week and every month, and of course in the end the drop out because there is no experience of being a success."

7.2.36 Overturning the association of reading with struggle and failure requires that the child repeatedly experience literacy-related success and achievement, whether through completing a story or a family literacy task or any other range of activities. Such "baby steps" may be taken for granted by skilled readers, but form part of the bedrock of successful literacy development.

Media/public support

7.2.37 In our interviews and case studies, we found several examples of the importance of media support and attention.

7.2.38 The starkest example was that of Bookstart. In December 2010 the new UK government made a shock announcement in which it said that it was going to remove all its annual investment from Bookstart in England. British newspapers and social media sites, in particular Twitter, were soon filled with complaints against this government actions and arguments in favour of continued investment in Bookstart. This led the government to reverse its decision, announcing that it would continue to invest, albeit possibly at lower levels than in the past.

7.2.39 This campaign to maintain government investment in Bookstart appears to have been spurred by broad public support of the programme, and a general view of the initiative as a necessary part of the broader British offering of education-focused welfare services. Such public support for a programme is likely to come only after many years of relatively high profile presence in public life. It is likely that the universal nature of Bookstart was significant in encouraging public support, particularly from the middle classes and other more advantaged groups. It is perhaps telling that other British educational programmes were threatened with funding cuts during the same period, but media and public outcry was reserved for Bookstart and other universal programmes. Educational services which did not benefit the middle classes did not benefit from as significant media/public support. (For example, see discussion of cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance, which is targeted at low SES students, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8411848.stm>.)

7.2.40 Over the lifetime of the initiative, Bookstart has successfully generated valuable media support, facilitating the near universal reach of the programme. In the Czech Republic, another programme aimed at encouraging a national celebration of shared parent-child reading, The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children, has also made strategic and successful use of the media, albeit on a smaller scale than that of Bookstart. According to the Director of the initiative, media support, coupled with patronage from national figures such as former President Vaclav Havel, has been an

essential part of expanding and maintaining the programme. However, the Director notes that even with the support of Czech celebrities, shared parent-child reading is a "hard sell": because it is not the most obviously media-friendly story, gaining media coverage requires great effort. However, both in the Czech Republic and in Poland, efforts have been fairly successful in the past. In the latter country, the initiative All of Poland Reads to Children is recognised by a reported 85% of Polish adults.

7.2.41 The three programmes discussed immediately above embed media campaigns in their broader strategy – a natural and necessary course of action for programmes aimed at encouraging a national culture of reading. Some Member States feature organisations which actively campaign to keep literacy issues in the public eye – a prime example is the Read Write Foundation in the Netherlands.

7.2.42 In Hamburg, Germany, the Family Literacy Programme (FLY) is a more targeted initiative than the three "culture of reading" organisations discussed above, and does not include the generation of media support as one of its objectives. However, in 2010 FLY received the King Sejong Literacy Prize from the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. As the Director of FLY reported to us in an interview, this prize caught the interest of policymakers, encouraging them to provide more support for the initiative.

Policy sustainability

7.2.43 In addition to programme sustainability, policy sustainability is an issue. With programmes, we have seen that sustainability requires flexible attitudes coupled with a firm knowledge of core programme values and elements that cannot be altered. Policy sustainability may require an even greater emphasis on openness to evolution and adaptation. For example, in England, a national family literacy policy was influenced by broader discourses and policy streams, and evolved into a family literacy, language and numeracy policy. This then further evolved into a broader family learning policy, of which family literacy was seen as an elemental aspect. Despite this shift, the objectives of family literacy policies remained distinct from those of family learning. In particular, while the latter focused on participation, family literacy policies focused on an ideal of basic skills improvement for children and adults, with gains for the latter being quantified through the taking of adult basic skills qualifications.

7.2.44 According to our England respondent, one of the weaknesses of family literacy policy in that country was the fact that despite – or perhaps because of – being relatively well funded and well developed, policy-making in this field eventually grew too rigid,

micromanaging issues such as parental attendance. Despite allowing for some adaptations, as discussed immediately above, family literacy policy-making in England went through a period of being overly focused on top-down prescriptions for programmes. This made such programmes too inflexible to meet local and individual needs.

7.3 Programme expansion

- 7.3.1 Programme expansion is a sign of success and can confer increased legitimacy, particularly when a programme becomes part of the national policy landscape, as has been the case with MOCEP in Turkey and Bookstart in the UK. In Norway, the Reading Friends initiative has grown from being a one-school project in 2000 to being offered in approximately 200 schools. Key to its successful spread is the fact that the programme helps schools to meet a range of policy needs and obligations, e.g. with regard to parental involvement and integration of migrant pupils.
- 7.3.2 However, expansion brings with it challenges that can be difficult for programmes to cope with. According to our interview subjects, the key issues impacting sustainability also influence programme expansion. However, some issues become even more important. For example, as a programme expands, e.g. as it makes the shift from local to nationwide, it is necessary to expand the pool of qualified, high-quality staff such as supervisors and teachers. This can be particularly challenging as urban programmes expand into rural areas, as the latter may lack sufficiently large numbers of potentially suitable staff.
- 7.3.3 As has been the case in Turkey, as programmes expand and become part of national policy, they become institutionalised (i.e. systemic as opposed to residual) and may need to be delivered or administered by a different organisation. For example, in Turkey the MOCEP programme is in essence being transferred from the Mother-Child Educational Foundation to the Ministry of Education. This will help to reduce the problem of lack of coordination between local programmes and central government. However, it also means that some Ministry of Education staff will take on supervisory roles and must be trained accordingly.
- 7.3.4 This can lead to problems regarding staff quality and may require special measures regarding training and staff recruitment. As one respondent from Turkey observed, when any programme is scaling up such issues are likely to arise. What is important in such a situation is to ensure that all key stakeholders agree about core guidelines and values for programme quality, so that the programme has clear guidelines

regarding the ways in which it can expand and self-imposed quality parameters it must remain within. We saw an example of this in Malta. All expanding programmes need to reflect on the core elements and activities required for programme fidelity. At the same time, as emphasised in Turkey, partners must be trusted to perform some key tasks in their own way.

- 7.3.5 As noted above, just as programme sustainability requires partnerships, so too does programme expansion – and the latter may require new partnerships, or alterations to old ones. For example, in Turkey the relationship between MOCEP and the Ministry of Education has changed as the programme has grown and developed a more solid reputation. One of the many positive outcomes of this is that the Ministry has gradually become more willing to trust MOCEP’s judgement on contested issues. Booktrust reports a similar process in the UK. Such increased trust can be particularly valuable as a programme transforms from project into policy.
- 7.3.6 As one of our respondents from Turkey observes, the process of expanding a programme from project to policy creates the risk of limiting or weakening the Programme, either through political or budget-driven compromises, or through adding a legislative rigidity to a programme that requires flexibility. As our respondent noted: "When any policy is designed ... They are so busy trying to get it down on paper that it can end up confining you to what's written in the rules and regulations. The last thing that we'd like to see is a uniform programme in a country of 70 million." We have discussed the dangers of overly rigid regulations in England regarding attendance. As the Turkish example suggests, it is essential for policymakers and programme leaders to work together to ensure that in the journey from project to policy, core values such as local flexibility are retained. If not, programmes will fail at local level – and when this happens, the policy has failed.
- 7.3.7 Core values and focuses can be challenged through the attempted imposition by policymakers of a "one size fits all" approach. As observed in Turkey, "Policymakers like to have one size fit all, because it makes their lives easier [but] within this national education programme policy we ensured there was a separate section of the programme for non-literate or low literate" parents.
- 7.3.8 According to Dr Gabriele Rabkin, Director of the Family Literacy Programme in Hamburg, the most challenging phase of a project is the period when policymakers are determining whether to maintain, expand or de-fund the initiative, generally based on a combination of evaluation results and overall policy priorities. In Hamburg, the FLY project was not only maintained, it is being expanded, with the rate currently set at 25 schools per year. As Dr Rabkin observes, policymakers have

provided the programme with "a beautiful chance to implement the project on quite a huge scale". However, she notes, such an achievement means that compromises will be inevitable, as the project is integrated into policy objectives and mechanisms.

- 7.3.9 Despite these challenges, expansion offers many rewards. The transition from project to policy means a programme has received a stamp of approval from key political institutions. This in turn may lead to greater long-term sustainability in times of economic crisis or change of government.
- 7.3.10 Due in part to policy momentum, programmes are sometimes scaled up before they have been adequately assessed for effectiveness. This occurred in the Netherlands with Opstap, that country's version of HIPPY. Between 1991-92 and 1994, the programme grew from 500 participating families to more than 4000. This rapid expansion required a range of implementation tools, including a Management Information System to monitor family participation and child progress. However, research soon made it apparent that despite HIPPY's success in other contexts, the programme was not showing the hoped-for benefits in the Netherlands.

7.4 Policy borrowing and programme transfer

- 7.4.1 Policies and programmes are creatures of context and culture; they cannot simply be taken from one country and implemented in another. In discerning the potential for cross-national policy learning, policymakers must undertake a range of interconnected steps. These include:
- study policies and programmes in other countries
 - discern what is key to the effectiveness of those programmes, and what can if necessary be jettisoned
 - adapt these key elements to their country's own circumstances
 - evaluate processes and outcomes
 - adjust policies and programmes as necessary.
- 7.4.2 Most importantly, as analysts of the policy borrowing and transferral process have argued, policymakers must resist the temptation to borrow and/or enact policies simply because those policies appear to be in favour in a number of other countries (see e.g. Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). Doing so often leads to the transfer not of best practices but merely of the most popular practices.
- 7.4.3 Given the central impact of participant characteristics and local culture on programme impacts (Pawson, 2002), what works in one setting may well be

inappropriate in a new one, unless evaluation and modification are undertaken. When adapting the globally popular HIPPY programme, policymakers in the Netherlands made to major modifications aimed at making the initiative more suitable for the Dutch context (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). The first was to offer the programme in the home languages of families, meaning that there was a Turkish version for Turkish families, an Arabic version for Moroccan families, and a Dutch version for Dutch and Surinamese families.

- 7.4.4 The second modification was to use paraprofessionals who were from the same ethnic backgrounds as participating families. In addition, family groups (for group meetings) were established on the basis of ethnicity. This is in contrast to how the initiative was designed in Israel, where it was established as a community-based Programme, allowing for ethnically mixed groups (Eldering and Vedder, 1999).
- 7.4.5 The decision to have ethnically homogenous groups in the Netherlands is a logical and sensible one, given the different home languages spoken by participating families, and their cultural differences. However, it did have impacts on implementation – for example, sometimes limiting the number of families served by paraprofessionals to a non-economical number.
- 7.4.6 The Netherlands adapted HIPPY to its own context. However, as several researchers (e.g. Eldering and Vedder, 1999) have observed, it expanded the initiative before adequately assessing its effectiveness. In contrast, Hamburg's Family Literacy programme (FLY) was adapted and expanded cautiously.
- 7.4.7 In terms of adaptation, Hamburg programme developers drew particularly on parallel track family literacy interventions in the UK, but adapted the programme significantly to suit local needs. FLY was then implemented on a small-scale, in cooperation with fewer than 10 schools. Only following extensive evaluation did policymakers agreed to expand the initiative.
- 7.4.8 The Mother-Child Education Programme has been transferred to Belgium (French-speaking), France, Cyprus, Germany and Switzerland, and a number of Middle Eastern countries, with apparent success (Bekman et al, 2010). When queried about the elements contributing to the successful transfer of this programme to other European countries, Professor Sevda Bekman, who has studied the programme for years (see e.g. Bekman, 2003), pointed to the following factors, which we will summarise as the four Ps: participants, pilots, partnerships, and project team.

- 7.4.9 *Participant characteristics and cultural validity.* Programmes tend to be more successfully transferred when the new target population has similar characteristics to those as of the programme's "home" population; however, they need not be the same ethnic group or otherwise "identical". It is important to remember that disadvantaged populations can be highly heterogeneous, as are different migrant groups. It is necessary to analyse the needs, beliefs and characteristics of the new target population, while also analysing the objectives and aims of the old and new initiatives. Programmes then must be altered accordingly.
- 7.4.10 This raises an important issue regarding the targeting of family literacy programmes. It also suggests that when seeking to implement a new programme for a particular group, policymakers and programme leaders should engage in a systematic study of potentially transferable initiatives so as to identify those which are most likely to be suitable for the target population. For example, a programme targeted mostly at native-born, ethnically Dutch families may require different methods than one targeted at Moroccan immigrants to the Netherlands, given the different backgrounds, experiences, cultural expectations and norms of the two groups.
- 7.4.11 *Pilots.* Given the extremely strong likelihood that any transferred programme, no matter how successful in its home country, will fail to ideally meet the needs of participants in a different national setting, it is essential that transferred programmes are piloted. Ideally, such programmes would have two pilots: the first to learn what adjustments need to be made, and the second to test the efficacy of the programme once those adjustments are in place. (Booktrust advises a similar model for countries considering Bookstart, encouraging a pilot-evaluation-rollout model.) Evaluation should focus both on processes and outcomes.
- 7.4.12 *Partnerships.* Before implementation, partnerships must be formed. MOCEP recommends close cooperation with the original programme team throughout the process of adapting, planning, staff training and implementing the programme in a new country – policy and programme transfer should be a collaborative process. This will ensure that lessons learned in the home country can be shared with partners in the new site. It will also stimulate reflection and critical thought on the part of programme leaders and policymakers in the home country.
- 7.4.13 *Project team.* In the new country, the programme and policy team needs to have the human, organisational and support capacity required to launch and sustain the programme. This calls for trainer competence in adult and child education, a team competent in time management and technical knowledge, presence of a satisfactory budget, and good relations within the target community. MOCEP emphasises that

programmes seeking to use its model should have very little dependence on unpaid staff, as reliance on volunteers has proven to negatively affect quality and sustainability.

- 7.4.14 According to Bekman, when the above conditions were present, transfer of MOCEP has been successful. However, when all the above conditions were not present, transfer has failed.
- 7.4.15 Kağıtçıbaşı et al (1995) have also written about the initial development of MOCEP in Turkey. This process involved borrowing the HIPPY programme and adjusting it in a variety of ways to increase its potential for successful, widespread implementation. First, she writes, the course content was adjusted so that it could be more easily administered and so that the course could be utilised in a broad range of contexts and with groups having differing needs. The programme was condensed from an initial 60 weeks down to 25, and targeted at a specific age group: five-year-olds.
- 7.4.16 Importantly, the revised model was piloted in different settings, and was then adjusted further based on findings from those pilots (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 1995).
- 7.4.17 The County Clare Family Learning Project (CFLP) in Ireland, featured in a case study in Chapter 10, is currently in the process of being transferred to Romania and Norway. In the latter country, a local integration project has developed a partnership with the local library to deliver a programme based on a County Clare initiative called "Stories in a Box". Tutors from both Romania and Norway were able to learn about the Clare Family Learning Project by attending a special training session offered by the programme and funded by Grundtvig. CFLP has also delivered it workshop to parents and creche staff in Estonia, but as yet has not received a word about whether or not this will lead to a new programme in that country.
- 7.4.18 Looking more closely at the notion of cultural validity and participant characteristics, policymakers and programme developers may disagree over the appropriateness of different pedagogical styles. In particular, the concept of "best practice" can be both a help and, as suggested by Steiner-Khamsi (2010), a hindrance.
- 7.4.19 The notion of best practice is dependent on a hierarchical model of potential practices, with some ranked as better than others and one or a small few considered "best". But as Pawson (2002) argues, programmes do not have effects in and of themselves; they have effects on specific groups at specific times and in specific contexts. Therefore, while the concept of best practice may be useful within a particular context, for example within one country or region, the concept can be a

barrier to culturally valid policy transfer and adaptation. Analysts of comparative education policy, such as Steiner-Khamsi (2010), point to a range of examples of educational policies created in and suited for particular contexts being transposed to contexts where they do not fit, often because of cultural factors.

- 7.4.20 While we were unable to find any research specifically focused on family literacy policy transfer, it may be the case that lessons learned in the broader educational field apply to parents support programmes as well. For example, family literacy programmes in England tend to have a relatively unstructured approach to lessons, viewing parents and trainers as equals and discouraging overtly didactic lessons in which trainers impart knowledge or skills to parents. This is in sharp contrast to family literacy programmes in, for example, Turkey, where parents receive highly structured lessons and instructions. In qualitative interviews, it was reported to us that some Western European observers of more structured, didactic programmes felt that such programmes did not engage in "best practice"—arguing, for example, that MOCEP would benefit from a less structured approach. We reject this analysis, which we find culture-centric. Our survey of programmes throughout Europe, coupled with our review of research, strongly suggests to us that both culture and socio-economic status need to be considered when choosing pedagogical styles. In particular, the research evidence strongly suggests that more disadvantaged and/or less educated families are more likely to benefit from highly structured programmes.
- 7.4.21 In general, there are limited mechanisms enabling systematic policy analysis and sharing across national borders, despite the European Commission's often excellent effort at facilitating networks and cooperation. Booktrust argues that transfer of its own model would be greatly facilitated if there were more European or international support networks helping family literacy programme developers and policy experts share best practice as regards working with their governments to successfully implement and transfer programmes and policies, and to more thoroughly integrate family literacy programmes into regional and national policy-making.
- 7.4.22 A notable exception was PEFAL (Camilleri et al, 2005). Reflecting on this Programme, our Maltese respondent observed that despite the programme being implemented in very different contexts – Lithuania, Romania, Belgium, the UK, Italy and Malta – the programme ended up being remarkably similar in all of those settings. Adaptations and differences were "essentially on supervision levels – will it be once a week, twice a week, once a month, twice a fortnight; will it be two hours or one hour?" – but programme mechanisms and the concerns of participants and staff were essentially the same.

- 7.4.23 Lessons can also be learned from countries which have previously undergone policy shifts that are new in one's own country. Looking at Germany and the UK, the latter made earlier strides in developing programmes and policies that reflected and sought to benefit the country's large number of migrants. Family literacy interventions were one such stride. Germany took longer to realise or accept that it was a high migration state, but like the UK, Germany, or at least some regions, have developed a family literacy initiatives reflective of that reality. Hamburg's Family Literacy Programme is one such initiatives.
- 7.4.24 As indicated above, analysis of one's own local context and the unique needs of target groups is essential. In addition to analysing participant needs, it can also be highly valuable to analyse policymakers' needs. Doing so increases the likelihood of being able to enlist their support in launching, maintaining or expanding a programme. The challenge here is to think not just in terms of how a programme works for participants, but how it works for policymakers in terms of enabling them to fulfil their responsibilities or meet their targets.
- 7.4.25 A similar process is sometimes required when a country experiences government change. Changes in government leadership often create opportunities to import or develop new policies (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010). They also increase the risk of successful programmes being discontinued. A new government will likely require persuasion in order to continue supporting programmes and policies launched by and/or associated with the old government. They will have to be persuaded that the programmes and policies are valuable, both to participants and to themselves. At the time of writing, this is an ongoing issue in the UK, where the new government initially said that it would cut all government funding to Booktrust (£13 million per year), but then backed down from this threat in the face of public and media opposition. At an early stage in this process, Booktrust undertook a range of evaluations assessing their bookgifting programmes' return on investment, both economically and socially.
- 7.4.26 As noted in Chapter 9, when originally establishing its own family literacy Programme, Malta used a combination of research evidence and examples of practice from other countries. In this case, policymakers in Malta undertook an extensive review of the research literature, both with regard to family literacy and with regard to other non-classroom initiatives aimed at improving child literacy through parental involvement.
- 7.4.27 In Hamburg, programme leaders spoke of having drawn heavily on British parallel track programme models and research evidence. This was cited as valuable not just

in terms of showing evidence of programme effectiveness, but also in terms of showing the implementation processes undertaken by previously existing programmes. On surface level, this meant that German programme developers could see outward manifestations of what British programme developers had done. More deeply, and perhaps more importantly, it gave programme adapters concrete examples of how theories and ideas underlying programmes manifest themselves in a particular context. These theories and ideas are particularly important, because programmes themselves cannot simply be transferred from one context to another; they must be adapted. But a better understanding of the thinking underlying programmes and implementation processes will aid adaptation, in part by highlighting what is essential and a Programme, and what is altered or alterable based on context.

