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From Conception to Reception: Early Years Intervention

Departmental Panel Discussion
Wednesday, 24 September 2008

at

Cumberland Lodge
Windsor Great Park
Windsor
SL4 2HP



PAUL DALGLEISH, Department for Children, Schools and Families

I have been struck by the standard of debate and the contributions generally. I certainly felt very challenged at various points during the discussion! I hope I can attempt to address some of those points directly. I think this session is a good example of Government trying its very best to present a more joined-up approach.

The slides show the logo for the new Department. With the machinery of government changes in July 2007, the new Department was formed and the emphasis was (and quite rightly) that, although education is still important, the word "children" appears right at the front. I think that emphasises the importance that we attach to our work. At the end we have the word "families".

In thinking about the agenda and how we should reflect this new Department and a growing set of responsibilities and revised emphasis, we thought it would be useful to share with the wider public our developing thinking in terms of our strategy. We were conscious that there was good coverage around Every Child Matters, but what we wanted to do was move the debate along. The Children's Plan is precisely that. It is a longer-term strategy looking at ten years or more and it is looking to build on the useful and valuable insights provided by Every Child Matters, and it is looking to develop that agenda and make a reality of that on the ground.

The Children's Plan recognises that it is not the role of the state to bring up children; that's for the parents. When we talk about parents and family, all the way through the Children's Plan, we recognise when we talk about parents that traditionally we describe it as mothers, but we are very clear and we have emphasised the important role that father's have to play and carers in all their guises. You will see references to carers, foster parents, grandparents, whatever form those carers take, dotted throughout the Children's Plan. I might use parents and families as a shorthand, but this isn't just a small nucleus, it comes in many and varied forms.

The Children's Plan is all about understanding that parents are likely to need some help in their parenting role at some stage, but most importantly it is acknowledging that early intervention will avoid problems later on.

So how do we empower parents and engage them? Earlier on we heard the discussion about information and how we communicate and enable parents. We have a document called "Parent Know How", which has within it a range of mediums which we are testing and piloting. We have to make sure that parents have access to the right sort of information in a form and format that is most suitable for them. What this document does is highlight various mediums such as DVDs, text messaging, family information services, helplines and so forth. So can I encourage you all to have a look at this? It is called "Parent Know How - Working Together, Supporting Families".

That is part of our strategy of trying to ensure that parents know where to access easily the information they want. We are making use of new technology in all its guises to



help see what are the most suitable mediums to reach out to parents. Our aim is to include a range of information, both about general good parenting and also about being involved in their child's learning and development. The work is acknowledging that children are competent learners right from birth.

So how do we engage with parents? The Department is supporting a range of initiatives to help parents get involved in and support their child's early learning. I want to highlight the provision of free books through Book start and Book time. The aim is to equip parents with the resources to encourage a love of books from an early age. We are doing that because we are recognising that that activity is very often the first stage of parental engagement and it helps support the bonding between the parents and the child and helps promote good communication and development of language.

As many of you will have seen from the PEAL display, we think it is important to acknowledge that there is a role around training for early years' practitioners. PEAL was specifically developed to help that process of improving workforce skills and communicating and working with parents. That is one example of trying to pick up on the point about professionalising the workforce.

We need to raise parents' awareness and understanding of what works in helping their child's early learning. So it is important, through programmes like ELPP (Early Learning Partnerships Project) and PPEL (Parents as Partners in Early Learning), to encourage the use of nursery rhymes and singing songs, sharing books and stories, painting, messy play, playing with letters and numbers and talking together about shared activities.

As part of our extended schools parenting support offer, our aim is that by 2010 all parents of children entering a reception class will be offered transition information sessions which are designed to help prepare them for the next stage of their child's life and learning. Of course we have the Early Years Foundation Stage which came into effect on 1 September 2008. Over time we will be able to judge what impact that has, but obviously we hope it will be a positive one.

