

12 years of early years policy, practice and research in Britain

What should be our future priorities for early years?

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Where started in 1997-1998

- Very high levels of child poverty, among the highest levels in Europe, very low early years service base
 - Labour Manifesto commitment to universal pre-school education for 3 and 4 year olds (5 days a week, 2.5 hours per day, school term time only) **all children**
 - National childcare strategy designed to increase quantity, accessibility, and quality of day care for working parents, **children of working parents**
 - Comprehensive Spending Review on Services for Children under 8, HMT review that resulted in Sure Start **poor children**
 - **3 different strands: early education, childcare, and integrated services for poor children**
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What we did: four major developments that encapsulate changes over the 10 years

- 2002, merger of Sure Start Unit with Early Years and Childcare in DfES (as was) creating integrated service framework for under 5s
- 2003, Every Child Matters Agenda, creating integrated service framework for all children 0-19, backed up by **Children Act 2004**
- 2004, Publication of Ten Year Childcare Strategy, backed up by **Childcare Act 2006**
- 2009 Publication of Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare, backed up **Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act, 2009**

Most important of the Changes: Sure Start and Every Child Matters

Sure Start: 1999

- result of Treasury review of services for young children, key principles: early intervention and poverty matters
- Area based initiative aimed at poor areas, for all under 4s in the area
- Local partnerships free to design program, but common set of goals, **outcome driven**
- 524 local programmes set up, eventually 'mainstreamed' to become Sure Start Children's centres

Every Child Matters: 2003

- Response to death of a child, failure of services to work together
- Integration of children's social care, education, youth offending, 0-19
- Built on 5 outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, economic well being, and making a positive contribution
- Improved information sharing, creation of DCS role,
- Reframing of responsibilities around the person not the profession, Dept for Children, Schools and Families (2007) **but name changed by new Govt in 2010, Dept for Education**

Key Themes consistent over the Blair-Brown era

- Reducing child poverty (PM announcement 1999)
- Reducing gaps in outcomes between poor children and the rest
- Evidence based policy
- Supporting parents/supporting parenting
- ***Progressive universalism***: System designed to ensure maximum support for most disadvantaged within a universal platform of services for all children

The Role of Government: supporting parents and parenting

Reduce pressures

- Rights and legal protection
- Financial support
- Support in kind

For example:

- Access to maternity and paternity leave
- Flexible working and flexible childcare
- Targeted benefits

Enhance capabilities

- Information and guidance
- Skills and training
- Intervention

For example

- Before and after birth, midwife and health visitor support
- Family Intervention programmes
- Family Nurse Partnerships

