



Written evidence submitted by the Nuffield Foundation to the Education Committee Life chances inquiry, 31 May 2018

Executive summary

- The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust that funds research, analysis, and student programmes that advance social well-being across the United Kingdom. We want to improve people's lives, and their ability to participate in society, by understanding the social and economic factors that affect their chances in life. The research we fund aims to improve the design and operation of social policy, particularly in Education, Welfare, and Justice. Our student programmes provide opportunities for young people to develop their skills and confidence in quantitative and scientific methods. www.nuffieldfoundation.org.
- This response summarises Nuffield-funded research relating to the Education Select Committee's terms of reference.

A: The role of quality early years education in determining life chances and promoting social justice:

1. It is important to reflect on what is meant by 'quality' early years education and how it is measured. A Nuffield-funding project carried out by Mathers et al (2012) addressed this question directly, by assessing the different measures of quality used in the early years sector. Two grants: Mathers and Smee (2014) and Gambaro et al (2013) considered whether children from different backgrounds have equal access to quality early years education. Blanden et al (2018) looked directly at the role of early years education in children's educational outcomes - their findings contrast other research in this area, highlighting the complexity of this issue and the need for further investigation.
2. **Improving Quality in the Early Years: A comparison of perspectives and measures. Sandra Mathers, Rosanna Singler and Arjette Karemaker (2012).**¹
This project examined the different measures of quality applied in nurseries and preschools by comparing Ofsted inspections based on the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) with other quality assessments such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) and the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) as well quality assurance schemes. Researchers carried out interviews with parents, providers and local authorities to explore how these different measures are understood.

They found that Ofsted grades are too broad to provide a detailed measure of quality in childcare settings and are best used alongside other existing quality assessments. Some settings judged as good or outstanding by Ofsted were rated as lower quality on the ECERS and ITERS rating scales. Parents felt Ofsted ratings did not provide all the information needed to make decisions about childcare settings. The authors

¹ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/identifying-quality-childcare>

recommend local authorities use a range of indicators when allocating funding for free childcare provision.

3. **Quality and Inequality. Do three and four year olds in deprived areas experience lower quality early years provision? Sandra Mathers and Rebecca Smee (2014).²**

This project investigated whether early years education was of lower quality in disadvantaged areas compared to more affluent areas. The project used secondary analysis of data gathered between 2007 and 2013 from early years settings and the children attending them. They found that government-maintained settings in disadvantaged areas offered quality for three and four year olds that was comparable (and in some cases higher) than settings serving the more advantaged.

Within the PVI sector however, quality was lower in settings located in deprived areas and attended by children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This was most evident in the quality of interactions, support for learning language and literacy, and provision for diversity and individual needs. Within the PVI sector, settings with a high proportion of well-qualified staff (to A-level standard) were more likely to be higher quality, whether they served advantaged or disadvantaged areas. Only the presence of a graduate member of staff was associated with narrowing the gap between PVI settings located in deprived areas and more advantaged areas however.

4. **Equal access to high quality early years education and care. Evidence from England and other countries. Ludovica Gambaro, Kitty Stewart and Jane Waldfogel (2013).³**

Gambaro and colleagues examined the relationship between children's socio-economic background and the quality of the childcare setting they attended by combining different datasets. They used two indicators of quality: qualification levels of staff and Ofsted ratings. Children from the poorest areas were far *more* likely to have access to a teacher or an Early Years Professional (EYP), than their peers from less poor areas. This is because children from the poorest areas were much more likely to be in maintained sector nursery classes, where the entitlement is delivered by teachers.

In the PVI sector the presence of teachers and EYPs was scarce with just over a third of children attending settings in these sectors having access to a graduate, with no clear association with children's social background. Ofsted ratings told a different story. Both within the maintained and the PVI sectors children from the poorest areas are the *least* likely to be in an Outstanding setting. The authors found a positive correlation between employing a graduate and a positive Ofsted rating. But Ofsted ratings also appear to be sensitive to settings' intake: settings with high concentrations of poor children are less likely to receive a positive rating, holding other factors including staff qualifications constant. This could be because high numbers of disadvantaged children within settings make quality more difficult to achieve or because Ofsted judgements of quality also reflect children's levels of development, thus rating settings with a high concentration of disadvantaged children more poorly.