In our discussion earlier we talked about the important role of children's centres. We have a target in the Children's Plan of 3,500. As the slide illustrates, we now have in place 2,100. So already we are ahead of the game, so to speak. These are essentially the hub where all services are delivered. It provides a focal point for parents to go, so they know where those services are located and, more importantly, the hub is there to join up those services. It encourages a sense for the parent that rather than being passed from pillar to post, their issues are addressed by the right professionals in a seamless way, even though there may be a range of issues that need to be addressed.

We have made considerable investment in family learning as we have prefaced in the Children's Plan. The aim is to help parents improve their own literacy, language and numeracy skills as well as helping them to support their children's learning and development, and to recognise that if the parents have issues around their own skills,



that is going to have an impact on their ability to support their children in their learning.

We have talked about professionalising the workforce and you rehearsed with us the need to be very clear about a need for a series of universal services but also recognising that for parents there will be a need for interventions and targeted support. This slide here is a presentation from the DCSF perspective. I want to highlight the universal services such as family information services; school information, in many forms, where supporting schools provide information online to parents. There is early learning and childcare through to school-based parent support advisers whose role is to act as the first point of contact with parents. We do not propose that they should be a panacea in terms of addressing all the issues but that they have an awareness of the sorts of issues that confront parents and, most importantly, are able through that awareness to signpost effectively to the appropriate practitioner.

Moving to where there are high needs, we have intervention for specific purposes. We have parenting early intervention projects which are about increasing availability of parenting programmes to reach those children at risk between the ages of 8 and 13. We have parenting experts which are building largely on the Respect parenting practitioners, and we are funding one or two in each local authority over a period of time. Their role is one where they will be adopting a more strategic role and looking at the delivery priorities within that local authority and asking the question: are the services that are engaging with parents the right ones and are they being delivered most effectively?

There are Respect parenting practitioners with parenting experts in 77 local authority areas. We are supporting the notion of family pathfinders. There are 15 of those. That is about encouraging within a local authority multi-agency support, so better joining up in a holistic way and, more importantly, looking to address the needs of the wider whole family. They are based on family intervention projects but they are working with a wider group of families.

Then we have the family intervention projects themselves. This is about looking at the whole family and assessing the needs and coming up with a support package. Somebody mentioned very early on in the discussion this morning about sanctions and enforcement. Why this works is because we are very clear about the sanctions that will apply. In effect it is a contract between the practitioner and that family that they will engage upon this programme. What we have been seeing is that in areas such as where we have experienced at the moment anti-social behaviour that this is producing real progress and real change for the better.

In working on that good practice and seeking to develop it more widely, we will be working with the Justice Department on the Youth Crime Action programme, which Philippa is going to talk about. We are focusing on child poverty as well. We are rolling a programme out to 15 local authorities initially. But, more importantly, the idea is that over time each local authority will benefit from that process of family intervention projects which will be addressing a whole range of issues around anti-social behaviour, drugs, gangs, knife crime and so forth.



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We recognise that we need to join up with a whole range of other agencies if we are going to have real impact. At the bottom there, there is a little box there called "Parenting Programmes" produced by the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners. This is an example of the government saying that we need to ensure that our practitioners across the children's workforce are properly equipped to interact with parents. The Academy has the role, funded by the DCSF, of delivering training places for the children's workforce and it is about to publish its strategy which will set out its game plan for the next three years.

It has two main components: the delivery of training workplaces, but the more important is building on the educational excellence of King's College, London looking at this whole issue of parenting programmes and developing evidence-based programmes which build on the work of Triple P, Incredible Years, Mellow Parenting and so forth. We use randomised control trials to look at our needs and try to develop a much stronger evidence base to support what we are trying to do.

In these sort of gatherings we always anticipate "So where next?" But this is the point where I am rewriting the script in the light of your very helpful suggestions and comments this morning! I want to pick up on a couple of things. We do have a Minister for Children. That was a conscious decision when we established the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The Minister for Children is Beverley Hughes. One of her priorities is to recognise that the Department on its own isn't going to be able to solve all the problems that face the primary sector. Across Whitehall most government departments have policies that impact on the family. Beverley will be drawing together a ministerial group which draws in all the key government departments at ministerial level to try in a joined-up way to look at and question and challenge and ask ourselves: are these policies and programmes that the government is developing joined up; will they impact in the right way; will they deliver the desired outcomes that we want to see in terms of promoting families?