- 7.4.28 Several countries and regions, including Malta and Hamburg, have adopted British family literacy models. However, in most cases they have modified the model so that the new programme is "two-pronged" instead of "three-pronged". As discussed in Chapter 9, three-pronged programmes are characteristic of Ireland and England, and have three aims: 1) improving child literacy skills; 2) improving parents' ability to support child literacy development; and 3) improving parents' literacy skills. Outside of Ireland and the UK, two-pronged approaches focusing primarily on objectives one and two are the most common, and view parental literacy improvement as a bonus rather than as a core objective.
- 7.4.29 In some cases, programme leaders have sought to adopt a specific programme or type of Programme, and have pointed to research evidence as support for their choice. In particular, programme leaders in several countries have indicated to Booktrust in the UK that they have engaged in such negotiations with policymakers. For example, the leaders of the Flemish Boekbaby's initiative say that UK research into the effectiveness of Bookstart help to convince local partners in Flanders to provide funding for the initiative. The same was true for Buchstart Hamburg, which says that evidence of Bookstart's success in Britain helped programme developers to convince policymakers in Hamburg that the programme could provide benefits in Hamburg as well.
- 7.4.30 Research has pointed to a range of positive benefits associated with Bookstart, including but not limited to gains in child literacy acquisition. One question is this: how enthusiastic would policymakers in other Member States be about adoption of Bookstart in their own countries, if the early – and thus far only – quantitative studies on Bookstart in the UK had not shown child literacy gains?

- 7.4.31 We pose this question because of the evidence that many otherwise successful programmes, particularly those targeted at the most disadvantaged families, are able to produce a broad range of important gains, but often fail to show short-term improvements in child literacy. Programmes producing broad an important gains, but failing to provide evidence of policymakers' primary interest, may struggle for support when programme leaders are seeking to justify development, expansion or transfer.
- 7.4.32 Other quantitative evidence has also proved valuable in encouraging programme transfer. There is evidence that Bookstart's 2010 Social Return on Investment study (Just Economics, 2010) played a role in Germany's recent decision to implement a well-funded Bookstart programme on a national level. It may be the case that programme developers or those hoping to transfer programmes from another country to their own could find a suitable evidence through SROI-type studies – at least when programmes are suited to such studies.
- 7.4.33 Whatever type of research evidence in other countries is cited, it is essential for programme developers to look at (and for) programme weaknesses as well as strengths. It is also essential to look closely not just at outcomes, but inputs and processes, to assess their feasibility. Examples of practice can and should be borrowed from other countries, but are likely to require modification in new contexts. For example, Buchstart Hamburg has reported to Booktrust that it was inspired by many of the practical ways bookstore is run in Britain, and used those strategies as a starting point for developing its own best practice.
- 7.4.34 Once the Maltese family literacy programme was in place, programme developers shifted their focus to the impacts their provision was having in the Maltese setting. In that setting, they found unexpected benefits – for example, parents were becoming more empowered by the programme than the developers had originally forecast. This empowerment happened across a range of domains, including improved confidence and commitment to their child's education. This provides an excellent example of utilising research and best practice from other contexts, but being open to the potentially unique ways that provision will develop in one's own country, and the potentially unique ways it will impact on families in one's own local context.
- 7.4.35 While Malta developed its early family literacy policies and programmes after a thorough review of research, programmes and policies from around the world, geographical and personal influences can also play a role in programme development. For example, in Germany, which lacks unified, central policy

leadership regarding early childhood education, an interviewee reported to us that programmes do not tend to be linked to policy. As opposed to a centralised, top-down approach such as that of Malta – where policymakers decided to see what approaches exist, assess them with regard to their potential usefulness in a new context, and then implement – in Germany the process has been more haphazard.

7.5 Policy vacuums and pioneers

- 7.5.1 While there has been significant family literacy-related policy development in a small number of European countries – Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK in particular – some Member States suffer a near or complete policy vacuum in this field. For example, in Romania there are no child literacy education policies regarding families. As one respondent observed, there is no "coherent educational preoccupation at the national political level". More broadly, Romania also lacks national guidance for literacy policies in general. However, there are some small, local family literacy projects in Romania, and the country was one of the participants in PEFAL.
- 7.5.2 In Cyprus, schools still generally operate a "closed doors" policy. While there has been a certain amount of rhetoric devoted to increased parental involvement, this has not led to concrete changes in policy and practice. Nor have there been strong pressures from within Cyprus to adapt more open approaches to parental involvement seen in other European countries. According to our Cypriot interview subject, while policy trends in Europe may have shaped Cypriot policy rhetoric to some degree, only bottom-up, locally-generated pressures are likely to make a significant impact on actual policy-making. This suggests that policy transfer or borrowing within the EU is not inevitable.
- 7.5.3 Other Member States may not suffer from family literacy policy vacuums, but are characterised by a lack of policy coherence and direction. For example, an interview respondent in Germany noted that in that country, with a small number of exceptions, projects tended to come and go, with little coherent policy at national or local level to shape provision.
- 7.5.4 Even in England, which was one of the first countries to possess a coherent family literacy strategy, the field is currently characterised by "policy drift". Compared to several years ago, family literacy policy there lacks a clear agenda and strategy.
- 7.5.5 In countries suffering policy vacuums, as well as those characterised by limited, directionless and/or sporadic policy development, there may be an important role

for what Baker and Steuernagel (2009) call "policy entrepreneurs". (Other potentially helpful terms are "policy activists" or "policy pioneers". These alternate terms have the advantage of not appearing to suggest profit-seeking, as the term entrepreneur might.) Policy entrepreneurs are individuals who seek to bring about significant policy change by advancing new ideas. Such ideas may be related to new or still marginal policy fields, or focus on new methods of addressing old problems. In countries such as Romania or Cyprus, this may mean getting a single family literacy project funded. In countries with more established family literacy fields, it may mean successfully advocating so that family literacy becomes viewed as a key part of the education system.

- 7.5.6 Policy entrepreneurs tend to play particularly important roles in bringing to the fore issues that are technically or scientifically complex (Baker and Steuernagel, 2009), and in popularising (amongst policymakers and policy actors) new ways of addressing complex policy problems. As noted in Chapter 4, complex policy problems tend to be particularly challenging to address successfully, as they are created by a complex web of interlinked inputs – e.g. financial and educational inequalities, family structure, and labour market weakness – and produce in turn a range of negative outcomes.
- 7.5.7 Baker and Steuernagel (2009) note that policy entrepreneurs tend to be idea brokers rather than creators of entirely new ideas, and may in many ways be more important to policy development than inventors who bring wholly new ideas, as the former play a more central role in converting ideas to reality.
- 7.5.8 Given their function as idea brokers and popularisers, successful policy entrepreneurs tend to be charismatic, politically skilled, and successful networkers. They also need a high level of credibility in their specific areas of interest.
- 7.5.9 In countries lacking well-established family literacy policy, policy entrepreneurs can and do play an important role. We have witnessed this process in several European countries. For example, one of our Turkish respondents observes that family literacy was almost unheard of when she and her colleagues began working on it in Turkey: "17 years ago, when we first started this work, people don't really know what family education was, what family training was, what parent training was. It was seen as sort of unnecessary, and a little bit extravagant." Now, the Mother-Child Education Programme exists throughout Turkey, is a key part of national education policy, and has been transferred to a number of countries in Europe and the Middle East.

- 7.5.10 The situation faced by Turkish programme developers, researchers and policy activists 17 years ago was in many ways a truer policy vacuum than that faced by countries such as Romania today. In the mid-1990s, very few countries in the world had engaged in significant levels of family literacy programme development and research. Furthermore, Turkey was an impoverished country with limited or no educational policies focused on the role of families. And there was very limited global research to draw on. Relatively little correlational research had yet looked at the impacts of families on child literacy development, and there had been even less research on the impacts of family literacy programmes themselves.
- 7.5.11 In contrast, while Romania and other European countries suffer from internal policy vacuums, they benefit from the wide array of research, programmes and policies existing around the world. Such countries can further benefit from their place within the European Union and the increased opportunities this brings for learning about other EU countries' policies and programmes, and participating in networks with European colleagues. Given the right conditions and actions, positive international factors such as these can influence national policy development, not least through providing resources and encouragement to local and national policy activists.
- 7.5.12 Such policy activism and development can do more than create family literacy policy; it can also shape broader educational policies. For example, in Malta, family literacy policy was well ahead of broader educational policy in its emphasis on the important role of parents and families. By highlighting the central role that families can and should play in education, family literacy policy in Malta helped shape the national educational agenda. This has benefited broader education policy (in making it aware of the central role of families) and has also served to create a "policy space" where family literacy can grow. Malta's newly revised national curriculum includes explicit reference to family literacy, as does the country's national literacy policy. In these ways Malta provides a strong example of pioneering policy and programme development which has, over time and despite numerous obstacles, led to what national policymakers view as a relatively stable, sustainable and institutionalised role for family literacy.
- 7.5.13 Thus far we have discussed the challenges faced by family literacy policy when confronted with national policy vacuums. We have also highlighted successes. However, when discussing policy vacuums, we should not focus only on policy fields; we should also look at how policy is made.
- 7.5.14 As many policy actors both within government and outside of it will agree, one of the chief weaknesses of the policy process is the very strong tendency of policy fields to

exist and work as "silos". Throughout Europe, governments have repeatedly called for "joined-up" policy-making, in which different policy fields work together for the benefit of all. Such joined-up policy-making can occur across policy areas – for example, when departments of education and health work together to develop childhood-wide policies – or across traditional divides within one policy field, for example when specialist in early childhood education and care, primary education and secondary education work together to develop coherent, childhood-long education policies.

7.5.15 In Chapter 4 we discussed childhood-wide policy-making in greater detail. Here, we will limit ourselves to focusing on the ways in which family literacy policy, which has a strong tendency towards focusing on the whole child rather than just, for example, child literacy skills, can serve as a pioneering example to policymakers in a range of fields. By putting the child rather than a particular department or institution at the centre of policies and programmes, family literacy engages in groundbreaking methodological work that has the potential to lay the foundations for future "joined-up" policy methodology.

7.5.16 To cite just one example from our interviews, our respondent from the Netherlands detailed how Opstap programmes and policies in her municipality consciously strive to bring together the efforts of various, often competing policy institutions and fields such as early childhood education and care, primary education, and family policy. As our Dutch respondent observed: "Instead of having three different institutions, we work to make it one." This is challenging, complex, pioneering policy work, drawing the attention and visits of policymakers who are interested in cross-departmental approaches.

7.6 Barriers and obstacles

7.6.1 This and preceding chapters have highlighted a range of obstacles and barriers faced by family literacy initiatives. In this section, we summarise those barriers, while also pointing to examples of solutions, where these exist. For organisational purposes, barriers are classified as either policy-related or programme-related, although there is overlap between the two categories.

Policy barriers

7.6.2 A key obstacle highlighted by family literacy stakeholders is the widespread lack of knowledge of or interest in family literacy on the part of key policymakers, including

many policymakers working in the field of education.

- 7.6.3 In some Member States, this lack of knowledge manifests itself in the form of policy vacuums. In such countries, there is almost no understanding of or policy interest in family literacy. In Cyprus, for example, education is largely seen as the responsibility of schools alone, and schools discourage parental involvement. Thus far, interest in family literacy in other Member States and a European level has had little impact on Cypriot policy. In countries such as Romania, centralised, top-down education planning leaves little room for "new" ideas or initiatives such as family literacy. In Romania, there is evidence of "policy pioneers" working to raise the profile of family literacy and adapt lessons learned from other Member States.
- 7.6.4 Even in countries where parental support programmes are on the policy agenda, family literacy tends to suffer because it lacks a clear policy home. Traditional policy-making tends to be based on institutional and departmental lines: rather than putting the child or the family at the centre of the policy process, developments are often driven by the interests and requirements of particular institutions, such as schools, or particular governmental organisations, such as Ministries or Departments of Education. In addition, policymakers and other stakeholders rarely have "childhood-wide" subject knowledge – for example, policymakers in Departments of Education may have little expert knowledge of family centred interventions.
- 7.6.5 Conflicting policy agendas are also obstacles. Family literacy stakeholders in countries such as England and Ireland have highlighted examples of hostility from schools and education departments. In Ireland, a stakeholder described the importance of cross-departmental policy fora as a means of advancing the interest of family literacy to policymakers in other fields.
- 7.6.6 Some types of family literacy initiatives, such as bookgifting programmes, are dependent on partnerships with health practitioners. Experts in bookgifting initiatives have reported on the challenges associated with developing and maintaining such partnerships, but have also been able to report success in a number of Member States.
- 7.6.7 We found evidence of conflicting funding agendas hampering the development and sustainability of family literacy. For example, in the Netherlands increased funding for early childhood education and care (ECEC) has come at the expense of family literacy programmes. This example points to the broader issue of a lack of overall policy coherence in the development of child literacy strategies, which rarely include family literacy as a key component. One promising counter-example is Malta, which

is currently developing a national child literacy strategy which includes a specific and well-defined family literacy component.

Barriers to programme success

- 7.6.8 Barriers to programme success range from "frontline" implementation issues such as participant recruitment and staff quality to "big picture" issues such as convincing policymakers and other funders of an initiative's importance.
- 7.6.9 As highlighted by studies such as the review of the Berlin Parent-Child reading programme, recruitment and engagement – particularly of disadvantaged families – can be a challenge. The SPOKES intervention, which targeted children with behavioural and literacy problems, reported a recruitment rate of 40%, which researchers rated as good. In Berlin, programme leaders found that it was easier to recruit socially advantaged families, raising the fear that this and other interventions might actually increase educational inequality rather than decrease it.
- 7.6.10 In Turkey, leaders of the Mother-Child Education Programme have spoken of the need to incentivise programme recruiters in order to encourage engagement of harder to reach families. In all Member States, programmes throughout Europe have found that it is much easier to recruit mothers and fathers, even when exceptional measures are taken to recruit the latter.
- 7.6.11 Staff quality was reported as a potential barrier to success, particularly as programmes expand. Staff quality was also reported as a potential obstacle in programme transfer and in times of funding cutbacks, when programmes may be encouraged to rely more on volunteer workers.
- 7.6.12 Ensuring implementation quality is a challenge, with evidence suggesting that disadvantaged parents do a poorer job of implementing programme methods. There is limited research evidence indicating how best to ensure that methods and messages taught by trainers to parents are successfully implemented in parent-child interactions.
- 7.6.13 Just as there is limited research on implementation quality, surprisingly little is known about the cultural validity of programmes. That is, are family literacy initiatives sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of different groups of disadvantaged families? Programme leaders spoke to us about pressures from policymakers to create "one size fits all" programmes that were easier to expand and administer. However, such programmes are unable to meet the distinct needs of

different groups.

- 7.6.14 Looking further at programme-policy integration, advocacy of family literacy can itself be a barrier to success, if programme developers promise more than their initiatives are able to deliver. This was the case in Malta, where family literacy stakeholders promised short-term, quantifiably measured child literacy gains that programmes were not able to achieve. This led to funding cuts.
- 7.6.15 This example highlights another barrier faced by family literacy programmes, particularly those targeted at disadvantaged families: policymakers often demand quantitative measures of child literacy gains. In many cases, and as highlighted by the evidence in our research review, programmes are able to show such gains. However, in many other cases, programmes producing a broad range of socially valuable benefits are unable to show short-term child literacy gains, and so lose their funding.

7.7 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

- 7.7.1 This section provides an overview of key messages in this chapter. Key messages are divided by theme, as follows: Policy sustainability and expansion; Policy borrowing and programme transfer; and Policy vacuums and pioneers.

Policy sustainability and expansion

- 7.7.2 Interviews with policy actors suggest that there are four key factors shaping programme sustainability: funding, programme quality, partnerships, and research-based evidence of success. Some programmes added a fifth factor: media support.
- 7.7.3 Many programmes suffer or disappear because of the short-term nature of much family literacy funding; dependency on short-term grants is not sustainable. Such grants encourage a policy climate in which programmes are more accurately conceptualised as short-term projects, rather than part of a larger family literacy strategy which integrates policy and programmes.
- 7.7.4 Programme success does not necessarily lead to Funding sustainability, particularly in marginal fields such as family literacy. Even successful, long-term programmes which have become part of a nation's policy landscape are at risk of funding cuts during times of economic austerity. In the UK, the new government recently said it would cut all of Booktrust's funding, only recanting after a public uproar.

- 7.7.5 In some countries, the policy experts argued for the benefit of receiving funding from a variety of policy strains. In other countries, it was argued that family literacy was safest and most sustainable with the Ministry of Education as the one fixed funding source.
- 7.7.6 When there is pressure on budgetary resources, more holistic family literacy interventions such as MOCEP and parallel track programmes such as those typical in England may find themselves under pressure to eliminate some programme components if policymakers do not feel that those components are directly contributing to their indicators of greatest concern, e.g. improved child literacy.
- 7.7.7 Our interviews and analysis suggest that effective partnerships are a prerequisite for the sustainability of family literacy programmes. Dependence on charity or goodwill is unsustainable; all partners must feel that they are gaining from the arrangement. Family literacy initiatives such as Bookstart succeed in part because they are able to add value to their partners, both in the private sector and at national and local government level.
- 7.7.8 When creating partnerships with government departments, Booktrust has actively sought to shape its initiatives so that they help government partners achieve their policy objectives. Bookstart is presented to local and national government as a non-governmental tool which helps government achieve its aims.
- 7.7.9 Crafting such relationships and understandings is laborious work. As noted in Turkey: "It really does take time to get [policymakers] to understand how this is going to benefit them, their department or their work."
- 7.7.10 In addition to adding value to government departments and private companies, family literacy programme should strive to "speak the language" of these organisations, at least when working with them. For example, if policymakers are particularly interested in quantitative data, it behoves programmes seeking sustainability to provide such data, even if doing so is somewhat onerous.
- 7.7.11 In many countries, the ideal is for family literacy to work in partnership with the school system. Note that forming a partnership with the school system is not the same as forming partnerships with individual schools. The former implies greater institutionalisation of family literacy in the education system, and a complementary relationship between a primary school curriculum and family literacy programmes. Malta provides a good example of this approach.

- 7.7.12 Programme quality is another key to sustainability, but is not sufficient in and of itself. In interviews, two key issues regarding programme quality was cited: the importance of high-quality staff, and the need to have a strong understanding of core programme values and parameters.
- 7.7.13 Respondents discussing staff quality suggested that it is better to have smaller programmes which do not compromise staff quality than larger programmes which lack the necessary human resources.
- 7.7.14 Regarding core programme values and parameters, interview respondents suggested that sustainability and/or expansion require flexibility. Particularly when working with partners or expanding an initiative, programme leaders may need to be flexible with regard to many programme aspects. The perfect can be the enemy of the good.
- 7.7.15 At the same time, programme leaders must determine the core values and parameters of the initiatives, and insist on adhering to those. Otherwise programmes will lose what made them valuable.
- 7.7.16 Programme quality can also be affected by funding fluctuations, particularly when such fluctuations caused the loss of valuable human capital in the form of knowledgeable and experienced staff.
- 7.7.17 Policymakers and programme leaders cited research evidence as a key to programme sustainability and expansion, particularly with regard to getting government buy-in. Both MOCEP and Bookstart have successfully used quantitative research evidence to gain government funding and policy commitment.
- 7.7.18 Research evidence was also cited in interviews as a key to convincing governments to borrow family literacy initiatives from other contexts. For example, when countries seek to adopt Bookstart, they often refer to positive benefits found in the UK. Before adopting family literacy, Maltese policymakers undertook an extensive review of global research to determine the best type of non-classroom initiative to adopt. They adopted family literacy because the evidence indicated that it was the best option.
- 7.7.19 When borrowing or developing family literacy initiatives, it is important that policymakers understand the research evidence, and understand the significant challenges associated with producing quantifiable child literacy gains. While meta-analyses indicate that family literacy programmes do produce good child literacy improvements, this does not mean that all initiatives will do so in all contexts,

particularly not in their first years. Programme developers therefore need to be cautious about what they promise, and should focus data collection not only on child literacy gains, but also on a range of other measures, including school preparedness, school attendance, family involvement and improved home learning environments..

7.7.20 Overpromising may be a result of misunderstanding the complex relationships between programme variables, participant characteristics and broader policy contexts.

7.7.21 Policymakers must be aware that disadvantaged participants may need to "learn to walk before they can run". Evidence from research on how public services can best be tailored to benefit disadvantaged families indicates strongly that programmes targeted at disadvantaged families should measure success in small steps (Social Exclusion Unit, 2006).

7.7.22 Expansion from project to policy brings with it a range of challenges regarding organisational structures, partnerships, core programme values and programme quality.

7.7.23 During periods of expansion, it is particularly important that programme leaders have clear guidelines regarding the ways in which the programme can be altered, and ways in which it must not change.

7.7.24 For their part, policymakers must be wary of the temptation to impose a "one size fits all" policy, even when doing so greatly reduces administration challenges. National programmes require flexibility to meet local and individual family needs.

Policy borrowing and programme transfer

7.7.25 The field of education is littered with failed attempts at policy and programme transfer. One cause of this failure is the adoption of initiatives which work well in one context but may not be suitable in another, or which may require significant modifications.