The authors conclude that while the quality of provision has been improved substantially by reforms and government investment, there are still insufficient graduate staff in the sector. They recommend funding mechanisms be designed to encourage and support settings to improve quality, and to enable parents to choose quality. Settings in disadvantaged areas should be supported by additional supply side funding.

² <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/deprivation-and-quality-preschool-provision>

³ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/childcare-puzzle-improving-quality-and-affordability>

5. **The impact of nursery attendance on children's outcomes. Jo Blanden, Sandra McNally and Kirstine Hansen (2018).**⁴

Jo Blanden and colleagues investigated the impact of nursery education on children's educational outcomes by exploring the effect of the roll out of free part-time nursery places for three and four year olds, since 1998, using administrative datasets. The findings showed modest beneficial effects of take-up of the free entitlement on children's outcomes at age five, however these effects seem to diminish by the time children leave primary school. Whilst there was some evidence that free part-time nursery places had more impact on the poorest, most-disadvantaged children, the attainment between those from richer and poorer backgrounds did not close in the longer term.

The study found a weak relationship between the characteristics of PVI settings and children's outcomes. Children taught by a highly qualified staff member and those attending settings rated as Outstanding by Ofsted scored slightly higher on the Foundation Stage Profile, but there were substantial unexplained differences in children's outcomes between settings. The findings from this study are in contrast to some other research in the area: specifically the Evaluation of Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study.⁵

B: The importance of support for parents and families, and integration with other services, in prevention and early intervention:

6. Nuffield-funded projects have explored support for parents of young children, specifically interventions to help parents develop children's outcomes. Burgoyne et al (2018) looked at the role of a parent-led oral language teaching programme in improving outcomes for pre-school children. In the early years of primary school Swain et al (2015) looked at the impact of family literacy programmes in supporting children's reading and Scott et al (2014) assessed the sustainability of outcomes for parenting programmes for children with behavioural issues. In addition, the Social Policy in a Cold Climate project included a workstream on the under-fives, which examined the impact of the last Labour Government's policies on children's well-being and life chances (Stewart 2013) and the same for the subsequent Coalition Government (Stewart 2015).

7. **Evaluating a parent delivered language enrichment programme: evidence from a randomised controlled trial: Kelly Burgoyne, Rachel Gardner, Helen Whiteley, Margaret J. Snowling and Charles Hulme (2018).**⁶

The researchers carried out a randomised controlled trial to assess the impact of a parent-delivered oral language teaching programme on preschool children's oral language and early literacy. They found the parent-delivered programme resulted in gains in children's language and narrative skills immediately following the programme, and that these language skills were maintained six months later and there were also improvements in early literacy. They note that the form of teaching is critical to the

⁴ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/impact-nursery-attendance-childrens-outcomes>

⁵ See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/featured-research/effective-pre-school-primary-secondary-education-project> for a full list of publications from the EPPSE study. A discussion of the apparent differences between the findings of these studies can be found here:

http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/Early_years_education_and_childcare_Nuffield_FINAL.pdf in section 3.1.

⁶ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/evaluating-parent-delivered-language-enrichment-programme>

success of the programme and recommend further research to identify the most effective forms of increasing parental involvement.

8. **The impact of family literacy programmes on children's literacy skills and the home literacy environment. Jon Swain, Olga Cara, John Vorhaus and Jenny Lister (2015).**⁷

This project examined the impact of family literacy programmes on the reading and writing skills of Year 1 and Year 2 children, and the impact on literacy practices at home. It assessed 27 family literacy programmes across England. The study found family literacy programmes provided a range of benefits for family literacy providers, schools, parents and children. A positive effect on children's reading skills was found and extensive changes in the home literacy environment were self-reported by families.

9. **Parenting interventions that improve disadvantaged children's life chances. Stephen Scott, Kathy Sylva, Angeliki Kallisoglou and Tamsin Ford (2014).**⁸

Researchers aimed to find out which type of parenting programmes help improve the longer term social behaviour and reading skills of young children at risk of poor outcomes due to anti-social behaviour. The study was a follow-up to the Helping Children Achieve Trial⁹ which compared the progress of children aged five to seven years from disadvantaged, inner-city areas who were receiving one of four evidence-based parenting interventions: Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools Literacy programme (SPOKES), the Incredible Years relationship programme (IY), a combination of both SPOKES and IY or signposting information about useful services (the control group).