As part of that, I am actually leading on establishing a parents' panel. We have actually already had, as a precursor to that, a parents' group, which is the Department saying "We need to make sure that our policy development is better informed. We need to ask parents what they think, and give them an opportunity to shape and influence the design of our policies and how we can implement them on the ground." So we have established this parents' panel, which will be a cross-section of parents. We will use that to test our developing policy and make sure that what we are implementing is more likely to achieve the desired outcome on the ground.

In picking up your concerns about professionalisation and the workforce, we are embarking on a review of the children's workforce. Ailsa and I and our respective Departments have been working very closely on this review because there is a recognition that when you talk about the children's workforce it is many and varied. We need to better understand than we can at the moment the relationships, the lines of responsibility and the reporting. I am not able to say at this moment that we will have a concrete proposal by X but certainly by the close of this year we expect to be in a position where we will be producing some guidance in terms of our early findings. The idea is that the Department, in conjunction with others, will be looking to consult



with a wide range of professionals about those initial findings and asking you: do these findings sit with your perceptions and how can we improve the operation and joining up of the children's workforce in moving forward?

I touched upon the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners and their role. They will have an important role in terms of professionalising the workforce and they are already working very closely with the children's workforce, the Development Council, the National College of School Leadership, the Training and Development Agency and I could go on. They clearly understand that they have to work with all the sponsor bodies for the whole of the wider children's workforce. As part of that, they are looking at this whole issue of professionalisation, professional development and how we can encourage a better career ladder which allows for better exchanges at various points between the relevant specialisms.

So really where next? I want to acknowledge that I found this morning really stimulating. I hope I have given you a sense that we have been listening to some of the specific concerns that you raised. I think it is very timely, my being here, because I started with the Children's Plan and there is a commitment to review progress in December 2008. We will go away now and reflect some of your real concerns and your points of view as we move towards the next stage which is producing a document which will be called something like "One Year On"

AILSASWARBRICK, Department of Health

I work for the Family Nurse Partnership within the Department of Health. You had a presentation from Kate Billingham yesterday so I will touch on that briefly but also talk about the Child Health Promotion Programme and the work that is happening in the Department of Health to support the early years' work.

When I was thinking about what you might say and about what our responses might be, I wrote out some guiding principles in terms of the work we have been doing on child health support, child health promotion within the FNP. I am pleased that they seem to echo the themes in the discussion this morning, not necessarily quite how they are articulated in the final recommendations but I think we are all in general agreement about the high-level issues.

The principles were, first, that work should start early in pregnancy when the family has been informed. Secondly there is a fundamental principle that we should have a progressive universal service so that you have targeted support but within a universal context. Thirdly practice should be written where possible in evidence, and I know that is not always easy to maintain. We have lots of different evidence, but I think that is an important principle to observe. Fourthly we should recognise that parents are experts in their own children. That chimes with the feedback about recognising the strengths and resiliencies of the family itself. Finally it should be deliverable, which touches on some of the workforce positions that you have been describing but also that the policies and the services we have actually fit with local configuration and



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local systems. That is an important thing that we need to work through as we develop services.

I know you have heard about the Family Nurse Partnership, but to show that it fits with those principles, it is evidence-based and a very structured programme. The relationship between the nurse and the mother is at the heart of the programme, and that carries through to the relationship between the parents and the child. The aims of the programme are to improve pregnancy outcomes, to improve child health and development and to improve the parental life course. The very strong evidence from the US is that we can have a strong impact on all of those areas, based on the work that the nurse does with the mother and the learning that they have together. We are testing in the UK whether, first of all, we can reproduce the impacts that it has had in the United States and, secondly, how we can deliver it in the context of the universal health services here. That comes back to the point about delivery. It is important to connect evidence with practice and with delivery. It is complex because the FNP is a licensed programme and we can't use the modules themselves more widely, but we are certainly very keen to use lessons from our testing of this programme in wider services for parents and children in the early years.