7.7.26 "Best practices" may only be best for particular contexts or participants. Alternately, what we tend to call best practices may just be the most popular ones.

7.7.27 The Mother-Child Education Programme has been transferred to European and Middle Eastern countries. Successful transfer of the programme has been credited to what we will refer to as the 4 P's: participant characteristics; pilots; partnerships; and

project teams.

- 7.7.28 Analysis of MOCEP's successful transfer indicates that programmes tend to be more successfully transferred when the new target population has similar characteristics to those as of the programme's "home" population; however, they need not be the same ethnic group or otherwise "identical". It is important to remember that disadvantaged populations can be highly heterogeneous, as are different migrant groups. It is necessary to analyse the needs, beliefs and characteristics of the new target population, while also analysing the objectives and aims of the old and new initiatives. Programmes then must be altered accordingly.
- 7.7.29 Booktrust advises a pilot-evaluation-rollout model when transferring its Bookstart programme to new countries. MOCEP suggests that transferred programmes should ideally have two pilots: the first to learn what modifications need to be made to make the programme more suitable for its new context, and the second to test the efficacy of the programme once those adjustments are made.
- 7.7.30 Just as with programme sustainability and expansion, partnerships are recommended for successful programme transfer. MOCEP also recommends that the new project team have very little dependence on volunteers.
- 7.7.31 It is also recommended that policymakers and programme leaders engaged in programme transfer plan in advance how the new initiative can best help policymakers and potential partners meet their own needs.
- 7.7.32 When using research evidence and examples of practice from other countries, it is essential to look at (and for) weaknesses as well as strengths. It is also essential to look closely not just at outcomes, but inputs and processes, to assess their feasibility.
- 7.7.33 Those engaged in programme transfer should be open to the possibility of unexpected outcomes, both positive and negative. In Malta, for example policymakers found that family literacy interventions lead to unexpected levels of parental empowerment amongst disadvantaged mothers.
- 7.7.34 Given the appropriate political will, policy borrowing and implementation may be able to occur more rapidly in smaller Member States, where there may be fewer – or less distant – barriers to change. This was the case in Malta.
- 7.7.35 The best policy transfer strategy might not be to find better programmes elsewhere, it might be to better support programmes a country already has.

Policy vacuums and pioneers

- 7.7.36 While there has been significant family literacy-related policy development in a small number of European countries – Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK in particular – some Member States suffer a near or complete policy vacuum in this field.
- 7.7.37 Other Member States may not suffer from family literacy policy vacuums, but are characterised by a lack of policy coherence and direction. Even in England, which was one of the first countries to possess a coherent family literacy strategy, the field is currently characterised by “policy drift”. Compared to several years ago, family literacy policy there lacks a clear agenda and strategy.
- 7.7.38 In countries suffering policy vacuums, as well as those characterised by limited, directionless and/or sporadic policy development, there may be an important role for policy pioneers, who advocate on behalf of family literacy.
- 7.7.39 Because family literacy policy by nature puts the family is at the centre of the equation, it may provide an excellent example to policymakers in other fields who are seeking to craft "family-wide policies, rather than those based around institutional or departmental lines.

Chapter 8 The role of research: evidence-based policy-making

8.1 Introduction

- 8.1.1 In Germany, Professor Nele McElvaney has researched and developed family literacy programmes. In an interview, she argued that the development of the field will be hastened by greater use of higher quality research. "I don't think there's much point in continuing to just do programmes which are either not evaluated, or are evaluated with standards which are not state of the art" in research terms, she said. This echoed sentiments voiced in several meta-analyses, arguing that the poor methodological standards of much primary research means that even when many programmes have been evaluated, this generates limited useful evidence about those programmes' effectiveness.
- 8.1.2 However, Professor McElvaney does not argue that quantitatively measured reading improvements are the only measure that should be focused on, particularly given the broad range of positive outcomes that have been found in family literacy interventions. For example, in the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme, positive benefits highlighted by children included spending more time with their mothers. Such "soft" or more intangible outcomes are important in and of themselves, and may also contribute to long-term literacy improvements. The key, Professor McElvaney argues, is for programme leaders and policymakers to decide in advance what variables are important to them, and then take the appropriate steps to accurately measure those variables in a way that will enable other researchers to utilise the

8.2 Numbers and stories: complementary use of quantitative and qualitative data

- 8.2.1 Quantitative evidence is particularly important for policymakers, as it allows them to show adequate return on investment within the context of stiff competition across a range of policy areas for programme funding. While in some countries this focus on quantitative evidence has greatly contributed to policymakers' support of particular programmes, programme developers throughout Europe reported to us that they feared a tyranny of quantitative evidence, in which programmes were evaluated only on a very small number of quantitatively measured "hard" outcomes – in particular,

child literacy gains as measured immediately after programme completion – while a range of other important benefits were viewed as unimportant – or as insufficient for maintaining funding. For example, in Hamburg, our respondent pointed to high levels of pressure to produce positive evaluations, and a lack of policy interest in achievements that were not quantitatively measured and expressed. In the Netherlands our respondent argued that a focus on short-term child literacy gains meant that policymakers overlooked: 1) how difficult it is for disadvantaged children to achieve quantitatively measured literacy improvements in the short-term; and 2) other positive outcomes of family literacy programmes, such as improved parent and child orientation to reading, improved motivation, improved parent-child bonding and other "soft" outcomes which may contribute to long-term academic success.

- 8.2.2 In Birmingham, UK, the Parent and Child Language programme provides services to a range of disadvantaged and extremely disadvantaged families, with the latter category including maternal victims of domestic violence, asylum seekers and refugees. It would be unfair to expect a programme with such a disadvantaged intake to show short-term, quantifiable child literacy gains. Such a programme is better conceived of and evaluated as a service that is part educational, part social support. For the most disadvantaged families, services such as this are vital first steps on the road to creating stable, healthy environment in which children can learn and progress.
- 8.2.3 Strategies for assessing programme effectiveness based on a broader range of direct and indirect measures are supported by research evidence showing that the most important aspects of parental involvement are some of the most subtle (Jeynes, 2005). Desforges and Aaboucher (2003) concluded that the most obvious manifestations of parental involvement, e.g. participation in school functions and checking home work, were not the most important in determining child academic outcomes. Instead, these researchers pointed to a more nebulous collection of parental attitudes and behaviours, which they characterised as "good at-home parenting". Likewise, Jeynes (2005), summarising the research literature, notes that it was not particular parental actions or activities that were most closely associated with pupil achievement, it was parental expectations and style. These, he argues, created an orientation to education that served children in a range of positive ways. Family literacy interventions which help inculcated such orientations, attitudes and behaviours may produce greater long-term child literacy gains, even if those gains are not quantifiably apparent in the short term.
- 8.2.4 As discussed in Chapter 3, qualitative meta-analyses possess many strengths, and can be extremely valuable to policymakers seeking to make decisions based not on

hunches or compelling arguments, but on quantifiable statistics. However, as Pawson (2002), a leading meta-analytic researcher and theorist, argues, meta-analyses on their own do not offer sufficient guidance to policymakers and programme designers. In particular, it must be remembered that those the presentation of quantitative data tends to mask a great deal of interpretation. As has been observed by more than one social scientist, perhaps the key difference between qualitative and quantitative data is that with the former the researchers' interpretation is made overt, while with the latter it is hidden. Numbers are not necessarily facts.

- 8.2.5 We join Pawson in cautioning against the temptation for policymakers to make decisions about policy or programme design solely on the basis of net effects tables in meta-analyses. While this is an important part of the process, it is not the only, or even the only essential, part of evidence-informing policymaking.
- 8.2.6 Summary tables in meta-analyses can, if used incorrectly or over-confidently, be dangerous. Instead of focusing only on effect sizes (e.g. Programme X produces effect Y), a better approach is to think in terms of Programme X, administered by stakeholder A, with participant group B, in context C, produces (or produced in this instance) effect Y.
- 8.2.7 This of course has considerable impact on transferability. It is not enough to know that a particular programme worked somewhere, with some group of people. It is necessary to try to ascertain why and how it worked in that place, at that time, for those people. This will require qualitative research, as well as qualitative research focused on specific issues, such as parental implementation of programme techniques.
- 8.2.8 To a large degree, researchers will only be able to understand the impacts of these variables when a programme has been tested in different environments and on different groups. This reality can of course be extremely troubling for policymakers, who are under great pressure to get things right the first time, and who do not often have the luxury of reviewing and revising initiatives. However, this unfortunate political reality in no way lessens the clear and compelling need for pilots, quantitative and qualitative evaluations of those pilots, revisions to programmes and (ideally) even more research.
- 8.2.9 Looking briefly at the weaknesses inherent in measuring child literacy gains immediately after completion of relatively short programmes, one of the strengths of Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme is that programme impacts have

been measured over the long term, providing researchers and policymakers with evidence not just of short-term impacts, but of improved literacy performance throughout children's school careers. In the broader field of ECEC research, the most famous and influential work is that conducted on the Perry High/Scope project. Again, the richness of this programme's data consist primarily in the fact that programme participants have been followed over the course of their lives, well into middle adulthood. The evidence accrued from both these projects highlight the considerable strengths of long-term, longitudinal data collection.

- 8.2.10 One type of quantitative data which may be useful, in which could feasibly be used more, is that produced through Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses. SROIs do not seek to quantify short- or even long-term educational gains produced by programmes; instead, they seek to quantify all of the social benefits engendered by those programmes. In the field of early childhood education and care, perhaps the most famous example of this approach is the large body of evidence on the Perry High/Scope initiative in the US (see e.g. Schweinhart and Weikart, 1997). Instead of limiting themselves to assessing cognitive and other gains in childhood, researchers have used longitudinal data to assess programme benefits across a range of policy areas, for example improved employment and lower crime rates.
- 8.2.11 SROIs do not necessarily need to be longitudinal. In the UK, a 2010 SROI analysis of Bookstart has estimated return on investment over a 37-year period beginning in 2009/10 (Just Economics, 2010). This analysis produced what the authors called a conservative estimate of savings to society of £614 million on an investment of £9 million – i.e. £25 saved to every £1 invested. This is a similar figure to that produced by longitudinal, real-time analyses of the Perry High/Scope programme.
- 8.2.12 As family literacy interventions are likely to yield a range of long-term impacts covering a variety of policy areas –because of their positive influences on cognitive development, child socio-emotional development, and parent-child bonding – it may be sensible for SROI analyses to become a more readily used component of programme leaders' and policymakers' strategic systems for programme advocacy.

8.3 Limited availability of high quality European data

- 8.3.1 A key finding from our review of research in this field is that, with the exception of a small number of countries, particularly Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK, there is a dearth of high quality European primary research in the field of family literacy. This is evidenced by, among other factors, the tendency of European researchers to rely

on non-European (primarily North American) primary research to provide data for meta-analyses. Few European studies of family literacy outcomes have been methodologically robust enough to be included in meta-analyses, even those conducted by Europeans. This has implications for the generalisability of the messages and recommendations from these meta-analyses: North America, and in particular the US, are characterised by a range of factors not present in Europe, such as the US's history of slavery and longer history of being a high-migration country. The US is also characterised by greater levels of inequality and a smaller social safety net. All of these factors may influence programme outcomes.

- 8.3.2 A better stock of European primary research would also allow greater attention to the influence of participant and programme variables. Some progress has been made with regard to the influence of programme type. For example, sufficient research has been done on dialogic reading to suggest that while it is valuable for children aged 2-3, it is less so for older children. Because of the relatively large amount of research that has been done on dialogic reading programmes (albeit with most of these programmes being outside Europe), it has been possible for Mol et al (2008) to conduct a meta-analysis looking specifically at the effects of this type of programme. Such a meta-analysis can arrive at more confident conclusions than a broader review of a much wider variety of programmes. In the latter category we would include broad meta-analyses of family literacy programmes, as the concept of family literacy includes a very wide range of approaches. For example, van Steensel et al's review of 21 programmes includes a wide range of programme types, including dialogic reading, period reading, HIPPY-type initiatives such as Opstap, and a variety of other approaches. Comparing such a broad range of approaches enables researchers to draw no more than broadbrush conclusions about the impact of family literacy initiatives in general. More high-quality research on specific types of programmes would provide the basis for more meta-analyses of the type that Maul and colleagues were able to carry out on dialogic reading initiatives.
- 8.3.3 However, while noting the critical importance of high quality primary research to the development of family literacy programmes and policy, we would also like to emphasise that research in itself is insufficient for advancing policy. Looking at another relatively marginal field, adult literacy, the experience of Canada over the last two decades may be informative. In that country, great attention has been paid to developing an adult literacy evidence base. However, this attention to research has not been complemented effort to ensure that policymakers and other policy actors continue to advance the field. The result has been an extremely rich pool of research, but little in the way of sustainable policy and programme development.

8.4 Research gaps

8.4.1 In addition to the lack of high quality European primary research, we would like to highlight a range of other gaps we found in the European evidence base for family literacy. Van Steensel (personal communication) suggests that future family literacy research needs to focus on a range of areas. These include:

- combining studies of impact with analyses of implementation quality
- developing a better understanding of implementation quality and the reasons underlying poor implementation quality (as well as good implementation quality)
- developing a much better understanding of the factors influencing the transfer programme contents from trainer to parent, and then from parent to child
- understanding better how programmes are received by families from different backgrounds, so that policymakers and programme developers can better tailor programmes to particular needs.

8.4.2 Van Steensel also suggests a range of programme characteristics that primary research might focus on (personal communication). Key suggested focuses are:

- type of activity, e.g. shared reading, training parents to train children, parents reading aloud to children, children reading aloud to parents
- staff quality and training. For example, are staff professionals, semi-professionals, volunteers or all three – and how does this affect programme quality?
- delivery mode: for example, home visits, group meetings, or a combination
- delivery site -- for example, home based, centre-based , or a combination.

8.4.3 Some programme characteristics are easily measured and are often included in programme data collections and research. An example is programme duration. A relatively large amount of data also tend to be collected regarding participant characteristics; however, as some researchers have noted, primary studies often collect surprisingly sparse data about whether or not anticipating families are at heightened risk of literacy difficulties.

8.4.4 Brooks et al. (2008) identified two major gaps related to the improvement of parents' literacy skills in parallel track Family Literacy programmes. These were: 1) the limited amount of quantitative evidence on benefits to parents' skills; and 2) the lack of research comparing the benefits to parents in family literacy programmes versus stand-alone adult literacy programmes. Both issues are of relevance in Member States where funding for parental support programmes comes from adult literacy funding streams.

8.4.5 In the long run, there is the potential to save a great deal of time and money by investing now in rigorous assessment of different approaches to family literacy in different contexts, so as to determine the most ideal practices for different participants in different countries and cultures. Because family literacy is still at a relatively nascent stage, there is still the opportunity to use research to help best influence future programme and policy developments before path dependency (Pierson, year) makes policy flexibility less possible. Coordinated, cross-country research initiatives could make this process more cost-effective.

8.5 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

8.5.1 This section provides an overview of key messages in this chapter.

8.5.2 Our review of the available meta-analyses in this field suggests that family literacy interventions can be and often are successful in improving child literacy. On average, family literacy programmes appear to be more effective than the majority of educational interventions. For a detailed discussion of these issues, see our research review, Chapter 3.

8.5.3 Both our research review and our interviews with family literacy policy stakeholders indicated that there is a strong need for a much larger body of high-quality European research in this field. Without exception, the meta-analyses in this field have been forced to rely almost exclusively on non-European primary research studies, due to the serious lack of sufficient numbers of methodologically robust qualitative studies undertaken in Europe, particularly outside Turkey, the Netherlands and the UK.

8.5.4 A greater number of methodologically robust studies of family literacy provision would not only improve our understanding of the degree to which such initiatives work, it would also greatly improve our understanding of how, why and for whom programmes work, and under what conditions.

8.5.5 The need for more high-quality research is not limited to quantitative studies; there is also a need for a more robust collection of high-quality qualitative research, as the latter can help answer complicated questions about the underlying reasons for programme success and failure for particular groups under particular conditions.

8.5.6 Particularly important research gaps exist with regard to issues including: implementation quality; the impact of disadvantage on programme implementation;

comparative effectiveness of different programme types for different participant groups.

- 8.5.7 It is important to accurately measure programme impact on child literacy, but evaluators should also seek to measure other important outcomes, such as improved parental and child attitudes to reading. However, McElvany emphasises that for outcomes such as this to be valuable to researchers and policymakers, they must be measured in a methodologically rigorous manner.
- 8.5.8 As effectively illustrated by programmes such as Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) and the Perry High/Scope project, long-term, longitudinal assessments of programme effectiveness provide messages which are both exceptionally valuable and highly encouraging.
- 8.5.9 Because of their positive influences on a range of developmental areas, including cognitive development, child socio-emotional development, and parent-child bonding, family literacy interventions are likely to yield a range of long-term benefits in a variety of policy areas. Therefore it may be sensible for Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses to become a more readily used component of programme leaders' and policymakers' strategic systems for programme advocacy. A recent SROI of Bookstart in the England produced an estimate of savings to society over the next 37 years of £614 million on an investment of £9 million – i.e. £25 saved to every £1 invested.
- 8.5.10 Increased policy attention is being paid to the long-term economic rationales for early childhood education and care. Family literacy stakeholders should capitalise on this interest by emphasising the potential long-term, socially beneficial outcomes of family literacy interventions – for example by utilising Social Return on Investment analyses, or by pointing to positive meta-analytic conclusions.
- 8.5.11 While evidence is essential for advancing policy, it is not in itself sufficient. Research needs to be linked with forward-looking policy action to ensure that policymakers and programme developers utilise findings, as well as to ensure that researchers' agendas best meet the needs of policy and programme development.

Chapter 9 Summary of Member States' family literacy initiatives

9.1 Introduction

- 9.1.1 This chapter provides an overview of family literacy policy environments and initiatives in a range of countries around Europe. It also provides information about key programmes in those countries. National overviews are not meant to provide comprehensive lists of programmes in each country, but rather to focus on one or two key initiatives, as well as key policy developments. National overviews also include introductory lists of key academic research analysing initiatives in each country.
- 9.1.2 Following the national overview, we highlight family literacy programmes in several Member States not featured in our national overview. This list is meant to be indicative only, rather than comprehensive. Where academic research of such programmes exists, we have provided references.
- 9.1.3 Appendix 4 contains a collected list of national programmes and academic research on those programmes.

9.2 Overview of national policies and programmes

- 9.2.1 In this section we provide brief overviews of key family literacy policies and programmes in 11 European countries. This overview is not meant to provide an exhaustive study of family literacy policies and programmes in Europe; rather it is meant to provide readers with an indicative sample of national initiatives and environments. In particular, we seek to highlight successful, ongoing initiatives in each country, where those exist. Where no such initiatives exist, we provide a brief discussion of reasons for this.

Cyprus

- 9.2.2 We did not find evidence of family literacy policies or programmes in Cyprus, with one exception. As part of our research, we conducted an interview with a Cypriot academic, Dr Loizos Symeou of the European University in Cyprus, who has conducted research into parental involvement in Cypriot schools (see e.g. Symeou,

2001; 2002). Dr Symeou has also recently taken part in a research project which investigated whether Greek-Cypriot families affected their children's literacy skills acquisition and cultural literacy by modifying the quantity and quality of family literacy and cultural events (Symeou, 2009). Child literacy was tested orally before and after the intervention, and researchers found that children taking part in the intervention experienced greater improvements in their literacy skills and cultural literacy than did children in the control group. Dr Symeou and his colleagues concluded that interventions of this type can help schools and families collaborate to better support children's literacy development, and that schools can play a role in encouraging interventions of this type.

- 9.2.3 However, a key characteristic of this intervention was its nature as a stand-alone, short-term research project. Writing in 2007, Rose observed that there is very limited parent-school collaboration in Cyprus. Culturally and institutionally, schools have traditionally been seen as the sole sources of educational expertise regarding children, with parental experiences and behaviour viewed as incidental at best.
- 9.2.4 In our interview, Dr Symeou confirmed the presence of these attitudes, observing that there appear to be few if any Cypriot family literacy programmes. More broadly, he observed that while the notion of increased parent-school collaboration has been discussed, such discussions tend to be on an abstract, rhetorical level; very little progress has been made. Incidences of parent-school collaboration do occur, but these are isolated rather than systemic.
- 9.2.5 He further observed that trends in other European countries and at EU level towards increased parental involvement and greater interest in family literacy appear to have had no impact on Cyprus. If change were to come on these issues, he suggested, it would require bottom-up, grassroots pressure, rather than examples from other Member States or the European Commission.

Selected research on Cypriot family literacy initiatives:

- 9.2.6 *Cypriot families' role in young children's cultural literacy.* Paper (SYMEOU, L.) presented at the Symposium 'Reducing the intergenerational gap through the interaction with common cultural grounds in different European countries' of the 7th International Conference of the European Research Network About Parents in Education (ERNAPE) 'Diversity in Education' (August 26-28, 2009, Malmö, Sweden).