The original Helping Children Achieve Trial found that there were promising results of the programme nine to 11 months after the trial began. This project followed children up when they were seven to nine years old to see if outcomes had been sustained. The project concluded that these programmes led to enduring improvements in the parent-child relationship, child behaviour and also child reading skills. They found that SPOKES did not have an impact by itself with this group of behaviourally challenged children.

10. **Social Policy in a Cold Climate, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), London School of Economics. The programme as a whole was led by Ruth Lupton. The work on under fives was led by Kitty Stewart.**

This programme examined the effects of the major economic and political changes in the UK since 2007, particularly their impact on the distribution of wealth, poverty, income inequality and spatial difference. In relation to the under fives, spending on early years education, childcare and Sure Start grew almost four-fold in England between 1997 and 2010.¹⁰ Key policies included longer maternity leave, Sure Start Children's Centres, free early education for all three and four year olds, more affordable and higher quality childcare, and more generous financial support for families with children, both in and out of work. Average maternity leave taken doubled, there was an increase in the use of formal childcare and early education, including among disadvantaged groups. There were measurable improvements in parenting as well as children's health, behaviour, and other developmental outcomes. Gaps

⁷ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/impact-family-literacy-programmes>

⁸ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/parenting-interventions-improve-disadvantaged-children%E2%80%99s-life-chances>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/which-type-of-parenting-programme-best-improves-child-behaviour-and-reading-the-helping-children-achieve-trial>

¹⁰ [Labour's Record on the Under Fives: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 1997-2010](#)

narrowed between disadvantaged social groups and others in the levels of low birth weight, infant mortality and cognitive and social development, though considerable social gaps remained at the end of the period.

Under the Coalition, real spending per child on early education, childcare and Sure Start services fell by a quarter between 2009-10 and 2012-13, and tax-benefit reforms hit families with children under five harder than any other household type.¹¹ Take-up of the free nursery entitlement for three and four year olds rose, and early education places for disadvantaged two year olds were rolled out. Health visitor numbers increased and the number of places on the Family-Nurse Partnership programme for teenage parents doubled.

Projects which are currently underway that will produce evidence in this area, but which have not yet reached the reporting stage

11. Dialogic book-sharing and cognitive and socio-emotional development. Lynne Murray, Peter Cooper, Claire Hughes, Edward Melhuish.¹²

This project will evaluate a programme that is designed to train parents of two-three year olds living in disadvantaged areas, in dialogical book-sharing practices. Dialogical book-sharing techniques involve supporting children with picture books by sensitively following and supporting their interests and actively engaging them in reciprocal interactions. These techniques have been shown to have positive effects on children's cognitive development, including their language abilities. Previous research found that disadvantaged parents are less likely to share books with their children, and, when they do they tend not to use dialogic techniques. This intervention will be delivered through Children's Centres and if effective could be scaled-up by widely training Children's Centre staff. This project started in March 2017 and is due to report in early 2019.

12. Early Words Together programme: a pilot randomised controlled trial. Louise Tracey, Nicola Gridley, Christina Clark and Clare McGread.¹³

This project is a randomised controlled trial of the impact of the Early Words Together programme, on the language acquisition of children living in deprived areas. The National Literacy Trust's Early Words Together programme is an intervention aiming to support parents to adopt activities that have been shown to improve the home learning environment – an important influence on the development of children's language skills. The project started in September 2017 and is due to report in summer 2020.

13. RCT of parent-based models of speech and language therapy. Deborah Gibbard, Sue Roulstone, Chris Markham, Clare Smith.¹⁴

This project will evaluate an enhanced parent-based intervention aiming to support parents living in disadvantaged areas to develop their children's language development at home. This intervention is targeted at two to three year old children with early language delay and is delivered by speech and language therapists. In areas of social disadvantage recruitment and retention of parents can be a challenge, so this project aims to include additional elements to increase parental engagement. This study started in April 2017 and will report in summer 2020.