Many of you will have seen the new book updating the Child Health Promotion Programme. The Family Nurse Partnership fits within that. It is one of the targeted services within the Child Health Promotion Programme. This sets the standard for preventative child health services. It is health visitor led, but of a multi-disciplinary interagency team, and quite often it will be driven through children's centres, for example, as well as GP practices and other primary care outlets. It was updated in March to reflect new knowledge of the developments in early pregnancy and in the early years, and in particular on neuroscience. There is a new emphasis on pregnancy, taking into account the learning that we have now of what happens in pregnancy and the very early years. It seeks to be supportive of parents and families, and that of course includes fathers. It is a child health promotion programme but, to be very clear, it is of course health in emotional development and social development, it is not just health. It talks about some interventions and preventative services that you might have, and you might commission locally. Many of them are very focused on supporting the bonding between the parents and the baby and supporting the children through the parenting of the baby and supporting the child's emotional development and the relationship between the two.

Finally this Child Health Promotion Programme sets the standard for the services that should be commissioned locally, but we are also developing new tools to help to implement it. We are working on a new antenatal and preparation for parenting programme which will build on some of the lessons that we have had and the evidence we have about what parents need in preparation for parenthood and what they value, and about the way that these things can be delivered as well. Some of the learning that we have had from the FNP is about delivery style and about how professionals work with parents as much as about the contents.

The other element to mention to you is a predictive child health and well-being tool, which is referred to in the Health Inequalities Strategy, which would help practitioners



to identify in pregnancy the kind of risk factors which could allow them to target services better from a very early age. It is not intended as a tick box nor an assessment of the parent. It's a tool that can be used with the parents, recognising their expertise in their own life, to make sure that the right services are targeted at the right people so that they are not excluded.

PHILIPPA GOFFE, Ministry of Justice

Last year I spoke about the Joint Youth Justice Unit had just been set up. It is now the accepted norm that we are reporting to two Secretaries of State, and a good example of joined-up working. We have brought together these two key elements in delivering action to tackle youth crime. The Government is taking the process from the early stages through to when people have come into the criminal justice system and dealing with them once they become offenders and preventing offending afterwards.

The Youth Crime Action Plan sets out the thinking behind it. The plan covers the background of the Youth Justice System, identifies what problems we are addressing and sets out key proposals. We recognise that we should be basing our proposals on evidence and one of the first stages we took when developing the action plan was to look at research in the field and consult with key practitioners and stakeholders and young people and young offenders themselves to get their views.

What people think about crime is quite important because perceptions are not necessarily true. "Adults think half of all crime is committed by young people", but the actual reality is that it is 10% to 20%. Part of what we are doing with the Crime Action Plan is to look at avoiding demonisation of young people. This addresses some of these attitudes that any young person out on the street has to be doing wrong. They are not. Some of them are just there talking to their friends. This is part of the wider development of services which is going on with the DCSF side of the work about developing more structured activities and social events for young people to go to so they don't have to be always on the street. There is a shortage of facilities and services for young people to access, and that is being picked up in the Youth Crime Action Plan as well.

If you look at what people think are the main causes of crime, you can see that lack of discipline from parents is identified as a key issue there. That is quite a big aspect of what we are looking at, the parenting input. In my job as Head of Community Sentences, I have responsibility for parenting for those people who come into the offending system, and I am a parent myself!

If you look at the underlying issues and problems with youth crime, these are the important factors which we need to take into account. Picking up from what the conference has been saying about the need to have the whole family approach, it is not just the young offender himself, it is what has brought them to being an offender or on the cusp of offending. It is the family background which plays an enormous role in how these people then end up within the system and we need to tackle the whole problem. It is not just the one person involved. It means that the approach must address the needs in the round and include the families in it.



Of course, once people come into the youth crime system then most of this work is focused through the Youth Offending Teams. The Government is still convinced that the Youth Offending Team is a very good example of multi-agency practice which can be very effective. We do recognise that there have been some issues about the transition points and particularly the need for dealing with young people when they leave the youth justice system and return to the community. We need to make sure that we have this support for the young person and their family continuing when they go back into the mainstream services and in the community to make sure that they don't continue offending and that their needs continue to be met.