Czech Republic

- 9.2.7 While we were not able to find any information about family literacy policies generated by the Czech government, we were able to conduct an interview with the Director and Founder of a nationwide, non-governmental reading initiative known as Celé Česko čte dětem (The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children). The campaign has a motto: “Let us read to children 20 minutes a day. Every day!”
- 9.2.8 This initiative, led by a non-governmental organisation, receives some financial support from various government departments, including the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The programme has also received support from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Its patron is former President Vaclav Havel.
- 9.2.9 The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children is a long-term, high profile campaign aimed at raising and maintaining public awareness. Czech Television has been a media partner of the Celé Česko čte dětem project since January 2009, and a number of well-known public personalities have contributed to media campaigns.
- 9.2.10 Similarly to Bookstart in the UK and various other European countries, The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children seeks to encourage a culture of shared parent-child reading. The programme's objective is not primarily to improve child literacy; rather it seeks to help children establish a lifelong reading habit, to help parents play a more influential and helpful role in positively influencing their children's socio-emotional development, and to encourage parent-child bonding, using stories as the medium. Despite its focus on socio-emotional benefits of shared reading, the programme does support the potential for child literacy gains through shared reading. The overall objective is to encourage the symbiotic emotional and intellectual development.
- 9.2.11 The emphasis is sharing the pleasure of reading. As the programme director stressed, the aim of the programme is not to encourage parents to tell children, "Go read a book". It is to encourage parents to say, "Let's get a book and read it together." Particularly in an age when both parents may be engaged in paid labour, and/or caring both for younger and older generations, the programme seeks to provide busy parents with a ready mechanism for sharing time with and showing love to their children.
- 9.2.12 In our interview with the programme’s Director, she stressed that the biggest challenge the programme faces is the ongoing battle to secure funding, particularly from government departments. Like many programme leaders, she stresses to

policymakers that family literacy initiatives such as hers yield significant social return on government investment, both because private partners are also utilised and because increased child reading for pleasure is associated with a range of long-term positive outcomes.

9.2.13 The Director expressed hope that the Czech Republic's recent mediocre performance on PISA would encourage the government to invest more in family literacy initiatives such as hers, but noted that similar performances on previous PISAs had not had such an effect.

9.2.14 Partnerships with private organisations have proven vital in this regard. However, unlike in the Bookstart model, in which the NGO formed partnerships with children's publishing companies, many of the private partners of The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children appear to be supporting the organisation because it is seen as a good cause, not because they also stand to benefit financially from encouraging a culture of reading. This may limit the long-term sustainability of such funding.

9.2.15 The initiative appears to have been highly successful in using the media to gain publicity and support. For example, in 2009 it won first prize in a competition to determine the Czech Republic's best NGO television advertisement. In our interview, the Director cited the need for positive and regular media exposure as a key lesson from the programme. Such exposure is encouraged if programmes can acquire the patronage of important figures, such as former President Havel.

9.2.16 The Whole of Czechia Reads to Children is an example of a successful programme transfer – it is modelled on a Polish initiative, "All of Poland Reads to Kids", which has then running since 2001. This programme is discussed in more detail in our overview of Poland.

9.2.17 In addition to this Programme, the Czech Republic also features a short, yearly initiative known as "A Week of Reading". Sponsored by the Librarians' and IT Workers' Union, this initiative aims to enhance literacy and promote a love for reading among children, enlisting the support of parents and other family members.

Germany

9.2.18 In an interview conducted as part of this project, Professor Nele McElvany of the Technical University Dortmund, who has conducted extensive research into family literacy and who also led the development of the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme, observed that at national level, Germany lacks coherent family literacy policy. However, she observed that the field may be becoming more interesting to

politicians, as Germany seeks to modernise its institutions and cultural attitudes regarding early childhood education and care.

9.2.19 There are comparatively few German family literacy programmes, and little research in the field. McElvaney and van Steensel (forthcoming 2011) point to three primary reasons for the lack of family literacy policy and programme development in Germany:

- Despite rhetoric and legislation regarding parental involvement in schools, education in Germany is seen as the job of schools, not parents
- Compared to many other Member States, informal education in Germany has little tradition of intergenerational education programmes
- Not until recently has early childhood education been seen as an important issue in Germany.

9.2.20 A regionalised approach to education is characteristic of Germany, where Lander are responsible for their own education policies. In Hamburg, the Buchstart programme has been running since 2007, and distributes book packs to children aged 10-12 months via paediatric practices. The packs include parental reading guides in German, Turkish, English and Dari. Approximately 18,000 children receive the packs each year, accounting for 92-95% of eligible families.

9.2.21 Germany does possess some national, non-governmental organisations which work as important policy actors and activists in promoting family literacy. These include Stiftung Lesen, which is dedicated to promoting reading in Germany. The organisation, which develops and manages a range of reading projects, including those to focus on family literacy, is financed by a combination of government and private funding. In 2008 Stiftung Lesen launched a national Bookstart programme, Lesestart, which includes parent guides in Turkish and Russian. This programme, which builds on a three-year pilot in the Free State of Saxony, has recently received significant government investment. At the time of writing, government funding was estimated to be approximately €26 million, to be utilised through 2018.

9.2.22 In conducting our research for this report, we were able to undertake an interview with Dr Gabriele Rabkin, Director of Hamburg's successful Family Literacy programme. The Programme, often identified simply as "FLY", encourages the acquisition of writing skills among parents and children, and has four primary components:

1. sessions with children in preschool education, in which they are given language support and introduced to the world of writing

2. sessions with parents, in which they are given information about ways they can help their children learn to read and write
3. parents taking part in classes at sometimes
4. joint out-of-school literacy and cultural activities, shared by parents, children and teachers.

9.2.23 Following a successful pilot at fewer than 10 sites in Hamburg, the initiative recently received the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, and is being expanded to serve a greater number of families and schools, in the context of the ongoing Hamburg School Reform programme. Beginning in 2009, the Hamburg Ministry for Education has expanded the programme at a rate of 25 new participating schools per year (UIL, 2010). The Family Literacy programme is also part of the city-state's policies promoting the inclusion and achievement of children and young people from migrant backgrounds.

9.2.24 In Chapter 7, we discuss success factors and challenges associated with programmes which evolved from being small, relatively isolated projects to being incorporated into national or regional policy.

Selected research on German family literacy initiatives:

9.2.25 **Initiative: Lobo vom Globo**, a parent focused programme for the promotion of phonological consciousness for preschool children.

- Koglin, U., L. P. -, et al. (2008). "Parent-oriented programme for promotion of phonological consciousness in preschool-age children." *Kindheit Und Entwicklung* 17(3): 173-181.

9.2.26 **Initiative: Berlin Parent-Child Reading Program**

- McElvany, N. and C. Artelt (2007). "The Berlin parent-child reading program: Conceptual design and evaluation." *Psychologie in Erziehung Und Unterricht* 54(4): 314-332.
- McElvany, N. and C. Artelt (2009). "Systematic reading training in the family: Development, implementation, and initial evaluation of the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme." *Learning and Instruction* 19(1): 79-95.

Ireland

9.2.27 In Ireland, family literacy initiatives have existed since the 1990s. As in England, government-funded family literacy provision tends to be "parallel track", in which both children and parents aim to improve their literacy skills. This approach has significant impacts on family literacy's location in the policy landscape, shaping

funding streams and patterns of advocacy and agenda setting. For example, the primary advocate for family literacy in Ireland is the National Adult Literacy Agency.

9.2.28 However, family literacy is seen as relevant to child policy. The 2009 Child Literacy and Social Inclusion report, which supports Ireland's "Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools" policy, highlighted the potentially beneficial role of family literacy, specifically mentioning the Clare Family Learning Project as an example of best practice in Ireland in supporting child literacy outside formal school learning. In Chapter 10, we provide a case study of that project.

9.2.29 According to Bailey (2005), Ireland's conceptualisation of family literacy as a component of adult literacy policy means that a key challenge for the former is to build on the philosophy and methods associated with the latter. In many ways, this may be a positive, as adult literacy teachers tend to have a strong understanding of the importance of "starting where the learner is", and recognising and respecting the experiences and viewpoints of learners. Both of these positions are important in family literacy, and represent a positive contrast to the more negative or distant attitudes sometimes characteristic of school-based approaches to disadvantaged families. Conversely, being seen as part of adult literacy provision can have negative implications for family literacy, particularly if it encourages schools to view family literacy as outside their remit.

9.2.30 In Ireland, family literacy is delivered by region Vocational Education Committees in partnership with adult education centres, community projects, libraries and schools. (NALA, 2004) while not all local areas have family literacy programmes, some, such as County Clare, boast well-established initiatives. (See case study, Chapter 10.)

9.2.31 In 2008, 3,551 participants engaged in mainly short family literacy programmes in 2008, or 7% of the total number of adult literacy students (NALA, 2009).

Malta

9.2.32 Malta has a particularly well integrated family literacy policy-programme environment. Family literacy programmes first began in Malta in 1999, but coherent policy activity began in earnest in 2001, when the government established the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) (Spiteri and Camilleri, 2003). The FES was conceived as a policy mechanism enabling the Ministry of Education to provide, via a third party, a range of educational initiatives focused on literacy support, parental empowerment and lifelong learning (UIL, 2008). It was also seen as a potential mechanism for improving school practice.

- 9.2.33 The FES has developed and managed a range of family literacy programmes. The first, started in 2001, was called Hilti, which is Maltese for "My ability". The programme had two primary objectives: to improve children's literacy skills, and to improve parents' ability to help their children develop those skills. Spiteri and Camilleri (2003) refer to this as a "two-pronged" approach, which they contrast with British "three pronged" methods (p. 1). By "three pronged", the authors indicate the emphasis in UK government-funded family literacy programmes on achieving three primary objectives: 1) improving child literacy skills; 2) improving parents' ability to support child literacy development; and 3) improving parents' literacy skills. In Malta, the emphasis both in Hilti and subsequent programmes, has been on achieving the first two objectives, with parental literacy improvement seen as a bonus.
- 9.2.34 The Hilti programme has received highly positive qualitative evaluations. Perhaps more encouraging than that, however, is the fact that Maltese policymakers responded to inevitable programme weaknesses not by cutting Hilti but by producing complementary programmes aimed at filling gaps identified in those evaluations. For example, two key weaknesses cited in evaluations were: 1) the fact that the initiative was effectively off-limits for most working parents, due to its provision immediately after school; and 2) the programme was unable to meet the needs of families of children at severe risk of educational failure (Spiteri and Camilleri, 2003).
- 9.2.35 To address the first gap, FES piloted evening Hilti courses. To better serve the most disadvantaged, the Nwar (Late Blossoms) programme was established, with a limit of two families per tutor and obligatory parental participation (Spiteri and Camilleri, 2003).
- 9.2.36 A more structural weakness of the Hilti initiative, according to Spiteri and Camilleri, is that it was not well enough integrated with primary school teaching and learning. As Mr Spiteri noted in an interview conducted for this research project, one of the primary focuses of current family literacy policymaking in Malta is to better integrate family literacy and classroom learning. Ongoing policy developments seek to embed family literacy more securely in the education system, encouraging individual schools and the school system as a whole to view family literacy programmes as a valued and vital complement to and partner in their own efforts to improve child literacy.
- 9.2.37 Other family literacy initiatives have included the following (FES, 2010):
- "A Book is a Treasure" (Ill-Ktieb), a Bookstart-type pilot project which launched in 2007. The project gifted book packs to children aged 2-3 years when their

parents registered them for school. Funding came from UK publishers, the Merlin Library and local councils in Malta

- Id f'Id (Hand in Hand) Parent Empowerment Programme. This initiative includes three projects home-based educational discussions and hands-on activities with parents: the Parent-to-Parent Meetings Project, the Parent-to-Parent Courses Project and the Community Literacy Outreach Project
- The Malta Writing Programme, which helps parents to nurture their children's creative writing skills, and to develop their own literacy skills. The emphasis for children is on creative writing rather than emergent literacy.

The Netherlands

9.2.38 As noted in our research review, the Netherlands has produced a particularly high volume of excellent quantitative and qualitative research on family literacy programmes. This body of research is in part a product of that country's relatively extensive policy and programme activity in the field.

9.2.39 According to Eldering and Vedder (1999), three sets of cultural factors have worked together to encourage family literacy provision in the Netherlands: 1) the low socio-economic status of particular immigrant groups, and the consequent poor prospects for the children; 2) government policy on minority ethnic groups; and 3) cultural and pedagogical behaviours characteristic of those immigrant groups, and conflicting with broader Dutch norms.

9.2.40 McElvany and van Steensel (forthcoming 2011) emphasise a number of overlapping policy trends contributing to the development of family literacy initiatives. These include the country's educational disadvantage policies, which grew out of concerns about educational inequality, as well as a desire to improve the life chances of Turkish, Moroccan and other migrants to the Netherlands.

9.2.41 These cultural and political factors led to the Netherlands being an early adopter of the Israeli-developed Home Intervention Programme for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), which first came to Holland in 1987. By 1994 more than 4000 families were participating in the Dutch HIPPY initiative (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). However, this expansion highlights one of the key dangers of policy and programme transfer. Researchers later concluded that HIPPY had very limited impacts in the Dutch context, despite successes elsewhere (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). Unfortunately, sufficient evaluation had not taken place before the programme was rolled out on a broad scale, thus leading to significant losses in time and funding

9.2.42 As a response to these negative evaluations, a revised version of Opstap (sometimes called Opstap Opnieuw, or “Step-up Anew”) was developed. This initiative utilised many components of the HIPPY approach, while altering others to better suit the socio-cultural context of the Netherlands and its target immigrant families (van Tuijl and Leseman, 2004). Various permutations of the Opstap initiative are discussed in our research review, and Chapter 10 includes case studies of two local Opstap programmes.

9.2.43 In terms of policy context, the Netherlands is representative of many wealthy European Member States, in that it has experienced a surge of immigration over the last few decades, leading to significantly increased ethnic diversity in a society that was formally marked by high levels of homogeneity. Challenges associated with integrating and assimilating new immigrants have been heightened by conflicts between traditional Dutch views of child rearing, which highlight the importance of the development of independence and autonomy, and the views of Moroccan and Turkish immigrants, who tend to strive to cultivate obedience and respectfulness in children (Eldering and Vedder, 1999). Furthermore, immigrant groups have tended to view education, including the development of literacy skills, as the responsibility of schools, rather than of schools and parents together. Family literacy initiatives are seen as a mechanism for helping migrant parents better adapt to the Dutch culture and education system.

9.2.44 In addition to its relatively extensive policy and programme development, the Netherlands is a European leader in family literacy research. A selection of that research is listed below.

Selected research:

9.2.45 **Initiative: Opstap (Dutch HIPPY)**

- Eldering, L. and P. Vedder (1992). "Opstap: een opstap naar meer schoolsucces." (Opstap (Dutch Hippy): A step up to more success in school for ethnic minority children?) Eindrapport van het OPSTAP experiment in Amsterdam. Amsterdam/Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger
- Eldering, L. and P. Vedder (1999). "The Dutch experience with the home intervention programme for preschool youngsters (HIPPY)." *Effective early education: Cross-cultural perspectives*: 235-258

9.2.46 **Initiative: Opstap Opnieuw**

- van Tuijl, C., P. P. M. Leseman, et al. (2001). "Efficacy of an intensive home-based educational intervention programme for 4-to 6-year-old ethnic minority children

in the Netherlands." *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 25(2): 148-159

- van Tuijl, C. and P. P. M. Leseman (2004). "Improving mother-child interaction in low-income Turkish-Dutch families: A study of mechanisms mediating improvements resulting from participating in a home-based preschool intervention programme." *Infant and Child Development* 13(4): 323-340

9.2.47 **Initiative: Opstapje (Junior Step up)**

- Kohnstamm, G. A., G. Meesters, et al. (1997). "Je kunt het waarnemen maar niet meten. Onderzoek naar de effecten van Opstapje op van huisuit Turkse kinderen ("you can observe it, but you can't measure it. A study into the effects of Opstapje ("junior step up") on Turkish-Dutch children)." Unpublished report
- van Tuijl, C. and P. P. M. Leseman (2004). "Improving mother-child interaction in low-income Turkish-Dutch families: A study of mechanisms mediating improvements resulting from participating in a home-based preschool intervention programme." *Infant and Child Development* 13(4): 323-340

9.2.48 **Initiative: Sounding Sounds and Jolly Letters (Klinkende Klanken en Lollige Letters),**

a home-based pre-reading programme which utilised parents as a tutor. The initiative was an adaptation of a Danish school-based kindergarden phoneme awareness and letter programme called "Towards initial reading: phonological awareness". Dutch children at a higher familial risk of dyslexia received this home-based intervention programme.

- van Otterloo, S. G., A. Van der Leij, et al. (2006). "Treatment integrity in a home-based pre-reading intervention programme". *Dyslexia* (10769242) 12(3): 155-176
- van Otterloo, S. G., A. van der Leij, et al. (2009). "Early Home-Based Intervention in the Netherlands for Children at Familial Risk of Dyslexia." *Dyslexia* 15(3): 187-217

Norway

9.2.49 Rose (2008), wrote that a number of European countries have strong traditions of adult education, but do not as yet appear to have engaged in extensive family literacy policy and programme development. Rose includes Norway in this group of countries, and our experience in gathering information for this research project supports that assertion.

9.2.50 Norway does have a very strong tradition of parental involvement in education in general and schools in particular. This is supported by legislation: the Act of Primary and Secondary Education places a duty on schools to collaborate with parents, both with regard to curriculum and plans for the school. In an interview conducted for this

project, a Norwegian educationalist highlighted a uniquely Norwegian system of parental involvement: a group of parents of schoolchildren are chosen by government to advise policymakers on educational issues. This small group of parents, which is funded by government, is meant to be the voice of parents and families, and has access to ministers and other senior policymakers. As our Norwegian respondent, who is a member of this parents group, observed: "We are invited in to discuss whatever matters we would like to discuss. It's very easy [for us] to speak to politicians at our Parliament and to ministers. We can ask to have a meeting with almost anybody and they always say yes."

9.2.51 The Norwegian Government Strategic Plan for Education includes a legal requirement of support for bilingual parents, and as noted in our case study (Chapter 10) of the Norwegian "Reading Friends" initiative, there is growing interest in early intervention to support the development of educationally disadvantaged children.

Romania

9.2.52 The research for this project included an interview with two Romanian experts working in the field of early childhood literacy development, one of whom has extensive experience attempting to develop the field of family literacy in Romania. Key issues and messages arising from this interview are included in chapters 4-8.

9.2.53 Both Romanian experts were clear that there is a vacuum of government-driven family literacy policy in Romania. This point was also made by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL, 2008) in an overview of family literacy projects around the world. According to this overview, literacy policy in Romania is still not connected to the family, nor are family literacy practices seen as relevant to or by the school system. More generally, the Romanian school system takes some formal steps to encourage family-school collaboration, including a requirement that parents sign a contract agreeing to support their children's learning. In practice, however this contract is not acted upon and parental involvement is low.

9.2.54 Family literacy policy-making in Romania does not appear to have been moved forward by the country's participation in the PEFaL (Parent Empowerment for Family Literacy) Network of Family Literacy Programmes, which were developed as an EU Grundtvig project in 2001. PEFaL programmes were developed in small areas in five other countries – England, Flemish-speaking Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Romania – based on a Malta's Hilti initiative. However, there have been ongoing attempts by non-governmental policy actors to develop family literacy programmes. In Chapter 10, we provide a case study of one such programme.