¹¹ [The Coalition's Record on the Under Fives: Policy, Spending and Outcomes 2010-2015](#)

¹² <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/dialogic-book-sharing-cognitive-socio-emotional-development>

¹³ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/early-words-together-programme-pilot-randomised-controlled-trial>

¹⁴ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/rct-parent-based-models-speech-and-language-therapy>

14. A systematic review of the impact of parent-child reading. James Law, Cristina McKean, Robert Rush.¹⁵

This project carried out a systematic review of the international literature available about interventions involving parent-child book reading. It aimed to assess the evidence of the effectiveness of joint book reading schemes on preschool children in improving their school readiness and early language development. This project started in September 2016 and will report in summer 2018.

C: The importance of communication skills and language development:

15. Nuffield-funded research shows the importance of communication skills and language development, even in the youngest children. Matthew et al (2017) identified the importance of 'contingent talk' for babies as young as 11 months in affecting their later language outcomes. Duff et al (2015) showed how babies' language skills at age one to two years is associated with later language outcomes in primary school but also underlined the importance of family history. Snowling et al (2012) and Bowyer-Crane et al (2016) have shown how an oral language intervention with children in their first year and the year before primary school (the Nuffield Early Language Intervention) can improve children's language outcomes, and also highlight the importance of the way interventions are implemented in their ability to help support children's language development.

16. Does promoting parents' contingent talk benefit language development? Danielle Matthews, Michelle McGillion, Julian Pine and Jane Herbert (2017).¹⁶

This project aimed to assess whether contingent talk: a style of communication where the parent talks about objects in a baby's current focus of attention, causes better language outcomes in children. The study tested whether showing caregivers a short video about talking with their children would change the level of contingent talk the parents engaged in, and children's language outcomes. The trial found that the intervention increased the amount of contingent talk parents used. For families with lower socio-economic status there were also improvements in children's language skills a few months later. These outcomes were not sustained in the longer term however, suggesting that a longer term intervention would have been necessary to ensure lasting benefits.

17. Learning to read project: Do vocabulary skills in infancy predict school-age language and literacy outcomes? Fiona Duff, Gurpreet Green, Kim Plunkett and Kate Nation (2015).¹⁷

This project followed up 300 babies to assess whether their infant vocabulary skills at age one to two years could predict school-age language and literacy skills. The study found infants with larger vocabularies went on to achieve higher levels of language and literacy in primary school. Although vocabulary in infants predicted later language and literacy skill development, family history was also a very important factor. Children with smaller vocabularies and a history of reading or language difficulties were more likely to show reading difficulties than children without family risk.

¹⁵ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/systematic-review-impact-parent-child-reading>

¹⁶ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/does-promoting-parents-contingent-talk-benefit-language-development>

¹⁷ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/can-infant-vocabulary-measures-predict-later-reading-skills>

18. **Nuffield Early Language Intervention, Margaret J. Snowling, Claudine Bowyer-Crane, Charles Hulme (2012).**¹⁸

The Nuffield Early Language Intervention is an evidence-based oral language intervention for children in nursery and reception who show weakness in their oral language skills and are therefore at risk of experiencing difficulty with reading. It is delivered over 30 weeks by teaching assistants in groups of three to four children.

The intervention was developed by a team from the University of York, and evaluated by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) who found the programme increased the attainment levels of four to five year olds in vocabulary, grammar and listening skills and improved language and children's confidence. The EEF are funding a second effectiveness trial of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention, which is currently underway. A Nuffield-funded project, starting in January 2019, will develop and evaluate a nursery version of the Nuffield Early Language Intervention.

19. **Oral language intervention for children with English as an additional language, Claudine Bowyer-Crane, Silke Fricke, Charles Hulme (2016).**¹⁹

This project followed on from the Nuffield Early Learning Intervention and evaluated the Get Ready for Learning programme - an oral language intervention for children in reception with English as an Additional Language and monolingual children with language weaknesses. Whilst successful in teaching new vocabulary, the programme did not result in improvements in more general language skills. Staff in schools were very positive about the programme and felt the children taking part had increased confidence, however found it difficult to fit the programme into the school timetable and that the children taking part may not have been those most suited to the approach the intervention used.

¹⁸ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/nuffield-early-language-intervention>

¹⁹ <http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/oral-language-intervention-children-eal>