This is the background to the Youth Crime Action Plan which followed on from the creation of the Joint Youth Justice Unit. It builds on the evidence in the Children's Plan, and the need to redo how the criminal justice system is working for young people and the options available to them. We look in the round about how we treat people and particularly the younger age group (the 10 to 15 year olds). Another key element is education for young offenders.

These are the headline objectives.

Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour. We should take action with young people who create anti-social behaviour and committing crime and distressing communities. But the big focus is on intervening early. We recognise that early intervention is the best approach, and identifying those people who are most at risk of ending up as offenders. We talk about having the right mechanisms in place to be able to identify when at key points from birth which families are most at risk, giving that support to parents and families early so that they don't end up with their young people being offenders later.

It is our aim within the Youth Justice Unit to do ourselves out of a job. We don't want to have to do all this work particularly with higher end with young people in custody. The more we can do at the early stage to prevent people drifting into offending and supporting families to make sure that they are able to help their children on keeping on the right path, the better that is. The facts always support that early intervention has the most positive outcome for young people.

In the round, it is not just about those people who are committing the offences; a lot of young people are victims and we need to give proper support to those people who are victims, including those people who are witnesses in the criminal justice system.

We do have to ensure that we have the proper range of sentences and a useful process for dealing with the most serious offenders who have to end up in custody and ensure that we have the right interventions and programmes in place to tackle the offending. Of course, we wish to break the cycle of offending and ensure successful resettlement. There is a big package of legislation looking at resettlement in the action plan. We want clearer accountability; people need to know what their role is.

There are key proposals. The first one is to increase the reach of intensive family interventions. We need to provide better support for young victims. We need young



people to feel that they are involved in these decisions themselves; they need to be brought into the process and not always feeling that it is something that is happening to them; they need to be part of finding out the solution to their needs. There is going to be expansion of the Safer Schools Partnerships to improve the links between young people and the police so that there would be a police officer attending at schools because there is an issue about the fact that there has been a breakdown between young people and the police. They don't see them as being there to help them. We wish a greater take-up of the parenting support that is available; and to explore better ways to engage parents in the Youth Justice System.

There are issues that we know arise when young people come into the Youth Justice System from when they are in court and their parents aren't there. This is a fundamental part of dealing with that young person: why aren't their parents there? We need to know why their parents aren't there. How do we get them there? What are the problems arising behind that? And I would like to flag up this point. This is a consultation question in the action plan and we would welcome input from anybody here at conference to putting suggestions forward about how we deal with that and we are seeking input, particularly from people who have expertise in the field, about how we should best go about improving the involvement of parents in the Youth Justice System, particularly in court and helping those young people to complete their sentences. How those parents react to that young person doing their sentence can be very important and can have a direct influence on what happens to that young person.

I have particular concerns about the rather worrying number of young people who end up in custody who are there just for breaching their community sentence or the supervision part of their sentence. It is 12%. They have not committed another offence. This is just for breach. There is a big issue here about supporting young people through that supervision process and making sure that we keep them doing the community part of their sentence and not just have them go into custody. There must be something wrong here and we need to tackle that key element. Parents and the involvement of parents in that sentencing process and what their child is participating in are crucial to the successful completion of that process and that stage in that young person's sentence, because we don't want them going into custody. Again, there is clear evidence to say the outcomes for people going into custody are not good.

The greater outreach and integration of services. This is seeking better engagement on first contact with the Youth Justice System. We want to have more street teams out there where they are seeing that young people are involved in anti-social behaviour so that they can go and talk to them, why are they there, what do they need, where do they come from, and try and sort out why they are there and whether they need more services, where their parents are, and things like this.

We are looking at making sure that there is a YOT worker in every police station, so that we have immediate intervention when that person is first arrested. Often there is a gap between when they get arrested by the police and before a YOT intervenes and makes an assessment of that young person. If you have them there straightaway, they can immediately talk to them and start doing work with them and engage with the parents before the Youth Justice System creeps into action - the earlier the better.