Slovenia

- 9.2.55 Like many European countries, Slovenia has been unpleasantly surprised by its results in international literacy surveys, and has used these results as a spur to develop family literacy policy and programmes. In Slovenia, the survey which first gave impetus to the development of family literacy was not PISA but was instead the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which, in 2000, found 77% of Slovenian adults performing at the two lowest literacy levels (out of five).
- 9.2.56 Following this result, the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education developed a family literacy programme aimed at families in which parents had a low level of education, i.e. 10 years of schooling or less (Knafljic, 2005). The Programme, "Read and Write Together", is targeted at children aged 6-9. Programme developers suggest that this is an ideal age, because the level of literacy skill required is not too high to be overly challenging for most parents with poor education (*ibid*). Programme leaders also suggest that parents of children at this age are particularly motivated to help their children get a good start in their academic career. Furthermore, this is an age when children tend to have a high level of trust with their parents, and emotional bonds tend to be particularly strong.
- 9.2.57 The programme was developed after study of family literacy approaches in other countries, particularly the UK and the US. However, there was no direct transfer of a pre-existing program: programme developers place strong emphasis on lessons learned in earlier literacy projects in Slovenia, and adapted a social practices approach to literacy, as this was viewed as most suitable for Slovenian families. (A social practices approach views literacy not primarily as a context-free skill, but as a complex, context-dependent phenomenon strongly shaped by social and cultural practices, norms and capital.)
- 9.2.58 As indicated above, family literacy in Slovenia is part of the adult education policy stream. In an as yet unpublished overview of family literacy programmes in Slovenia, being prepared for the European Commission, Estera Mozina of the Read and Write Together Programme, outlines the Slovenian policy context. Several key policy documents in this field support the development of adult literacy and an emphasis on intergenerational literacy approaches. These include the Adult Education Master Plan (2004), the National Literacy Strategy (2005), and the strategy for lifelong learning (2007). The Slovenia Institute for Adult Education has a mandate from the government to monitor the Read and Write Together initiative on an annual basis, and is currently undertaking an assessment of the long-term impacts of family literacy provision in Slovenia. Results of this evaluation were not available as of the writing of our report, but are expected to be available by mid-2011.

9.2.59 In addition to the Institute for Adult Education, other key stakeholders and policy actors shaping family literacy in Slovenia include the Ministry of Education and Sport, which has provided funding for family literacy since 2001. According to Mozina, this funding has been relatively consistent, with the exception of 2008 when it was delayed, leading to an almost complete lack of family literacy provision that year.

Research:

9.2.60 *Knaflic, L. (2005). "How we started: the family literacy programme in Slovenia." Literacy 39(2): 81-84*

Turkey

9.2.61 Turkey has one of the most well developed and successful systems of family literacy policy and programme integration in the world. This is a result of a number of factors, including: Turkey's early adoption and development of family literacy programmes, the large body of methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative research conducted on those programmes, the positive benefits for children and parents shown by the research, strong leadership and stewardship of programmes by governmental and non-governmental policy actors, and strong partnership working between governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

9.2.62 Turkey is characterised by a high level of socio-economic disadvantage, and lacks a national Early Childhood Education and Care system. Within that context, the Turkish government has been eager to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are well prepared to succeed in school, and has used family literacy initiatives as a key tool in pursuing that objective.

9.2.63 Key challenges cited by the Turkish government and highlighted in our case study of a Turkish family literacy programme (see Chapter 10) include:

- Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to attend pre-school, thus increasing educational inequalities. This lack of attendance tends to be a product of parents not being able to afford pre-school fees or of parents not emphasising early learning.
- Parenting styles may not be providing the optimum emotional, social and intellectual environment for learning. Parents – mothers in particular – are often keen to help their children succeed academically, but lack the knowledge and skills to do so.

- 9.2.64 The key family literacy NGO in Turkey is the Mother-Child Education Foundation (Anne Çocuk Eğitim Vakfı, or AÇEV), which engages in advocacy work and coordinates a number of programmes, including the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) and the Father Support programme.
- 9.2.65 The former is Turkey's largest family literacy initiative. It was developed in 1982 as part of a longitudinal research project known as the “Turkish Early Enrichment Project” and undertaken by Bogazici University Istanbul. In 1992 the programme was revised, under the auspices of initial co-operation with the Non-Formal Education General Directorate (MoNE). The following year AÇEV was established and the implementation of the MOCEP programme was increased. The programme works with socio-economically disadvantaged mothers and their children between 5 and 6 years of age who do not have access to pre-school education services and who are “at risk” because of their environmental conditions. The majority of the mothers involved left school after completing the primary level.
- 9.2.66 The programme has an annual target of 25,000 mothers and children. So far 6657 courses have been delivered to 292,076 mothers and children in 78 provinces in Turkey. The completion rate is 80%. The programme has also been transferred to Turkish migrant families in other countries.
- 9.2.67 In 2010 the programme was adopted as the National Parent Education Programme under MoNE. AÇEV remains responsible for trainer training, programme and resource revision and research. The programme is implemented by the Ministry of National Education’s General Directorate for Apprenticeship and Non-Formal Education with whom AÇEV works in close consultation.
- 9.2.68 MOCEP is a prime example of holistic, wrap-around family literacy initiatives which focus both on child literacy development and on improving mothers' parenting skills. Such programmes are underpinned by the theoretical argument that children's long-term cognitive/academic gains are much more likely when programmes seek not just to improve child literacy skills, but when they also seek long-term improvements in the child's developmental environment – in particular, the broad range of parenting strategies and skills which impact on children's socio-emotional development and orientation to education (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2001).
- 9.2.69 Long-term longitudinal research evidence indicates that this approach has been highly successful. This evidence discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Chapters 4-8 include extensive analysis of the programme, its successes, and key messages that can be taken from the programme by policymakers and other stakeholders.

9.2.70 Turkey also features a large Father Support Programme, which as of 2007 had served 13,000 fathers and children in 22 provinces of Turkey (Bekman, family literacy programmes – examples from Turkey) The yearly target is 6,000 fathers and children, and the target population is fathers of children aged 2-10. The purpose of this Programme, writes Koçak (2004) is to increase fathers' awareness of their importance to their child's academic and socio-emotional development. Like MOCEP, the programme has an emphasis on parenting skills.

Selected research:

9.2.71 Initiative: Turkish Early Enrichment Project

- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., (1992). Research on parenting and child development in cross cultural perspective. In M. Rosenzweig (Ed.), *International psychological science* (pp. 137-160). Washington, DC: APA
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., (1997). Parent education and child development. In M.E. Young (Ed.), *Early child development: Investing in our children's future* (pp. 243-272). New York: Elsevier
- Kağıtçıbaşı, C., D. Sunar, et al. (2001). "Long-term effects of early intervention: Turkish low-income mothers and children." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 22(4): 333-361.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., Sunar, D., Bekman, S., Cemalcılar, Z. (2005). *Continuing effects of early intervention in adult life: Preliminary findings of Turkish early enrichment project second follow up study*. Istanbul: Mother Child Education Foundation Publications

9.2.72 Initiative: Mother-Child Education Program

- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., Bekman, S., & Göksel, A. (1995). Multipurpose model of nonformal education: The Mother-Child Education Programme. *Coordinators' Notebook*, 17, 24-32
- Bekman, S. (2003). From Research Project to Nationwide Programme: The Mother-Child Education Programme of Turkey, in T.S. Saraswathi (Ed.), *Cross-cultural Perspectives in Human Development* (pp. 287-325). India: Sage Publications
- Bekman, S. (2004). "Early Home Intervention to Promote School Readiness: A Turkish Experience." *NHSA Dialog: A Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Intervention Field* 7(1): 16 – 34

9.2.73 Initiative: Father Support Program

- Koçak, A. (2004): Evaluation report of the Father-Support Programme. Retrieved February 28, 2006 from <http://www.acev.org>

9.2.74 **Initiative: Preschool Parent-Child Education Programme (PPCEP)**, which aims both to support emergent literacy skills and improve parent-school relationships. The target population is children who are attending nursery classes and their parents

- Bekman, S. & Topaç, B. (2000). Ovçep Anadolu Pilot Projesi Değerlendirme Araştırması

UK / England

9.2.75 In the United Kingdom, most family literacy provision and policymaking falls under the auspices of adult learning policy streams. Adult learning policy (and therefore much family literacy policy) is devolved to each of the four nations constituting the UK: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. Our overview of the primary government-funded family literacy initiative will focus on policy and programme development in England, as will our overview of Bookstart.

9.2.76 In England, government-funded family literacy programmes are primarily of the "parallel track" model, in which programmes seek to improve the literacy skills of children and parents. Programmes of this sort have a relatively long pedigree in England, and have been associated with improvements in child literacy (Brooks et al, 2008). Spiteri and Camilleri (2003, p.1) refer to this as a "three-pronged" approach, indicating that there are three primary objectives: 1) improving child literacy skills; 2) improving parents' ability to support child literacy development; and 3) improving parents' literacy skills. Most family literacy programmes around the world include only the first two objectives – even programmes partially modelled on three-pronged British initiatives.

9.2.77 The evidence regarding adult improvements is mixed. Some research has found gains for parents, while other studies have found otherwise (Brooks et al, 2008). The evidence is clearer regarding successful parental development of a range of other competencies which better enable them to support their children's literacy development. These include: improved confidence regarding books and stories; greater understanding of the importance of shared parent-child reading; and improved self-efficacy.

9.2.78 Key stages in the development of family literacy policy in England include the mid-1990s evaluation of Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes, which found

positive gains in literacy achievement for children and parents (Brooks et al, 1996). A follow-up study two years later found that these benefits and many others had been sustained (Brooks et al, 1997). These programmes and the studies which assessed them gave impetus to the growth of family literacy policy and programmes, both in the UK and elsewhere.

9.2.79 At the time of writing, family literacy initiatives represent one element of a broader family literacy, language and numeracy initiative in England. This initiative in turn comes under the umbrella of a broader set of family learning programmes, which have the general aim of bringing children and adults together in learning, and of helping parents learn how to better support their children's cognitive development. During the period 2008-2011, the government is spending an estimated £25 million per year on the delivery of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes, in addition to a further £12 million per year on broader family learning initiatives. It is estimated that approximately £12-15 million per year is being spent on family literacy alone (Swain et al, 2009). The family learning budget in England has remained consistent since 2004/05.

9.2.80 In addition to improving child and parent literacy skills, English family literacy programmes aim to help parents better support child literacy development. However, funding for these programmes comes from the adult learning policy stream, and programmes are meant to provide opportunities for parents to achieve literacy qualifications. One of the primary policy objectives of parallel track family literacy programmes is to provide poorly educated and/or low literacy adults with a low-pressure, first step back into formal adult learning, taking advantage of parents' strong desire to improve their ability to help their children succeed.

9.2.81 Bookstart is a national bookgifting programme which aims to encourage parents and carers to share books, songs and rhymes with their children from a very young age. The initiative is delivered in partnership with all 151 local authorities in England. Health visitors, libraries and Early Childhood Education and Care centres distribute free book packs to children at three stages: at ages 6-12 months, 18-30 months, and 3-4 years. In addition to partnering with local and national government institutions, Bookstart has developed extensive partnerships with children's book publishers, who support the programme by providing books for free or at a nominal cost. For every £1 of investment by government, Bookstart generates an additional £4 from private sector funding. The programme maintains complete control over the selection of books for the packs.

9.2.82 While there is quantitative evidence that participation in the programme improves child literacy outcomes (Moore and Wade, 1993; Wade and Moore, 1998; Wade and Moore, 2000), the primary focus of the initiative is on encouraging a culture of shared parent-child reading for pleasure. Booktrust, the independent national charity which administers Bookstart and other bookgifting programmes, emphasises not just the potential literacy gains associated with the Programme, but also the capacity of shared book reading to improve child socio-emotional development and parent-child bonding (Just Economics, 2010).

9.2.83 In 2010, Booktrust commissioned a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of Bookstart. This analysis concluded that for every £1 the government invested in Bookstart, society received £25 in social and economic benefits (Just Economics, 2010). That is, the £9 million contributed annually to Bookstart by the UK government yields an estimated social return of £614 million. According to the evaluators, this is likely to be a conservative estimate.

9.2.84 Despite these and other positive figures, and the growing numbers of European and non-European countries developing their own Bookstart programmes, in late 2010 the new UK Government announced plans to cut all funding for Booktrust in England. However, following significant public and media uproar, the Government reversed this decision. However, at the time of writing, it is unclear to what extent government will continue funding the charity.

9.2.85 In the process of conducting our study, we were able to interview three senior members of Booktrust, including the charity's Director. These interviews are drawn on in chapters 4-8 of our report.

Selected research:

9.2.86 **Initiative: Bookstart**

- Wade, B. and M. Moore (1998). "An Early Start with Books: literacy and mathematical evidence from a longitudinal study." *Educational Review* 50(2): 135-145
- Moore, M. and B. Wade (2003). "Bookstart: A Qualitative Evaluation." *Educational Review* 55(1): 3-13
- Hall, E. (2001). "Babies, Books and 'Impact': problems and possibilities in the evaluation of a Bookstart project." *Educational Review* 53(1): 57 – 64
- Hines, M. and G. Brooks (2005). "Sheffield Babies Love Books: An Evaluation of the Sheffield Bookstart Project." Sheffield: University of Sheffield

9.2.87 **Initiative: Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes**

- Brooks, G., T. Gorman, et al. (1996). Family literacy works The NFER evaluation of Basic Skills Agency's demonstration programmes. London, Basic Skills Agency
- Brooks, G., T. Gorman, et al. (1997). Family literacy lasts The NFER follow-up study of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Programmes. London, Basic Skills Agency
- Brooks, G., J. Harman, et al. (1999). "Family Literacy for New Groups: The National Foundation for Educational Research Evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's Programmes for Linguistic Minorities, Year 4 and Year 7." London: Basic Skills Agency
- Brooks, G., P. Cole, et al. (2002). Keeping up with the Children: evaluation for the Basic Skills Agency by the University of Sheffield and the National Foundation for Educational Research, London: Basic Skills Agency

9.2.88 **Initiative: REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy)**

- Hannon, P., A. Morgan, et al. (2006). "Parents' Experiences of a Family Literacy Programme." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 4(1): 19-44
- Morgan, A., C. Nutbrown, et al. (2009). "Fathers' involvement in young children's literacy development: implications for family literacy programmes." *British Educational Research Journal* 35(2): 167-185

9.3 **Selected list of European programmes and research**

9.3.1 In this section, we list initiatives in Member States other than those discussed above, paying particular attention to programmes which have been the subject of academic research.

Belgium, Flemish-speaking

9.3.2 Boekbaby's (Bookbabies) was launched in 2005 and is coordinated by Stichting Lezen. The information in this overview comes from a programme summary provided by Boekbaby's.

9.3.3 As of 2010, 45 Flemish communities (out of 328) are full participants in the Boekbaby's initiative. In these communities, local healthcare centres distribute book packs to approximately 10,000 children at the age of six months. When children are 15 months old, parents are encouraged to pick up a second book pack from the local library. Approximately 5000 toddlers receive the second pack.

- 9.3.4 In other communities, parents visiting healthcare centres are provided with brochures containing information about reading with their children. In the long-term, the initiative aims to provide book packs to all families in Flanders.
- 9.3.5 Partners in the initiative include the public library system and the Flemish government agency responsible for young children and families (Kind en Gezin). As in the UK model, Boekbaby's works in close partnership with local libraries and healthcare centres, and receives private funding.
- 9.3.6 According to Boekbaby's coordinators, an essential tool for convincing local partners in Flanders to invest in the initiative was research on Bookstart in the UK showing positive positive child literacy gains (see e.g. Moore and Wade, 2003).
- 9.3.7 *Research: Vanobbergen, B., M. Daems, et al. (2009). "Bookbabies, their parents and the library: an evaluation of a Flemish reading programme in families with young children." Educational Review 61(3): 277-287.*
- 9.3.8 The Turkish Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP), was implemented in Gent in 1998, in partnership with the Gent Turkish Women's Association. The programme ran in its standard form – i.e. with focuses both on child education and mother support – until 2002, and was provided in Turkish for Turkish migrant mothers (Bekman and Koçak, 2010).
- 9.3.9 Since 2002, however, only the Mother Support element of the programme has been implemented. This component of the programme aims to provide mothers with improved parenting skills so they can better support their child's educational and socio-emotional development.
- 9.3.10 *Research: Bekman, S. and Koçak, A. (2010) Mothers Reporting: the Mother-Child Education Programme in Five Countries. Istanbul: Mother-Child Education Foundation.*

Denmark

- 9.3.11 In 2009, Denmark launched Bogstart, its own version of Bookstart. In a report for Booktrust UK, Bogstart provided information on which the following paragraphs are based.
- 9.3.12 The programme has been implemented in areas of 15 cities with high levels of disadvantage; approximately 6700 children received book packs last year.

Implementation of the programme is largely led by librarians, who work in partnership with local organisations, including housing associations and unions.

9.3.13 Currently, the programme is scheduled to receive government funding for the years 2009-2012, but is aiming for permanent investment. As yet, no evaluation of the programme has taken place.

France

9.3.14 From 2008-2010, the National Agency for the Fight against Illiteracy (Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illétrisme, or ANCLI) ran "Actions éducatives familiales" (Educational activities in families). This family literacy project was designed in part to improve parents' skills, knowledge and understanding with regard to how to support their children's educational development, including literacy. All parents in the programme had poor literacy and were living in rural poverty. Many had experienced a difficult educational career, which had made them reluctant or even resistant with respect to school.

9.3.15 In late 2010 an evaluation of the project found a range of positive improvements in parents' ability to support their children's education. The clearest effects concerned improved relations with the school. The parents' relationship with school evolved in positive and constructive ways: they knew more about it, visited it more often, and were more involved in its life. Growth in confidence in this regard is attributed in part to a process of "desacralisation" of the school (p. 18).

9.3.16 All three projects were effective in at least one respect, which is given the apparently novel French name of *parentalité*. This is defined (p. A7) as: "support for parents so that they play a full part in teaching [their children] basic facts, emerge from 'invisibility', and take their place in social and civic life."

9.3.17 Another French initiative is the Turkish Mother-Child Education Programme, which has been implemented in France since 2000 (Bekman and Koçak, 2010). This programme has not yet been quantitatively researched; however, qualitative analysis of the programme is available in: *Bekman, S. and Koçak, A. (2010) Mothers Reporting: the Mother-Child Education Programme in Five Countries. Istanbul: Mother-Child Education Foundation.*

Greece

9.3.18 In Greece, Parents' Schools provide training to parents so they are better able to address their children's needs and meet the challenges facing the contemporary

family.

- 9.3.19 *Research: UIL (2008) Family literacy: a global approach to lifelong learning. Effective practices in family literacy and intergenerational learning around the world. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning.*

Italy

- 9.3.20 In South Tyrol, the Department of Culture for the German- and Italian-speaking populations has run a bilingual Italian and German Bookstart-type programme since 2007. The programme provides free books at six and 18 months. Project website: http://www.provinz.bz.it/kulturabteilung/jugendarbeit/bookstart_de.asp

Poland

- 9.3.21 "All of Poland Reads to Kids" is a social campaign encouraging shared parent-child reading, and provides the basis for the later "Every Czech Reads To Kids". The Polish initiative, launched in 2001 by the non-governmental "All of Poland Reads to Kids Foundation", aims to encourage a culture and a celebration of reading, stressing to parents that shared parent-child reading benefits children both academically and socio-emotionally, while also improving parent-child bonds. Media research in 2006 indicated that 85% of polls were aware of the campaign. Website: <http://allofpolandreadstokids.org/all-of-poland-reads-to-kids>

Portugal

- 9.3.22 "Crescer a Ler" is a nascent Portuguese Bookstart initiative provided in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Leya, a Portuguese publishing group. Website: www.cresceraler.apei.pt.
- 9.3.23 The "Read and Win" programme is part of the National Reading Plan. This is a government initiative designed to promote reading and writing skills through a broad range of interventions, including those targeting the family. Through the initiative, teachers meet with parents to discuss with them the advantages of shared parent-child book reading. Website: http://www.euread.com/projects/details/read_and_win/

9.4 Key messages

- 9.4.1 European Member States feature a variety of different types of family literacy programmes. However, there appear to be limited data regarding the extent to

which such programmes have been implemented. Turkey is exceptional in that robust participation and outcome data are available for the country's flagship family literacy initiative, the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP).

- 9.4.2 MOCEP is particularly widespread: the programme has an annual participation target of 25,000 mothers and children. More than 6,600 courses have been delivered to just under 300,000 mothers and children in 78 provinces in Turkey. In Ireland, participation figures from 2008 indicate that 3,551 participants engaged in mainly short family literacy programmes that year (NALA, 2009). Irish family literacy programmes are part of the adult literacy stream, with family literacy accounting for approximately 7% of the total number of adult literacy learners.
- 9.4.3 Data are less readily available for other initiatives. For example, there are no national participation data for the UK's government-funded, "three-pronged" family literacy programmes – data are only available at local level. In the Netherlands, Opstap and its variants are widely available, although recent funding cutbacks has meant the loss of some programmes.
- 9.4.4 Bookgifting programmes are growing in coverage. In the UK, Bookstart distributes more than 2 million bookpacks each year. Booktime and Booked Up, initiatives targeted at older children, account for an additional 670,000 packs per year for each programme.
- 9.4.5 In other Member States, local manifestations of Bookstart have varying degrees of coverage. In Germany, Buchstart Hamburg estimates that it distributes approximately 18,000 book packs per year, reaching 92-95% of newborn children. In Portugal, the Crescer a Ler organisation estimates that in its first nine months of operation it distributed approximately 350 book packs. In Flemish Belgium, Boekbaby's distribute book packs in all five provinces of Flanders, covering 45 communities out of a total of 328. Approximately 15,000 packs are distributed each year, accounting for approximately 15% of annual births in Flanders. In Denmark, Bogstart distribute book packs in areas of 15 cities, reaching approximately 6700 children each year.
- 9.4.6 Our review of family literacy programmes and policies throughout Europe found little evidence of clear policy strategies in Member States. In particular, our review found few national examples of top-down policy planning that encourages the development of coherent, complementary ranges of programme types. In contrast, initiatives tend to be bottom-up in their development. While such bottom-up development has many strengths, if not complemented by top-down strategic

planning, it can lead to programme landscapes characterised by competing initiatives and/or a focus only on one or two programme types.