Intervening to safeguard children

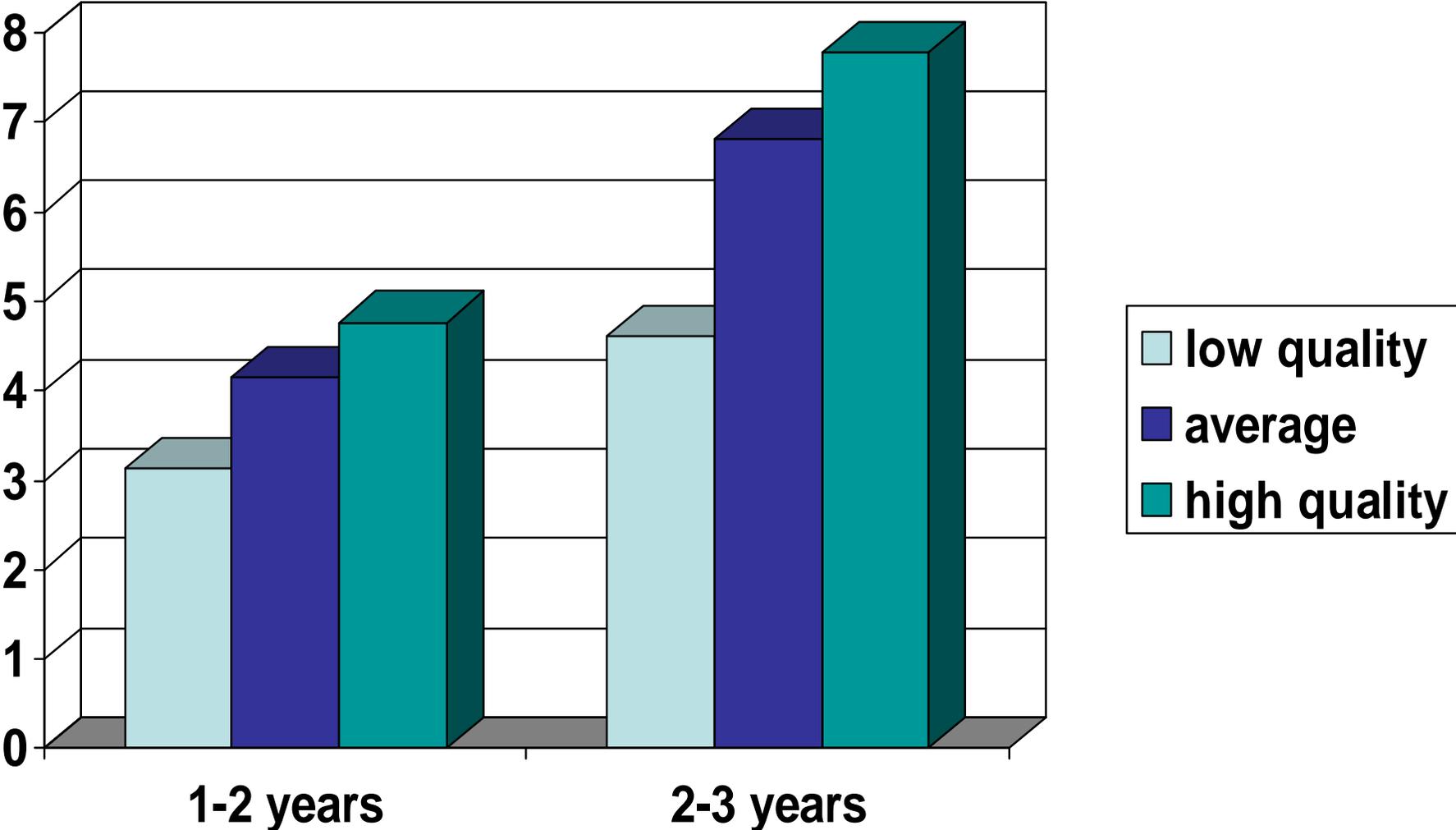
What has research told us that has informed all policy development?

Two pre-eminent studies

- Effective Provision of Preschool Education (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart)
- National Evaluation of Sure Start (Melhuish and Belsky)