We want to give the Children's Trust a role to prevent offending and re-offending. That is an important extension, bringing parties together with more local interaction.

Among the key points in the plan are short-term actions, which have already started. £60 million has already been made available to ten key areas where we have identified the greatest need. The Government has produced £100 million in this year to take forward the key points within the action plan. But we have got longer-term proposals, again talking about a longer-term strategy, not just the short-term. This is why we have got consultation questions within the action plan and are wanting input from people about developing future policy.

In response to a question about the absence of any reference to the civil courts in the Children's Plan PAUL DALGLEISH said: We have to recognise that the Children's Plan has started from and is building on Every Child Matters. It recognises that we need to do more reflecting of discussion about joining up much more effectively if we are serious about addressing issues in the round. Part of that is we are building bridges, but we are not quite there and we recognise that. But we are getting there.

In response to a question which noted that a number of young women in the criminal justice system are pregnant and asked how they could be integrated into the system so as to ensure they received therapeutic provision to them, PHILIPPA GOFFE noted the importance of cross-government working in the development of plans.

We are looking at working with the YJB about improving assessments and we are looking at bringing together the common assessment framework and the ASSET assessment for young offenders. The key need is to assess the individual's issues in the round. If a young girl is pregnant, we need to consider her health needs and accommodation and planning for when the baby arrives and also, if that person is going to come before a court and get a sentence, what elements of the sentence need to be tailored for that specific individual's needs to take into account, if she is pregnant, about when the baby is going to be born and about what she can do and what her future plans are.

We are introducing the youth rehabilitation order which is supposed to provide a flexible and individual sentence. The Youth Offending Team need to work with mainstream children's services and with healthcare professionals to develop the individual tailored plan for that person.

In response to a question about the involvement of young people in decisions that affect them leading to good service delivery and policy development, PAUL DALGLEISH said that there was a Children's Panel as well as the Parents' Panel. Beverley Hughes, the Minister for Children, chairs the Children's Panel which meets three or four times a year. The intention is to communicate and understand better about how it looks and feels from their perspective.

A question was asked about evidence-based policymaking and how closely the current direction of youth justice policy was being driven by evidence. The Family



Interventions Project was being expanded. It had an element of compulsion, which was not known to be better than any other way of reaching the most needy. The pilot programme for the Safer Schools Partnership had been evaluated by the Centre for Policy Research Bureau and the results were not encouraging. Why are we expanding some of these programmes when we still don't really know if they are effective?

PHILIPPA GOFFE said: For the Youth Crime Action Plan we did look at the available research. There is a dearth of both qualitative and quantitative research to provide concrete evidence about the effectiveness of various interventions and the Government must shoulder some of the blame for this for not actually investing in research. We have got one major piece of research which is going on currently, which is the Juvenile Cohort Study. We should have the results of that next year and it will give evidence about the effectiveness of the sentences delivered to juveniles.

It was noted that since the Children's Plan we have had Building Better Futures, the Action Plan for the Children's Workforce with its expert group, which spoke about the importance of developing and strengthening professional identities. The Government talks about a differentiated workforce and the desire to push down to as low a level as possible the cost of delivery of the workforce. We have heard that if everybody used professional nurses for the Family Nursing Partnership delivery, a 50% improvement in outcomes. In other countries nurses and social workers are accredited to deliver parenting support effectively. In this country we seem to be accrediting less qualified people and the outcomes might well not be so good.

PAUL DALGLEISH responded: The Children's Plan overarches those specific groups that you mentioned. That sets the strategy and what you have got is examples of very discrete groups looking at some of the specifics. We are working closely with the DH on the review of the children's workforce, and that is designed to encourage precisely what you are asking us to think about. There is a developing policy and thinking about the strategy of joining up and working between the two Departments, recognising that we both have specific sets of skills and experiences which impact on families and young children. What we need to do is to make sure that as we are developing and shaping our policies that we are, if you like, improving the dynamics rather than rubbing against each other.