- 9.4.7 Some Member States have been slow to develop family literacy initiatives. For example, both Ireland and Germany were late in recognising the importance of the home environment on literacy acquisition. Particularly in Germany, family literacy programmes, policies and research are in their infancy. In other Member States, such as Cyprus, education is still seen as the responsibility of the schools, and parental involvement is discouraged.
- 9.4.8 Member States which recognise themselves as "nations of migration" appear to be quicker to invest in family literacy initiatives. For example, the Netherlands and the UK were early adopters of family literacy programs, while Germany has been a slow adopter.
- 9.4.9 Most Member States suffer from a lack of high-quality research on family literacy initiatives. Exceptions are Turkey, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Chapter 10 Case studies

10.1 Introduction

- 10.1.1 The seven case studies carried out for the research focus on innovative practice linked to national and European policy from within the European Union as a whole, the EFTA-EEA countries and the Candidate countries. They reflect a wide range of approaches with different target groups and include the work of a variety of providers from big national programmes to individual endeavour at local level where there is not yet in place a national or regional initiative to involve parents in their children's early literacy acquisition.
- 10.1.2 This chapter provides an overview of key messages and themes arising in these case studies. Throughout this overview, we provide quotes from programme leaders and participants.
- 10.1.3 The thematic overview is then followed by a summary of each of the seven case study programmes.
- 10.1.4 Full case studies are provided in Appendix 2, along with the case study proforma and briefing paper provided to programme leaders.

10.2 Context

- 10.2.1 All the providers involved took a broad definition of the skills and behaviours involved in early literacy acquisition stressing the importance of oral communication, a positive interaction with parents and books and, in the majority of cases, using the library. Reading a book included sharing and talking through a text and value was given to real life reading practice through family involvement using the home environment and culture as the starting point for learning.
- *“The programme takes a holistic view of literacy development as one that must be embedded in everyday situations and practice. Parents are seen as learners in their own right as well as playing a vital role in supporting children's literacy*

acquisition.” Parent and Child Language Group, England

- 10.2.2 The case studies demonstrate that parents need to have knowledge of how children learn and develop, how they can best support this and an understanding of the school system. However, for this knowledge to have the maximum effect on children’s achievement other factors also need to be in place and these differ between families and communities. Often they include the ability to communicate in the main language of the country of residence, a healthy lifestyle and reasonable economic and emotional stability. There is also a need for formal education systems to acknowledge the vital role parents play in their children’s learning and to support developments which include them in an active learning role.
- 10.2.3 For example, the Turkish Mother-Child Education Programme takes a holistic approach. It targets the mother and the child’s immediate environment rather than the child itself. The programme aims to create an environment that will provide optimal psychosocial development, better health and nutritional conditions and to promote school readiness for the child. It is an adult education and child education programme fostering the role of the parents in the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child. The course has three main elements: the Cognitive Education Programme that fosters the cognitive development of the child; the Mother Support Programme that teaches mothers about the overall development of their child; and the Reproductive Health and Family Planning Programme that teaches mothers about reproductive health and family planning.
- 10.2.4 The Commission states the need for early childhood education to provide children with the emotional, physical, social and educational support they need to start to develop their potential.
- 10.2.5 The case studies demonstrate a wide range of activities leading to these outcomes which underpin successful early literacy acquisition. For example, the Netherlands Opstap programme builds on and includes: home culture including using first language; strengthening confidence and self-esteem in parents/carers and children including supporting the parents to promote learning in a playful way and to understand the importance of praise; builds in enrichment activities e.g. visits to the library; includes effective parenting and the promotion of “at home good parenting skills” through role modelling; develops better interaction between parent/carers and child by developing and sharing fun activities; provides progression opportunities for adults including stimulating Dutch language learning and helping in school; and increases parents/carers’ involvement with their children’s school by developing their confidence.

10.3 Impact

- 10.3.1 Feedback and evaluations from the case study programmes show progress in children's literacy and positive changes in attitude to books and literacy from children and adults. This goes a long way to breaking the cycle of underachievement passed on from one generation to the next which holds families in poverty and disadvantage.
- 10.3.2 The headteacher from the the Romanian case study programme, Meserie de Parinte sa Invata, reports that the programme introduces children to new ways of learning, reading and writing and this motivates the children to learn and offers additional support to those with learning difficulties.
- 10.3.3 The Netherlands Youth Institute highlights the programme's success in working with parents who speak little or no Dutch, many of whom have had little education themselves and are unemployed. Van Tuijl and Siebes (2006) reported that the programme had succeeded in engaging families in Turkish and Moroccan communities, groups that services have tended not to reach. This success was attributed in part to the fact that the paraprofessionals share the language and culture of families receiving the service and work directly with the families.
- *A primary school teacher RA involved with the Opstap programme reports: "I see the impact of the programme on children's and family behaviour; the children and adults talk together more, share more activities together and the parents became more positive. The children are proud to receive a certificate for completing the course. It is noticeable that as a result of the programme, they talk more often and more fluently. They develop more skills for play and become more sociable."*
 - *A mother on the programme comments: "My children's skills have improved. Before we started the programme, they had poor language skills and bad concentration. I had little patience or energy for them. I often used to yell at them. I wanted to give them attention but I did not know how. Now I've improved my skills and the interaction between myself and my children. I notice that my kids can play and concentrate better now and their language has improved."*
- 10.3.4 An evaluation in 1998 of the Turkish Mother and Child project in collaboration with the Ministry of National Education showed positive effects on the children's cognitive development, especially in pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The children started reading earlier and achieved higher grades. It was also found that

the mothers involved had changed the ways they were bringing up their children. They had stopped using authoritative attitudes and behaviours and replaced them with more democratic measures. The changes were found to continue after a year.

10.4 Delivery styles

10.4.1 The mode of delivery is different in each case study and respects the need to address parental support for the children's literacy acquisition in the context of the wider needs of the families targeted by the provision. For example, the German Lesestart programme is a mainly non-targeted programme delivering book packs through paediatricians. The Norwegian "Reading Friends" works with immigrant families and involves nine year old children supported at home by their parents as the readers to younger children. The Netherlands Opstap programme works with immigrant families and uses para-professionals to deliver the programme in homes. The Irish programme "English to support Parents of Primary School Children" again targets immigrant families and is delivered in schools by qualified adult tutors and children's teachers. The Turkish Mother Child Education programme works through adult education centres for group sessions with socio-economically disadvantaged mothers with children between five and six years of age who do not have access to preschool education services and who are 'at risk' because of their environmental conditions. The majority of the mothers involved left school after completing the primary level and had not gone on to further study. The mothers and children involved also do structured activities at home.

10.5 Policy context

- 10.5.1 All the programmes are underpinned by country specific policies on promoting children's achievement in reading and learning generally.
- 10.5.2 For example, in Norway the 'Reading Friends' programme responds to the requirements of the Act of Primary and Secondary Education which includes a duty on schools to include resources from home and provide differentiated learning for parents. The Norwegian Government's strategic plan for equal education 2004–2009 includes a legal requirement of support for bilingual parents. There is also currently a move towards promoting early intervention to support children's learning and development.
- 10.5.3 In England the Parent and Child Language Group contributes to the implementation of the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision which aims to

prioritise language learning for those families who form part of the settled communities in England. The programme also aims to improve outcomes for children and young people in line with Every Child Matters and to improve skills for employment to tackle child poverty and social and economic inclusion.

- 10.5.4 In Turkey the Mother Child Education programme responds to the Government's target of 100 % of five-six year olds attending pre-school by 2013. At present only 51% of this target age range attend pre-school and there is a big over-subscription for these places. Pre-school is not offered as free provision by the Government and children from disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to be those not attending pre-school because their parents often cannot afford the fees or do not have the expectation or understanding of the importance of early learning and do not give priority to paying for pre-school provision from the family budget.

Education and Training 2020

- 10.5.5 The case studies cover a variety of topics connected to parents' support for learning and include opportunities for the development of the key competencies for lifelong learning which are seen as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context, in this case the children's literacy acquisition. In particular the programmes described develop competence in communication in mother tongue and communication of foreign languages where the target groups were immigrant families. They also develop skills for learning to learn, social and civic competence and cultural awareness. As the parents became more aware of the school systems, they developed confidence to talk in a more constructive way with teachers, and in some cases, started volunteering in school or taking a more active role in school life through the parent/school association. These actions fall within the strategic objective "promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship" within Education and Training 2020.

Children with a migrant background

- 10.5.6 The conclusions of the Council on the education of children with a migrant background (2978th Education, Youth and Culture Council meeting Brussels, 26th November 2009) are clear on the need to improve the educational chances of children from migrant backgrounds, the majority of whom tend to perform significantly lower than their peers. This results in a greater incidence of early school leaving and lower levels of education. The situation is exacerbated where there is a linguistic and cultural difference between home and school, combined with poor socio-economic circumstances and low expectations coupled with insufficient family and community support and lack of suitable role models.

10.5.7 The Council underlines the need for targeted measures and a greater flexibility to address the needs of children from migrant backgrounds and their families. The case study programmes working with migrant families (Norway, England, Netherlands, and Ireland) are working examples of imaginative, flexible provision which include activities to develop social inclusion and a culture of aspiration for the children's learning. The English and Irish programmes also have specific main language (English) learning for the adults as a key outcome of the programme, further developing the ability of the parents to take an active role in their children's school learning. All the programmes make an effort to value and promote home language and culture.

- *“The level of parents’ English language improves as a result of the programme. Some parents are now involved in classroom activity, parents are better able to attend parent/ teacher meetings and become more used to being in the school environment. Parents are more confident in supporting their children’s learning, in helping with homework and they can communicate better with the school. Increasingly they are able to help with homework and are more aware of literacy and numeracy in everyday tasks in and around the home. They are also moving into other progression areas. The majority of learners move on to more formal learning opportunities in the adult education centre.” English to support Parents of Primary School Children, Ireland*

Early school leaving

10.5.8 Early school leaving is seen as an important element working against social inclusion. The Council identifies early school leaving as continuing to be a serious and urgent problem as a high number of children still drop out of school before the end of secondary education. Learning difficulties, social problems or a lack of motivation, guidance and support are all cited as reasons for drop out. Early school leavers are likely to come from families with lower socio-economic status or to belong to vulnerable social groups. On average, children from migrant backgrounds are twice as likely to leave school early as children from native families.

10.5.9 A powerful outcome from the case study programmes is the parents’ development of a greater interest in and understanding of how children learn literacy. This enthusiasm translates into changed behaviours within the home and the development of an ‘I can’ attitude to school work which is likely to lead to a better outcome for the child in school, encouraging the likelihood of the child staying on longer in school and progressing to higher education.

10.5.10 *“The children (on the programme) were proud to have the certificate at the end of the course. As a result of the course they were talking and playing more and better. They became more sociable, and their parents became more positive, talking more with them and doing more activities.” Teacher involved in Opstap, Netherlands*

10.5.11 The Irish programme has improved school attendance for the children involved as an impact measure of the programme and reports positively on this.

Learning for All

10.5.12 Adult Learning is a vital component of EU education policies contributing to the drive to improve competitiveness, employability, social inclusion and active citizenship. The challenge is to provide opportunities for all, especially the most disadvantaged groups who need learning most. The case study programmes demonstrate how disadvantaged families can be reached through intergenerational programmes which have children’s learning at the centre. This provides a non-threatening way into learning for the adults.

10.5.13 *“My child pushed me to do this ‘Storybags’. I did it because it seemed to be something to help my child, and the kids are very keen for us to do it.” English to support Parents of Primary School Children, Ireland.*

10.5.14 All the case study programmes involve the adults as learners, at least to the extent of learning something about how to support their children’s literacy development. However the degree of participation as active learners in their own right, working on skills identified by them as important to their own progress, varied between programmes. For example Norway focused more on the social outcomes of increased collaboration between home and school and increasing the parents’ confidence in their role as educators compared with Ireland where aims for the adults included providing the parents with opportunities to improve their own literacy and numeracy skills, the opportunity to foster the notion of lifelong learning and improve competency in the target language.

- *Mother A. who completed the Mother Child Education programme, Turkey in 2009 home visit 24th November 2010: “I am much more confident, I feel I can do anything now. The Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) gave me lots of advice and support, including the importance of routines and learning every day. My daughter T. didn’t behave well when she started school, but I used some of the techniques which I learnt on the course about managing behaviour and now*

she is a very good student, getting top grades at school.

“I think MOCEP helped T. with her literacy. The activities we did together at home helped hand/eye coordination and her logical thinking has developed and she can analyse better. I see the difference with my other daughter (aged ten) who didn’t do the programme. She’s always needing help. And I see the difference with other children in T’s class who didn’t do the programme, crying about the homework.

“I left school after Primary and I am just completing home based open Secondary School. I enrolled for this partly because I wanted to be a model for my two daughters. Now I want to enrol for the open lycee and eventually go to college to become a fashion designer.”

10.5.15 Family learning, including parent support programmes, are not necessarily an end in themselves but often a vehicle for embedding lifelong learning among family members. Some case study programmes e.g. Ireland, Netherlands and England have specific adult guidance input to encourage progression into further learning and/or employment. For some of the case study sites, progression opportunities are more of an issue e.g. Romania where there is no adult learning available locally to which learners can progress onto.

10.6 Funding

10.6.1 Funding is mainly provided by different government departments depending on the main focus and aims of the programme.

10.6.2 In Ireland, where the programme has clear literacy outcomes for adults and children, funding comes from the adult literacy budget and under Delivering of Equality of Opportunity in Schools at the Department of Education and Science and from the Department of Education and Science. Funding covers the adult tutor teaching and planning time.

10.6.3 In the Netherlands, funding for Opstap is received from the local government budget for early years but is already suffering a reduction as it competes with other early years work. For one of the case study organisations, Maarschappelijke Onderneming Smallingerland (MOS), funding still covers the staff costs of the paraprofessional and co-ordinator for teaching and planning time. Adults who participate in the course pay a fee of 12 Euro per course.

- 10.6.4 Because of budget restrictions, the other case study organisation Algemene Stichting Welzijn Appingedam ASWA) is unable to deliver Opstap using paid paraprofessionals and is developing a delivery model using trained and qualified volunteers.
- 10.6.5 The English case study programme is funded by a private charity and Birmingham Churches Together, and covers tutor costs. Accommodation costs are supported by the Children's Centre where the programme takes place with the assistance of the Baptist Church Centre as part of their community provision.
- 10.6.6 Funding for the German programme Lesestart is different in that the majority of funding comes from private sector sponsorship. However, state governments are increasingly providing funding to buy the Lesestart book packs for distribution to families e.g. in Bavaria and Niedersachsen.
- 10.6.7 The programmes in Norway and Romania run with no extra budget but are delivered by staff as part of their main work in schools. This has the danger of relying on the goodwill of staff to undertake extra work often outside regular school hours, this can affect sustainability.
- 10.6.8 100% of funding for the Turkish Mother Child Education programme is provided by the Government and Social Protection Agency.

10.7 Barriers and obstacle

- 10.7.1 All parents, but particularly those from disadvantaged families may face barriers in joining a programme to support their children's literacy and learning in the first instance and then in staying on the course and completing it. Barriers can be institutional and personal. Successful programmes need to break down these barriers.
- 10.7.2 This may be done through partnership working across different priority areas e.g. health and early years education to offer layered support to families most in need so that they can successfully access family literacy programmes as shown by the Netherlands case study. The English case study programme Parent and Child Language group is an example of a "first touch" informal parent support intervention offered at a venue local to the families who have not traditionally accessed family programmes, at a time to suit them with a crèche for the younger children. All the case studies highlight the importance of providing an informal, flexible non-threatening learning environment where the learners are able to discuss a wide range of topics about their children, parenting and learning without fear of censure

or ridicule; creating the right conditions for learning supports retention and achievement.

- 10.7.3 Parents will stay on a course where they feel it is benefiting themselves and their children. The balance between wanting outcomes for themselves or their children will vary depending on their needs. For an immigrant parent, acquiring more of their adopted country's main language so he/she can talk to school teachers or the need to improve literacy so that the parent can read to the child may be of paramount importance to that parent. A successful programme deals with these individual needs or signposts parents to further learning where they can address them.
- 10.7.4 The quality of staff matters to ensure programmes are effective and successful. Apart from Lesestart, case study programmes are taught by children's teachers and qualified adult tutors, or in the case of Opstap by trained paraprofessionals. MOCEP has a rolling programme of staff training. Above all the teachers need to honour the parents as having an essential part to play in the children's learning and encourage them to build a variety of skills necessary to support the children.
- 10.7.5 The case study programmes highlight issues which can act as barriers to sustainability. The most obvious is the situation where the programme has neither external funding nor national or regional backing as is the case in Romania. The Norwegian programme "Reading Friends" receives no external funding but is supported at national level and integrated in to the school system so is more secure. In the Netherlands, the case study organisations reported competition for reduced funding with other organisations in early years provision even though this is a priority area.
- 10.7.6 MOCEP is well documented as showing literacy gains for the children involved over a sustained period. Where other countries do not have such quantitative data, the programmes' sustainability can be risk as policies shift and funding is re-allocated.

10.8 Transferability

- 10.8.1 Opstap in the Netherlands and Mother and Child Education Programme in Turkey have already transferred to other countries. Resources have been translated and adapted to the needs of the new target groups.
- 10.8.2 The curriculum of the Mother-Child Education programme has been adapted to be appropriate to the culture and needs of the target families in different countries. The

concept of a successful transfer needs to be seen in the context of priority areas for disadvantaged families within individual countries and the wider context of the generic social and learning outcomes relevant to the adults and children involved. The contribution of the programme to EU priorities also needs to be considered.

- 10.8.3 The case studies demonstrate that one programme will not cover the diverse needs of families in different countries. However, there are possibilities of transferring programmes between countries, subject to the above, including developing a curriculum for parental support of children's literacy acquisition to include generic learning and social outcomes for adults and children. Delivery of the curriculum would be customized to be appropriate to different families' needs and individual country requirements and the funding available.
- 10.8.4 The Irish programme has been shared with a number of EU countries through a Grundtvig programme as part of a knowledge and experience exchange.

10.9 Methodology

- 10.9.1 A case study briefing paper and proforma were sent to the participating organisations prior to the interviews with key people involved in the organisation and delivery of the programmes. Four interviews were face to face and some included meeting and talking to learners in England and Turkey and a volunteer delivering the programme in the Netherlands. Three interviews were on the telephone with a taped record. Some additional case studies of learners and comments from the children's teachers involved were obtained to illustrate particular points in the case studies.

10.10 Key messages for policymakers and programme leaders

- 10.10.1 Early literacy acquisition involves a broad range of skills and behaviours. Parents have an active role to play in supporting their children's learning and development and the home environment is crucial.
- 10.10.2 Parents need a variety of skills to be in the best position to support their children including knowledge of the school system and how children learn and develop, "at home good parenting skills" (Desforges and Abouchar (2003)) and confidence in themselves and in their role as a parent. Where programmes also have literacy and language outcomes for the parents, this supports their ability to work with their

children and to become less isolated and part of the school community.

- 10.10.3 There are often barriers to recruiting and retaining parents from disadvantaged backgrounds, including immigrant families which can be overcome through family programmes. This involves careful selection of venue, often close to where the families live, times of classes to suit the parents, bilingual tutors sharing the culture of the families, use of first language where appropriate and interesting relevant materials. Single sex classes may be more appropriate to some cultures.
- 10.10.4 Positive outcomes come from a variety of programmes and modes of delivery. Case study programmes ranged from packaged evidence-based programmes (MOCEP, Opstap) through to informal locally led initiatives (Parenting Profession can be Learned, Parent and Child Language Group)
- 10.10.5 There is no “best” model of curriculum, delivery or length of programme. Delivery needs to fit with the learners, taking account of educational background, their needs and experience as well as cultural norms. However, there are some common elements running across the different case study programmes such as a relaxed, non-threatening “I can” atmosphere, tasks to do with the children at home, discussion of parenting skills and activities to develop a love of reading and books. The MOCEP case study illustrates the importance of a curriculum which aims to bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes within the family and to create a literacy friendly environment in the home.
- 10.10.6 Family programmes can give good opportunities for parents to come into learning for the first time and to progress. They often become ambitious for themselves as well as their children. This can lead them to further learning and ultimately a job and help break the intergenerational cycle of deprivation.
- 10.10.7 Sustainability is an issue. Short term funding and shifting national priorities can endanger programmes. It can take time to establish successful contact with disadvantaged families and to obtain their regular attendance on programmes. If funding is removed, the families are left out on a limb and the gains made for adults and children soon lost.

