



A Review of How Fathers Can be Better Recognised and Supported Through DCSF Policy

Department for Children, Schools and Families

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Aims and objectives

- To review how DCSF policy supports fathers' engagement with family services
- Three key questions for the research:
 - To what extent are fathers recognised in DCSF and its partners' policies?
 - How father friendly are family services?
 - What is the relationship between policy and practice?



Method

- Policy audit
 - Review of over 150 policy documents
- Local authority survey
 - Responses from 50 local authorities
- Qualitative fieldwork
 - 8 case study local authorities, 10 family services in each



Defining terms

- Family services:
 - Children’s Centres; primary / secondary / special schools; family information services; behaviour and attendance; teenage pregnancy; youth offending services; Connexions; integrated youth services; safeguarding and looked after children; parenting support
- Policy types:
 - Legislation; top level policy; workforce and service delivery; financial; monitoring and evaluation



Fathers in DCSF policy

- Explicit recognition of fathers in about a quarter of policy documents
- Little recognition of different groups of fathers
- Clear differences by policy type
 - Greatest: workforce and service delivery and top level policy
 - Little or none: legislation, financial or monitoring and evaluation
- Some differences by type of family service
 - Greatest for: Children's Centres
 - Some recognition: teenage pregnancy, schools, parenting support



Local authority viewpoint

- Local authorities:
 - High awareness of key national policy documents
 - Many beginning to focus on fathers (e.g. through parenting strategy and specific pilot initiatives)
- Views of family services in their area:
 - Almost all seen to be accessed more by mothers
 - Services generally seen as being 'neutral' towards fathers
 - Children's Centres and parenting services most father friendly



Practice in family services

- Mothers access family services much more frequently than fathers because of parental role
- Family services generally neutral towards fathers – limited evidence of routine father specific practice
- Father specific practice tended to be sporadic, often based on individual manager / practitioner interest and local initiative
- Little or no monitoring of engagement by fathers

Service specific findings: examples

- Children's Centres: generally reported as having very low engagement by fathers in mainstream services compared to mothers, but more likely than any other types of family service to have been pro-active in trying to become more father friendly
- Schools: more father specific practice and greater parental engagement generally in primary; difficulties engaging effectively with non-resident fathers

Key barriers and enablers

Barriers

- Predominantly female workforce
- Views of the workforce
- Lack of training and skills
- National targets and priorities
- Identifying young and non-resident fathers
- Service characteristics
- Fathers' and mothers' attitudes

Enablers

- Timing and location of services
- Appealing to fathers' interests
- Outreach
- Positive, father friendly communication
- Working with voluntary and community sector

Conclusions - policy and practice

- Most policy is neutral towards fathers
- Loose connection between recognition of fathers in policy documents and father friendly practice – much father friendly practice generally developed bottom up
- Policy can make a difference: Children's Centre guidance
- Some policy has little influence: schools good practice guidance
- Some policies can create barriers to engagement with fathers: teenage pregnancy targets