AILSASWARBRICK added that there is a move towards greater professionalism in the early years' workforce. There are qualifications being developed for children's centre leaders and for early years' professionals. The Family Nurse Partnership does rely very clearly (and the evidence shows that it is very important) on highly trained professionals. But I think that works best with a very specific cohort of people. If I recall correctly, the best impacts are with the sort of woman who needs it most. You have to make sure that you use your money, your talents and your skills wisely and then target the right workforce to the right interventions.

Why is the young defendants' pack still not being produced, despite the recommendation from this conference many years ago and despite the fact that it was a promise really in the Government document Youth Matters, which was published at the same time as Every Child Matters. If we are going to show respect to young



defendants as young people - they might not be young offenders, they might be young, innocent defendants - we need to provide them with full information about what happens in the court process. That includes providing the parents with some information. That could help avoid having children put in custody because they have breached their supervision. If you look at the way that young victims of crime are treated as compared to the way that young defendants are treated, there has been a young witness pack available to them for many years and it includes within that pack a booklet for parents about what happens when your child is going through court proceedings. The Youth Justice Board has hosted a steering group, which came up with a template for a proper, well-researched young defendants pack dealing with the issues that the research highlighted were needed by young defendants. This needs to be addressed in the context of the Youth Crime Action Plan. This would be taken up with the Court Service in the Ministry of Justice.

The Youth Crime Action Plan - is there anything in it that refers to the age of criminal responsibility? PHILIPPA GOFFE said that there are no current plans to change the position as it is. We did look at the position in other countries but I think it is probably fair to say that ministers are not wishing to go there at the moment.

The role of expert evidence in civil courts - there is a real crisis about not just paying for lawyers' fees but actually providing a coherent ethical trained expert workforce. There were recommendations made and I wonder if you could give us any update as to how this is going and what is happening.

PAUL DALGLEISH said: The Children's Plan has an emphasis on addressing relationship breakdown. We linked this to intervening early, try and get in before the breakdowns happen and try to mediate.

It is worrying that there is co-ordination in relation to youth justice between the MOJ and DCSF which we don't see happening between the MOJ and the DCSF in relation to care and the civil courts.

PAUL DALGLEISH said: One of our key agents is CAFCASS of course. We are doing a lot of work with them.

In summary EILEEN VIZARD said:

I think probably the key issue was the whole-hearted support that the conference would want to give for the provision of a spectrum of services for parents from universal services. We have had plenty of good examples of what these might be like presented to us in the course of conference, tiered and at a level that is appropriate, right through to much more specific services which would be targeted for parents and children who are socially excluded in high need.

These all need to be evidence based, as indeed the examples we have been hearing about most clearly have been, the Triple P work and other examples.



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We need to look after the workforce. We value the context in which children are reared. Whether they are reared by the biological parents, foster carers, in a childcare setting, volunteers, we value what is being done for these children, the quality of their upbringing is very important, but we note that there needs to be support for these carers. We note that there needs to be a skilled workforce actually delivering training and this skilled workforce needs to be well remunerated and supervised and given time to reflect on all the other things that we have discussed.

We will suggest that there is somebody possibly called a Chief Scientist for Children who will take a lead role in bringing together initiatives for children in whatever department they might be. This would bring together a much more coherent strategy for children in the longer term and include the commissioning of research and thinking about policy and practice over the much longer term. We have to move away from the currently inevitable three to five years funding round with valuable initiatives and cohorts being lost. Consideration must be given to how both services and research could be commissioned and set up to last for ten to fifteen years or longer.

Clinicians are being taken away from face-to-face work with clients by the burden of bureaucracy and form-filling. That links to some of the research demands, analysis programmes and to a worry about professional identities. If you take the Family Nurse Partnership work, it is clear that the professional identity of the nurses is absolutely central to developing and delivering excellent services to parents. In other professions, notably the social work profession, because social workers are now spending so much time in management tasks they are beginning to lose a sense of their clear professional identity and their skills base may be to some extent withering. The health visiting profession has also been mentioned in relation to that. As you are promoted you move away from direct work with clients so often. People want to keep in touch with direct practice with clients because it allows them to maintain their professional identities.