10.11 Summary of case study programmes

NETHERLANDS - Opstap

- 10.11.1 Opstap is a national programme offered throughout the Netherlands. It is an evidence-based intervention programme linked to early child education supported by the Netherlands Youth Institute. It targets listening, speaking and reading skills. It is seen as having an important place in local educational policy which is placing a heavy emphasis on early years education, following the lead from national government. It is a home-based parenting support programme based on the Israeli HIPPY model working with predominantly mothers and their children between 4 and 6 years old from low-skilled families, including immigrant families.
- 10.11.2 Opstap belongs in a series of programmes aimed at families with children of different ages for example, Instapje 1-2 years old, Opstapje 2-4 years old, Opstap 4-6 years old. In the first year of primary school, there are also supported reading schemes Overstap and Stap Door. The programme is based on home-based peer-support delivered by paraprofessionals known as 'neighbourhood mothers', who are trained and supervised regularly by recognised professional coordinators with backgrounds in professions such as pedagogy, social work, or teaching.
- 10.11.3 The programme takes place over two years. It is built round activities based on about 30 books each year which correspond to the level of the child's learning in kindergarten and includes activities to do at home with the child. There are seven activities on each book, one for every day of the week. The activities are for the mother and child to do together and include reading and worksheets. Activities are highly structured, to ensure that parents with low levels of literacy can follow instructions.
- 10.11.4 The families may also attend periodic sessions altogether at the school. While the mothers work with the paraprofessionals on different discussion topics including parenting the children do play activities. This session is seen as an important part of the programme as it gives opportunities for peer support and the development of cross-cultural understanding. It is felt that schools know little of home life and culture.
- 10.11.5 The programme aims to increase parent/child interaction and to give the tools and skills to parents to support the development of the child. Parents are also encouraged to stimulate literacy and an interest in active learning through the development of a stimulating home environment. Funding for the Opstap

programme is delegated to local government and is subject to local priorities and funding restrictions. Adults who participate pay a fee of 12 Euros per course.

10.11.6 Schools report better performance from the children on the programme. The mothers gain confidence in their role in their children's education and are better able to support the children's literacy. They also improve their own skills and confidence which can lead to further training and work.

- *"The children (involved in the programme) were proud to receive the certificate at the finish. As a result of the programme, they were talking and playing more and more constructively. They became more sociable and their parents became more positive. They were talking more with the children and doing more activities."* Teacher RA

ROMANIA Meserie de parinte sa invata (Parenting Profession Can Be Learned (PPCBL))

10.11.7 The programme takes place at Scoala No.8 in Suceava in north-east Romania. It is a state-funded primary school and has about 400 students between the ages of 6 (Clasa 1) and 11 when the students transfer to secondary school.

10.11.8 The programme has developed through the enthusiasm of staff in one school that has recognised the need and value of including parents and carers in the children's learning. It takes place after school at a time when the most parents can be involved and although the sessions are for the parents/carers only, it also includes activities to do at home as a family.

10.11.9 Staff identified a need for parenting skills and support for helping the children's reading and writing. The course developed addresses both of these areas. Involvement of parents is supported by an active Parents Association which helps to develop an ethos of partnership between school and families to reach the best outcomes for families.

10.11.10 The children involved are drawn from Clasa 1 (6-7 years old). This is the first year of formal school following on from nursery school (gradinita). The course is centred around instruction and activities to develop parental involvement in the children's learning and literacy. Parents learn about the school, the curriculum, the discipline of study, how children learn to read and write, how parents can support this at home, how to share books, how to build a positive relationship between parents and children and library use is encouraged. The importance of parental involvement in

learning to read and write during the first year of school is emphasized because this has the most effect on later development.

10.11.11 The course takes place over the school year during school terms. Parents/carers attend a two hour adult only session every week outside the school day, generally between 17.00 and 19.00 so that working parents can attend. From this session activities are set for the parents to complete with the children outside school usually at the weekend. This will involve some form of exploration generally using ICT and/or the library. On Mondays, in class the children will report back on the family activities and the parents will discuss how the activities went as part of their adults only session. This encourages self-evaluation and reflective learning in the adults and children.

10.11.12 Other activities include thematic studies on topics proposed by the children which they undertake with their parents at weekends and finding age appropriate books for the children.

10.11.13 The programme is not targeted but the school is situated in a working class district and unemployment in the area is fairly high. Generally parents/carers have completed their own schooling and about 30% have continued to higher education. Complete illiteracy is rare.

10.11.14 The programme is taught by a trained school counsellor already on the school staff and supported by the headteacher and a classroom teacher. The aims of the programme are for the adults to learn how to support their children's reading and writing and for the children to improve their reading and writing and develop an interest in learning. There is no funding for planning or delivering the course and staff work on it in their free time or as part of their school work, where the work takes place during the school day. It is offered free to the parents/carers. The parents' association provides coffee and biscuits.

10.11.15 The school has developed a strong commitment to involving parents closely in a variety of ways despite no lead or support from the Schools Inspectorate or local government. The programme shows positive outcomes for adults and children, including the development of parenting skills as these are seen as an essential component of active and successful parental involvement.

ENGLAND Parent and Child Language Group

10.11.16 The programme is run by Birmingham Churches Together (BCTT) is a voluntary organisation working with families with English as a second or additional language in

Birmingham whose overall aim is to promote wider access to learning for adults and children in the area. The locality is in an area of high deprivation with a large percentage of immigrant families, newly arrived and settled.

10.11.17 The aims of the programme for the adults are:

- To develop an awareness of language, literacy and numeracy skills of child and parent
- To develop parent's awareness of child's need to learn through play and experience different learning opportunities
- To develop the language of second language speaking for both parents and their children
- To encourage parents and children to speak, listen, read, draw and play together at home
- To develop language, literacy and numeracy skills
- To increase parents' confidence and to empower parents as first educators to support their children's learning
- To value the gift of dual language speaking

10.11.18 The aims of the programme for the children are:

- To incorporate the five principles of the Every Child Matters agenda (stay safe, be healthy, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being) within scheme of work
- To provide a stimulating nurturing child friendly environment which will support the developing language of the child
- To provide activities which will create the opportunity for speaking and listening
- To develop the beginning of writing skills
- To use interactive activities which parent and child can do together
- To value the gift of dual language speaking

10.11.19 The development of the parents' speaking and listening skills and use of English language and literacy through activities related to their child's learning encourages greater confidence and interaction with schools and services and encourages children's regular attendance at school/ nursery to ensure the most positive educational outcomes.

10.11.20 The informal approach to family literacy work through play encourages families from target groups to attend. Embedding literacy in a variety of related topics, for example a visit by The Red Cross gives opportunities for developing literacy skills and a wider interest in learning.

- 10.11.21 Modelling positive interactions with children supports parents' to focus on their child and their learning and to understand the cultural differences within the education system in England.
- 10.11.22 The model provided by the parents as learners on the programme helps to develop an understanding of the importance of play, increases the culture of learning for children and adults and supports achievement. Improvement in adult skills is seen as a key component in the programme.
- 10.11.23 As a voluntary organisation BCTT has not been able to draw down government funding for family learning and literacy through mainstream channels as this is restricted to local authorities. The programme is funded by the Westhill Endowment Trust, a local educational charity and Birmingham Churches Together (BCTT). The Soho Road Children's Centre assists with the recruitment and provides the accommodation with the support of the Baptist Church Centre as part of their community provision.
- 10.11.24 The BCTT main programme includes the parent and child language group which is seen as an important tool for engaging with adults who are parents and who have low levels of English oral and literacy skills and in turn contributing to an improvement in adult participation in lifelong learning.
- 10.11.25 The family learning programmes put a strong emphasis on developing speaking and listening skills that underpin children's subsequent acquisition of literacy and numeracy capability in school learning. This is done through modelling positive interaction, structured play and parental involvement.
- 10.11.26 The programme is delivered in one centre specifically to support women with pre-school children as an additional service to the ESOL provision delivered in that venue and has been running for over two years. The course is run in the daytime when parents and young children can attend. It is part of the wider programme of courses run by BCTT which include English (ESOL) for Parents, Preparing your child for school and Friendship Group for Mothers.
- 10.11.27 The programme runs for two hours a week over eight weeks. The course is run a community centre close to the local Children's Centre and easily accessible on foot. Each session follows a similar pattern so that children and adults feel secure and comfortable with the session

- 10.11.28 The course covers topics on rhyme, song, children's books, understanding the importance of play, developing children's language and has a focus on healthy eating and the language of health. It links to children's stories and activities such as bandaging a doll or teddy bear and involves visiting speakers, for example The British Red Cross spoke about safety in the home. Families are encouraged to take activities home to finish after the session.
- 10.11.29 Activities are planned to stimulate and develop the child's imagination and to engage parent and child. Target families are predominately parent's who have English as a second language (ESOL) who are often new arrivals to this country, as refugees and asylum seekers and where the mother/ carer has beginner level English skills. Children range from three months old to 4 years old.
- 10.11.30 The programme is staffed by a qualified adult tutor who also has extensive experience and qualifications in child development and early years teaching. The tutor is supported by two volunteers from the local community and who can interpret for the families as required.
- 10.11.31 The level of parents' English language improves as a result of the programme and some parents progress to helping in classroom activities and attending parent/teacher meetings.
- 10.11.32 Parents are more confident in supporting their children's learning, in helping with homework and they communicate better with school.
- 10.11.33 The programme does not measure specific impact on the children's literacy levels but the children's centre reports that the children involved have developed skills and confidence in communicating and built co-ordination skills through the practical activities.

NORWAY - Reading Friends

- 10.11.34 The programme was started in Åsen School, Lorenskog in 2000. Lorenskog has one of the highest immigrant populations in Norway and since 2006. The programme has worked with immigrant families placing at its centre the need to value to a greater degree home language and culture by using the families' first language for the programme.
- 10.11.35 The programme was developed to support transition between kindergarten and primary school and to boost reading levels of the reader children by giving them a real life reason for practising their reading skills. The programme also helps build

their confidence and self-esteem and involves the parents in their children's reading development.

10.11.36 The Reading Friends programme involves parents and their nine year old children in Primary School (reader children) and children in Kindergarten. The reader children are supported through specific reading activities by their parents and school teachers to become "reading friends" to the younger children. Children with the same first language are paired or put together in small groups where the older children read stories to the younger children in first language.

10.11.37 The programme takes place in four sessions over the school year totalling about 35 hours. At the first parents meeting early in the autumn term the head teacher tells parents about the programme. The 9 year old children are told about the programme in class and can volunteer to take part if they want to do so. The local library is alerted to the first languages of the families involved in the project to ensure that there is a good selection of books in those languages. Teachers work with the librarians on selection of the books and the reader children then visit the library with their teachers. The kindergarten then issue invitations for the reader children to visit them to share and read the books to the younger children. Where a reader child is not yet a confident reader, he or she can still share the book through the pictures. Each reader child will have three books to read.

10.11.38 Before visiting the kindergarten, the reader children practise sharing the books in class with their teachers. This includes reading aloud, talking about the books and finding a comfortable place and way to read. The children role-play as reader and kindergarten children to simulate the real experience. Letters are sent home to the families of the reader children with a weekly plan for the parents to practise reading the books with the reader children. This continues for two weeks and the children keep a record of their practice experiences. Where the parents do not have advanced literacy skills they are encouraged to help the children to share and tell the stories through the pictures. Once they have finished their "training" the reader children visit the kindergarten to read the selected books to the children.

10.11.39 The reading episodes in the kindergarten take place in September, November, February and April. In May at the end of the programme there is a party for all the children involved. The reader children receive a diploma from the school. The kindergarten children receive a "good card for a helpful act" from their reader partner giving positive feedback on their participation in the programme. This system of feedback is used throughout all school activities. The children take their

cards home to show their parents and this helps to build a feeling of pride in achievement.

10.11.40 The target families are those who do not have Norwegian as their first language.

Aims of the programme

10.11.41 The aims for the adults are:

- To increase collaboration between home and school
- To increase parents' confidence in their role as educators

10.11.42 The aims for the children include:

- To support their school work
- To ease transition between kindergarten and school for those from an immigrant background
- To strengthen the multi-cultural perspective of school and kindergarten
- To strengthen an interest in reading
- To increase the value given to families' first language and understand its importance to children's language development

10.11.43 The programme is funded through standard funding allocations to schools, kindergartens and libraries for their main services. Library staff and teachers take part in the programme in their existing hours as part of their job. The programme requires no additional staffing.

10.11.44 The use of first language supports literacy development and draws the parents into closer collaboration with school.

10.11.45 The programme engages the children in real life reading activities and supports the development of a love of reading including enhancing library use. The families also develop a pride in home language and culture and the families become more engaged with school. By using home language, the school learns more about the children involved and this supports their learning progress. For example, one reader child who was a slow reader in Norwegian was found to have a reading age in first language of about a 15 year old.

10.11.46 The programme is easy to set up and administer with no extra costs. Although not externally evaluated those involved report favourable outcomes for the children in terms of developing a love of reading and using the library. It is clear that the use of first language is important in raising self esteem and developing links with parents. The head teacher EW who set up the programme sees it as a tool in children's

literacy development and she sets great store by the enjoyment experienced by the children involved.

10.11.47 The programme has already been taken up by about 200 schools in Norway and has the potential to become part of the general school offer to support bilingual families. It could also be re-started with mainstream families to support real life reading practice and the development of an interest in books and library use.

IRELAND - English to support Parents of Primary School Children

10.11.48 “English to support Parents of Primary School Children” is part of the offer of a variety of family learning programmes provided by Clare Family Learning Project (CFLP) which is seen as holding a key position in Ireland for the development of family literacy and numeracy programmes. The development of the parents’ abilities, interests and knowledge to support their children’s learning encourages more regular school attendance and the children’s greater achievement in school.

10.11.49 A flexible and informal approach to family literacy work encourages attendance from target families. Embedding literacy in a variety of topics gives opportunities for developing literacy skills and a wider interest in learning. The model provided by the parents as learners on the programme helps to develop learning aspirations in the children to support achievement. Improvement in adult skills is seen as a key component in the programme.

Case study: Clare Family Learning Project, Co. Clare, Ireland

10.11.50 RK from Poland, is a parent of 2 young children ages 4 and 6. Both children now attend the Educate Together primary School.

10.11.51 She first attended a family learning class in March 08, Family Learning and Health. She then attended two family learning coffee mornings in the school which led to her enrolling in an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) class at the adult education centre and shortly after joining the English for Parents class held in the school for two hours every week.

10.11.52 During 2008 -2009 she attended two ‘story bags’ classes, one of them bilingual storybags, Christmas Crafts for parent and child and Family learning songs and rhymes and has maintained a steady presence at the English for Parents classes in the school. However she has only attended the ESOL classes at the adult education centre for one term.

10.11.53 The progression of this parent has seen her now in employment since attending family learning classes. She also recorded on her progression form that she got promotion in her job since attending. The personal progression recorded showed more engagement and confidence around helping with the children's homework and feeling more ambitious for her children as a result of attending. At the end of 2009, she began volunteering in class to support children's reading in junior infants (4-5 years). Clare Sheahan, Resource Worker

10.11.54 The programme was set up in response to identified needs of the high number of immigrant parents in the school who were not familiar with the Irish education system or how their children were taught but were anxious to support their children's learning. It runs in the most disadvantaged primary schools.

10.11.55 The target group are immigrant parents and those identified by the Home School Community Liaison teacher as being disadvantaged with literacy and numeracy needs.

10.11.56 The course has two basic units these being English for parents new to Ireland and Storybags. In the past year the curriculum offer has been extended to include a wider range of topics. Learners choose different units depending on the needs and interests of the families to make the total hours of the course. The units include Fun Maths, Games to make and play (dads and children evening class), English and Bilingual Storybags. The dads and kids and fun maths programme supports the numeracy in the school. Literacy and numeracy are embedded in the course activities.

10.11.57 The programme takes place during school terms made up of 3 x 2 hour sessions each week over the school year. Enrolment for the programme is roll-on/roll-off and learners make their choice of which units to attend. Learning takes place in groups with ten or more adults as the core group. There are adult only and joint sessions with the children. The course does not offer accreditation or qualification.

10.11.58 The aims of the programme for the parents are:

- To encourage parents to see themselves as their child's first teacher and value the home as a learning place
- To affirm what parents are already doing at home as valuable
- To encourage parents to become involved in their child's education at an early age
- To help parents develop strategies for extending their children's emergent literacy and numeracy skills

- To build a partnership between home, school and community in order to maximise support to parents
- To provide parents with opportunities to improve their own literacy and numeracy skills
- To foster the notion of lifelong learning
- To learn how the education system works in Ireland
- To learn the language to communicate effectively with the school
- To learn ways of supporting their children's schoolwork
- To improve competency in target language

The aims of the programme for the children are:

- To increase parent and child interaction time on literacy and numeracy based activities in and around the home
- To have fun learning together
- To increase children's achievement through parents involvement in their children's school activities
- To build a more positive relationship between home and school for the children
- To Improve competency in target language

10.11.59 Funding is provided for adult tutor teaching and planning time mainly from the adult literacy budget from the Department of Education and Science. There is also extra funding from the Department of Education and Science under Delivering of Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS).

10.11.60 The programme is staffed by an adult tutor who teaches the parents. Where the children are also involved a teacher from the school takes part. Adult tutors are qualified second level teachers with family learning and adult education training.

10.11.61 Staff involved report that the level of parents' English language improves as a result of the programme and parents are more confident to support their children's learning through communicating better with school and becoming involved in classroom activities and attending parent/teacher meetings. Increasingly they are able to help with homework and are more aware of literacy and numeracy in everyday tasks in and around the home. The majority of learners take a step to becoming a lifelong learner and move on to more formal learning opportunities in the adult education centre. The programme has brought learners to the local museum, a local history project and the local library.

- 10.11.62 The programme does not measure specific impact on the children's literacy levels. One impact measure is improved school attendance and this is reported positively by schools involved in the programme, particularly among Roma and Irish Traveller families. Teachers also comment that following completion of the programme, children are getting their homework done and done better.
- 10.11.63 The case study programme is part of a wider and innovative family learning offer which aims to improve the skills of parents so that they are better able to support their children's learning and take an active role both at school and at home. Progression for the adults as learners is seen as a vital component in raising children's literacy achievement. Emphasis is put on oral communication and on generating an interest in learning as being vital to literacy development. The informality and flexibility are seen as great strengths of the programme matched by professionally qualified teaching staff and well-prepared materials often drawing on real life situations.
- 10.11.64 The programme is clearly successful in reaching parents not already engaged in learning and where the children need extra support. The partnerships with schools and Home School Community Liaison workers allows for the most vulnerable families to be reached. The broad view of parental involvement in a variety of learning opportunities where literacy is embedded, takes a holistic view of literacy development. Weight is given to the parents as learners and the part this plays in supporting children's literacy acquisition.

GERMANY - Lesestart – Die Lese-Initiative für Deutschland

- 10.11.65 The Lesestart model is based on the UK's Bookstart programme and works through supplying tailor made babies' and children's books through paediatricians who offer health checks to new born children.
- 10.11.66 The programme started with a pilot in Saxony in 2006; then gained funding through private sponsors for a two year national roll out. It is organised through Stiftung Lesen a foundation which sees itself as a forum for creating new ideas and ways to promote reading in the media-age with a focus on reading aloud and storytelling to pre-school children in the family context. Stiftung Lesen is especially dedicated to this issue because they believe that reading habits and the familiarity with books must be established at an early age and can build the basis for lifelong reading.
- 10.11.67 Although the project is a universal offer, it is particularly interested in families where reading is not part of their everyday life. However, decisions about targeting families lie with the paediatricians and there may be regional priority groups.

- 10.11.68 The Lesestart packs come at three stages (new born baby, child aged 2 and child aged 3) and include an age-appropriate picture book for parents to read with their children, and a reading guide for parents which includes tips on reading with young children, information about child development and practical suggestions on integrating reading into everyday life. The guide includes chapters translated into Turkish and Russian, as two of the main immigrant languages spoken in Germany. The Lesestart packs also contain a list of book recommendations and a diary for parents to keep of their best memories of reading with their child. Posters and stickers also form part of the packs.
- 10.11.69 The paediatricians talk to the parents about reading and explain what they can do in looking at a book with their child. The third pack is issued through the library.
- 10.11.70 The programme aims to introduce reading to children as early as possible, in order to promote literacy and language acquisition. Private sector sponsorship forms the bulk of funding for the Lesestart project. The national roll-out was funded by a variety of publishers and printing houses and a range of local and national companies have sponsored the programme in different regions. Increasingly, state governments are providing funding to support the programme e.g. In Bavaria, the Ministry of Family Affairs has provided packs for working parents of two and three year old children. Evaluation of the original model project in Saxony by the University of Leipzig showed that 10% of the parents involved had started to read to their child as a result of the programme and 30% reported that following the programme they read more to their child. Similarly, an evaluation of the English Bookstart programme carried out in 2001 reported evidence of changed behaviours and attitudes in parents who were part of the programme.
- 10.11.71 The programme introduces reading and associated home-based activities to families who would not necessarily see this as part of their parenting role. It also introduces ideas for activities that parents and children can do together, such as visiting libraries and museums. It suggests ways that parents can be involved in the child's kindergarten or school activities.
- 10.11.72 The successful roll out of the programme has raised the profile within Germany of the importance of early interaction in families with books as an important step to literacy acquisition.

TURKEY – Mother Child Education Programme (MOCEP)

10.11.73 MOCEP is a multi-purpose programme that targets not only children's development but the mother as well, bringing together adult and pre-school education. The programme was developed in 1982 and offers a free alternative to already over-subscribed government funded fee paying pre-school education for children aged 5 and 6.

10.11.74 The programme has an annual target of 25,000 mothers and children. So far 6657 courses have been delivered to 292,076 mothers and children in 78 provinces in Turkey. The completion rate is 80%. The programme has also been transferred to Turkish emigrant families and mainstream families in other countries.

10.11.75 It targets mothers in families from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and, as a home based programme, places the children's home environment at the centre of learning.

10.11.76 The programme runs for 72 hours with group sessions for the mothers followed by set activities to do one-to-one with the child at home. It focuses on the mother as first educator and aims to empower the mother to create a stimulating and enriching home environment for the children to help with developing their readiness for school. It takes a holistic approach to developing the best possible opportunities for children to learn and achieve, recognizing the home and family relationships as crucial to this.

10.11.77 The programme supports pre-literacy and literacy development through: the promotion of a more positive relationship between mother and child; encouragement of oral communication and shared activities including inter alia, reading and comprehension, vocabulary development; and the development of skills for analysis and problem solving. The home activities include pre-literacy exercises to develop fine motor skills and the sharing of books and stories.

10.11.78 MOCEP was developed in 1982 as part of a four year longitudinal research project 'Turkish Early Enrichment Project' undertaken by Bogazici University Istanbul. In 1992, the programme was revised and small scale cooperation with the Non-Formal Education General Directorate (MoNE) was started. The following year The Mother Child Education Foundation (AÇEV), a voluntary organisation was established and the implementation of the MOCEP programme was increased. In 2010, the programme was adopted as the National Parent Education Programme under MoNE. AÇEV remains responsible for teacher training, programme and resource revision and research.

10.11.79 The programme is made up of three sections:

1. The Mother Support Programme which aims to inform mothers about child rearing issues and bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes within the family
2. Women's Reproductive Health and Family Planning
3. The Cognitive Education Programme (CEP) which aims to support pre-school children's cognitive development and boost school readiness

10.11.80 The programme follows a published teacher's manual. This includes background and activities for each group session, case studies for group discussion and handouts of the points covered in the sessions. There are set materials for the home activities each week and eight children's story books for activities and reading at home.

10.11.81 The programme aims to create a literacy friendly environment in the home and to provide the necessary tools for fostering the cognitive and socio-emotional development of the children involved.

10.11.82 For the mothers it aims to support them in their parenting and educating roles by learning to support the holistic development of their children as well as developing the skills and attitudes which impact on their own and their child's well being.

10.11.83 For the children, it aims to develop a readiness for school and support their cognitive and social development.

10.11.84 The programme has been regularly researched and evaluated since the 1980s to assess both the short-term and the long-term effects of the programme. These studies showed that:

- The programme has positive effects not only for children, but their mothers as well;
- The children of participating mothers achieved higher scores in intelligence and general aptitude tests, were more successful academically, continued their schooling for a longer period of time, developed a more positive self-concept and in their adult lives worked at higher-status jobs and obtained higher salaries;
- The participating mothers communicated better with their children and husbands, experienced increased self-confidence regarding their parenting skills and enriched their children's living environment based on what they learned.

10.11.85 Talking to mothers at the end of a group session, they reported changes in their parenting style as a result of the programme. They were now less aggressive and less

nervous with their children. They kept a better control on their body language and felt more relaxed and confident. They felt that they now understood their children better and had better communication with them. Life had changed for the better at home with better modelling, a better sharing of responsibilities and more quality time spent together.

10.11.86 They felt that the programme helped their children's literacy through the home activities and had noticed that the children concentrated better and were more communicative. They seemed more confident and responsible and played more games linked to real life situations. One mother commented: "I used to worry about my daughter starting school, but now I know she will be all right". (Focus Group MOCEP 23rd November 2010)

10.11.87 Based on 23 years of research and experience, MOCEP shows itself to provide a proven low cost alternative to centre based early education programmes. Longitudinal studies show sustained improvement in children's literacy skills and school success backed by positive changes in child rearing and mother's interest in schooling. Mothers too are shown to be more likely to enrol in higher education following completion of the course.

Chapter 11 Conclusions and recommendations

11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 In this chapter we offer concluding comments and observations regarding the degree to which family literacy interventions should be supported. These observations are based on the evidence reviewed in this report.

11.1.2 Following that, we offer specific recommendations for the support and development of family literacy programmes and policies. These recommendations are categorised under four headings, but necessarily overlap. Those headings are: policy design and action at European level; policy design and action at national level; programme development and transfer; and improving the family literacy evidence base.

11.2 Concluding observations: to what degree should family literacy interventions be supported?

11.2.1 Family literacy as a field should only be supported by policymakers if interventions are able to show evidence of success. The research reviewed in this report provides strong evidence for such success, both in child literacy gains and in a range of related areas.

11.2.2 Beginning with child literacy acquisition, the meta-analytic evidence is positive. As Hattie (1999, 2008) has demonstrated, the average (mean) effect size for educational interventions, the vast majority of which occur in schools, is 0.4. Hattie argues that policymakers should favour interventions producing effect sizes of 0.4 or larger. Most interventions have less impact than this: the most common effect size is 0.3, with the next most common being 0.2. This indicates that the majority of educational interventions have relatively limited impact.

11.2.3 In contrast, the meta-analyses reviewed for this report found impacts of family literacy interventions ranging from a low of 0.25 to a high of 0.68. Five of the six meta-analyses found effect sizes greater than 0.3, with four finding effects greater than 0.4. In three of the six meta-analyses, the effect size is greater than 0.5. These findings strongly suggest that family literacy interventions have a relatively large impact on child literacy acquisition.

- 11.2.4 As Hattie (2009) argues, the key question in deciding whether or not to employ a particular intervention is not "Does it work?" It is: "How well does it work in comparison to other viable alternatives?" By this measure, family literacy programmes appear to be even more effective at influencing child literacy acquisition. Because the majority of family literacy interventions take place outside school hours, they are not in direct competition with school-based literacy programmes. Instead, they can complement them. In our assessment, the meta-analytic evidence therefore strongly supports the argument that all Member States' child literacy strategies should include a family literacy component, and that policymakers should more actively support the widespread proliferation of family literacy interventions.
- 11.2.5 Turning from meta-analyses to primary research, there are few studies assessing the long-term benefits of family literacy interventions. An exception is the large body of a longitudinal, methodologically robust quantitative and qualitative evidence generated by Turkish researchers evaluating the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and its successor, the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP). This research finds strong evidence of long-term cognitive and non-cognitive gains for disadvantaged children participating in these programmes. These include gains in literacy skills and improvements in a range of other educational areas. They also include long-term returns to society, such as better employment outcomes in adulthood (Kağitçibaşı et al, 2005). These findings are similar to those of the landmark Perry/High Scope preschool project in the US. This project, which also included a home dimension, has shown evidence of excellent long-term return on investment: by the time the participants reached age 40, the State had recouped approximately \$17 for every \$1 spent on the intervention (Schweinhart et al, 2005).
- 11.2.6 In addition to similarities in long-term improvements in literacy and other areas, the Turkish family literacy interventions and the Perry/High Scope programme share another characteristic: an emphasis on supporting child socio-emotional development. Heckman et al (2009) have argued that this emphasis is the key to long-term programme benefits. Kağitçibaşı et al (1992, 2001, 2005) emphasise the importance of providing parents with training not just an educational support skills but in socio-emotional support skills, an emphasis seconded by Desforges and Abouchar (2003), who argue in favour of interventions including a parenting component. It is our own assessment, based on the evidence we have reviewed, that family literacy interventions emphasising both child literacy and parenting skills are the most likely to produce long-term gains in child literacy and related areas. We therefore feel that such programmes should be widely available in Member States,

and targeted at disadvantaged households.

- 11.2.7 The evidence highlighted above refers not just to child literacy gains but to benefits in other areas. The evidence included in our report suggests that family literacy interventions can and do produce a wide range of benefits in a number of policy areas. For example, a recent Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis of Bookstart in England (Just Economics, 2010) produced an estimate of savings to society over the next 37 years of £614 million on an investment of £9 million - i.e. £25 saved to every £1 invested. This and related evidence suggests to us that family literacy interventions should be strongly – and cross-departmentally – supported.
- 11.2.8 A core objective of initiatives such as Bookstart and Every Czech Reads to Kids is to encourage a celebration of reading for pleasure. Such programmes seek primarily not to facilitate short-term literacy gains, but to contribute to a broader cultural shift in which reading and learning become seen by all families, but particularly disadvantaged ones, as enjoyable parts of daily life. Such a cultural shift is required if European countries are to evolve into successful, equitable knowledge economies.

11.3 Recommendations for policy design and action at European level

- 11.3.1 In order to facilitate pan-European sharing and transfer of good programme practice, EU-level funding, either from structural funds or from the Lifelong Learning Programme (or its successor), should be made available to support the development of Peer Learning Activities, European networks and other recognised means for sharing good practice. Funding and opportunities should also be made available for family literacy experts to share knowledge and messages with policymakers in related fields, particularly school education. To facilitate these and related objectives, we recommend the creation of a European family literacy reference, research, policy, development, documentation and communication centre.
- 11.3.2 The Commission should actively encourage and support Member States to develop family literacy initiatives targeted at improving the literacy skills and integration of migrant families. European seminars, conferences or other fora should be utilised in order to improve understanding at national level of the potential benefits of family literacy programmes, and to enable the sharing of lessons learned through the development and transfer of currently existing programmes such as MOCEP and Opstap.

- 11.3.3 European funds should be made available to encourage the development of family literacy programmes and policies in Member States lacking relevant initiatives. Chapter 7 discussed the important role of “policy pioneers” in such Member States. These individuals and organisations should be supported, financially and otherwise, in their efforts to learn good practices from other Member States, to convince national, regional and local policy makers of the importance and benefits of family literacy initiatives, and to adapt and transfer these practices to their own national contexts.
- 11.3.4 European-level funding should be provided to encourage the development and sustainability of European initiatives seeking to promote reading, both for pleasure and literacy improvement. Such initiatives include the recently announced "All of Europe Reads to Kids", which is based on national initiatives in Poland and the Czech Republic.
- 11.3.5 Funding should also be provided to encourage the development and sustainability of pan-European organisations seeking to promote reading for pleasure and reading literacy, so that such organisations can better share knowledge, practices and lessons learned, both with regard to policy and programmes.
- 11.3.6 In principle, national policymakers express support for joined-up, cross departmental policy-making. In practice, they find it exceedingly difficult to implement. Because of the potential value of joined-up, cross-departmental policy-making, the Commission should take a leading role in promoting it, using family literacy initiatives as a focus. The Commission should support the development of networks or other fora encouraging "childhood-wide" policy-making in general, and the role of family literacy initiatives in particular. Efforts should be made to encourage joined-up working between departments of Health and Education. In particular, the Commission should fund research into good practice in joined-up family literacy policy-making, as well as funding dissemination and communication of key research messages, through publications, seminars, conferences, working groups or other fora.
- 11.3.7 European education reviews and publications should include a focus on family literacy initiatives. For example, Eurydice overviews of national education systems should include discussion of family literacy impacts and initiatives.

11.4 Recommendations for policy design and action at national level

- 11.4.1 All national child literacy strategies should include family literacy strategies. As part of all literacy strategies, schools should be encouraged to utilise family literacy initiatives as a complement to in-class literacy programmes.
- 11.4.2 Policymakers should view the different components of their child literacy strategies as complementary rather than competing. In particular, funds should not be diverted from family literacy initiatives in order to fund interventions such as Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), as has occurred in the Netherlands.
- 11.4.3 The profile of marginal policy fields such as family literacy can be raised when they are associated with issues that are of particular importance to policymakers. Family literacy policy and programme advocates should seek to capitalise on growing interest in and unrest about: 1) poor literacy skills and their impact on society; 2) the impact of poor parenting skills on child cognitive and non-cognitive development; and 3) the need to improve migrant integration and educational achievement. Advocates should emphasise family literacy's unique capacity to address all three issues simultaneously and effectively.
- 11.4.4 In most Member States, the field of family literacy will continue to be overlooked by policymakers and will thus not develop sufficiently under current institutional structures, which tend to encourage either child-focused, school-focused or adult-focused approaches, Member States should encourage the establishment of third-party, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) charged specifically with the support and advocacy of the full range of potentially valuable family literacy interventions. In the field of adult literacy, similar organisations already exist, advancing policy and programme development in Member States such as Ireland (the National Adult Literacy Agency, NALA) and the United Kingdom (the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, NIACE). Another potentially useful model is that adopted for adult learning in Norway, where Vox, the Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning, is part of the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, but operates with a great deal of autonomy.
- 11.4.5 Policymakers and policy stakeholders should develop coherent national family literacy policies which include a range of complementary programme types meeting a range of targeted and universal needs. In particular, Member States should support the development and sustainable funding of three key programme types, adopted to local contexts:

- d) universal book gifting or "celebration of reading" initiatives, such as Bookstart and "Every Czech Reads To Kids", which encourage the development of a culture of reading and learning that is essential in modern knowledge societies;
- e) national family literacy initiatives targeted at disadvantaged families and modelled on Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme. These programmes should aim to improve child literacy and socio-emotional development, while also (and in part through) developing parents' ability to support their child's cognitive and non-cognitive development. In some Member States, such programmes may also seek to develop parents' literacy skills;
- f) Shorter-term, local, targeted initiatives focused only on child literacy and parental support of child literacy. Examples of such programmes include dialogic reading programmes for younger children, and the successful literacy skills training programmes highlighted by Sénéchal and Young (2008).

11.4.6 In order to help achieve their long-term skills objectives, Member State should invest in national, regional and local organisations aimed at encouraging a culture of reading. Organisations aimed at encouraging a culture of reading, such as Bookstart and Every Czech Reads to Kids require relatively little funding to achieve their aims, yet are essential in promoting a culture of learning.

11.4.7 In order to encourage sustainable, long-term, evidence-based programme development, Member States should learn from Turkey's experience. Potentially promising programmes should be regularly subjected to methodologically rigorous quantitative and qualitative assessment, so that a longitudinal record of programme effects can be developed.

11.4.8 Policymakers should evaluate different types of programmes using the metrics that are most appropriate for each intervention. For example, taking the three above examples, universal book gifting or "celebration of reading" initiatives should be evaluated primarily through Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses, as these are best equipped to assess the broad-ranging impacts of such interventions with both cognitive and cultural aims. Programmes aimed at improving child literacy and parenting skills should, as in Turkey, emphasise long-term, longitudinal, quantitative and qualitative assessment across a range of policy areas. More targeted initiatives focused only on child literacy should rely primarily on short-and medium-term assessments of quantifiably measurable programme impact.

11.4.9 Policymakers should use programme evaluations formatively, not just summatively. That is, programme should first be evaluated in order to assess what modifications are required to improve the programme. Only after such modifications have been implemented should programmes then be re-evaluated in order to assess programme effectiveness and to determine whether programmes qualify for continued funding. This “pilot-evaluate-refine-evaluate” model of programme development and assessment would be more efficient than the more common model, in which programmes are either re-funded or not based on a single, initial evaluation. This is an inefficient approach, as it encourages the funding of the development of entirely new programmes instead of building on ongoing work, knowledge and experience.

11.5 Recommendations for programme development and transfer

11.5.1 Programme developers and researchers should devote greater attention to the cultural validity of initiatives, in order to ensure that they successfully meet the needs of low income families and ethnically diverse target groups. Programme developers should not assume that initiatives piloted on educationally or socio-economically advantaged families will be successful in disadvantaged households.

11.5.2 Based on the available research evidence, the cognitive aspects of programmes targeted at disadvantaged families should be more highly structured than those developed for the general population. We also recommend that programmes targeted at disadvantaged families include, where possible, some focus on parenting skills training, as this has been shown to improve the recruitment and attendance of disadvantaged parents.

11.5.3 While ideally family literacy programmes should work with the long-term aim of engaging both fathers and mothers, evidence suggest that it is more efficient and cost-effective to focus on mothers. We therefore recommend that, where resources are scarce, efforts should focus on recruiting mothers onto family literacy programmes. Participating mothers should then be encouraged to engage fathers and/or other male family members in family literacy activities in the home.

11.5.4 Governments and researchers should devote particular efforts to developing and assessing programmes in which parents are trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children. Initial evidence suggests that programmes of this type may be particularly effective.

11.5.5 Perhaps the strongest evidence in the field of family literacy interventions is that which points to the importance of parental skills training in order to foster a more emotionally supportive home environment. Member States should develop and expand family literacy programmes which feature a major parent coaching component, using Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme as a model. Where desired, such programmes could also include a parental literacy skills component. However, the emphasis for parents should be on development of the understandings and capabilities required to support their children's cognitive and non-cognitive development.

11.5.6 Programme transfer should focus on four key conditions – the four P's: participant characteristics; pilots; partnerships; and project teams.

- Participant characteristics. The target population for the transfer programme should have similar characteristics and needs to the programme's "home" population
- Pilots. To increase the likelihood of successful adaptation, projects should include a pilot-evaluation-rollout model – or, preferably, a model in which the programme is piloted, evaluated, modified and then re-assessed before large-scale implementation.
- Partnerships: developing effective local partnerships will increase the likelihood of successful programme transfer.
- Project teams: the project team should be professional, with minimum dependence on volunteers.

11.6 Recommendations for research to facilitate evidence-based policymaking

11.6.1 Following the trend of the last several decades, efforts to improve child literacy will increasingly focus on the importance of families and the home environment. This is likely to encourage a broad array of family literacy initiatives and research projects. Member States should recognise now that key research questions about programme design and impacts will be answered sooner and with more confidence if research strategies are proactive rather than reactive.

11.6.2 European and national research councils and other grant-giving bodies should fund more European primary research and meta-analyses, in order to overcome the current reliance on non-European evidence.

11.6.3 In order to assess more fully the promising gains associated with programmes in which parents are trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children (Sénéchal

and Young, 2008), the Commission should fund a multi-nation research and development project investigating such programmes.

11.6.4 Additional research priorities should include:

- implementation quality, including the factors influencing the transfer of programme contents from trainer to parent, and then from parent to child
- cultural validity
- the use of digital technologies to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of family literacy interventions.

Such research should be funded at Member State and European levels, with funding provided to encourage widespread dissemination of research messages.

11.6.5 Where funding for parental support programmes derives from adult literacy funding streams, Member States should give priority to quantitative research assessing the benefits to parents' skills.

11.6.6 Because of their positive influences on a range of developmental areas, including cognitive development, child socio-emotional development, and parent-child bonding, family literacy interventions are likely to yield a range of long-term benefits in a variety of policy areas. Therefore Social Return on Investment (SROI) analyses should be more readily used.

11.6.7 Research and evaluations should be robust but also draw on a wide range of measures for "success" and "effectiveness", particularly with regard to disadvantaged families. Such measures include, for example, "time children spend with their mothers" and "parental attitudes to education". Measures used to assess literacy should be designed to identify small gains: even very small gains may represent significant progress for children who have low levels of literacy.

11.6.8 Sharing good practice in programme development is easier and more straightforward than sharing good practice in policy development. Family literacy faces a number of challenges in the area of programme-policy integration and policy development, including the field's lack of a clear policy/departmental home in most if not all Member States. In order to address these challenges, the Commission should make funds available to encourage research on successful policy development and the sharing of successful practice so that policy successes in some Member States can be more readily duplicated in others.

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