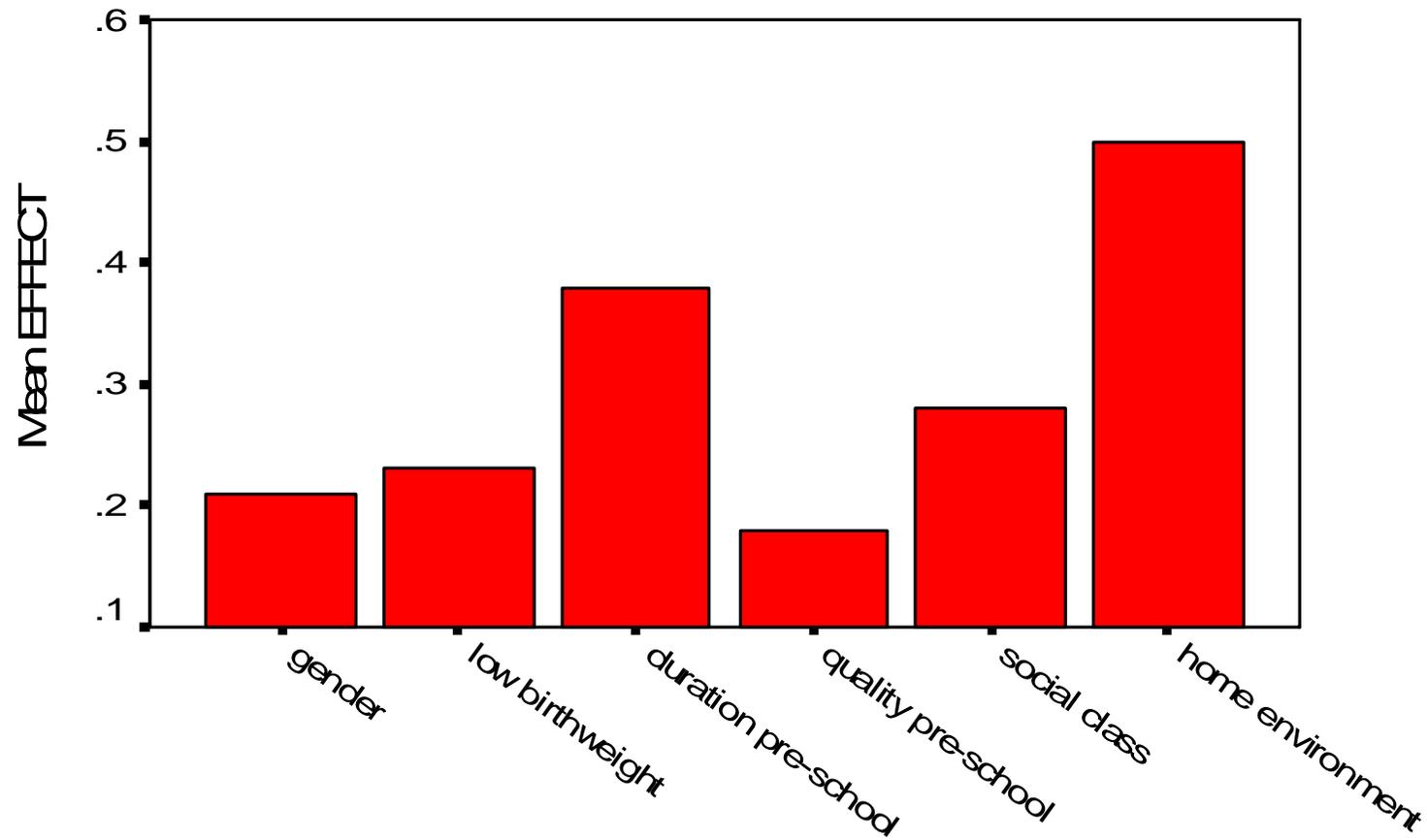
Key messages from EPPE

1. Quality and Duration matter (months of developmental advantage on literacy)



2. Most important predictors of success

EFFECTS UPON LITERACY



What have we learned from Sure Start about supporting poor families

- Three impact studies:
 - 2005, mixed results; good for the poor, some negative results for the poorest
 - 2007, overall good results, and no differences between the groups
 - 2010, good results for parents, improved health indicators for children

A possible explanation for 2005 results: user satisfaction and reach

Wants yes Needs yes <i>Ideal users, grateful and compliant</i>	Wants yes Needs no <i>Benign neglect; probably providing good voluntary effort, good for child mix</i>
Wants no Needs no <i>Ignore, probably using other local services, children fine</i>	Wants no Needs yes <i>Requires real resource to engage, probably unpopular with other users</i>

Second impact study 2007 longitudinal study comparing Sure Start children with Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) children

5 outcomes clearly indicated beneficial effects for SSLPs. These were for:

- child **positive social behaviour** (cooperation, sharing, empathy)
- child **independence / self-regulation**
(works things out for self, perseverance, self-control)
- **Parenting Risk Index** (observer rating + parent-child relationship, harsh discipline, home chaos)
- **home learning environment**
- total **service use**

In addition there were better results in SSLPs for:

- child immunisations
- child accidents
- But these 2 outcomes could have been influenced by timing effects

Reasons for differing results: 2005- 2007

1. Amount of exposure

It took 3 years for a programme to be fully functional. Therefore

- in the first phase children / families were not exposed to fully functional programmes for much of the child's life**
- in the second phase children / families are exposed to fully functional programmes for all child's life**

2. Quality of services

- Children's centres now have clearer focus on services following lessons from earlier years, and NESS**
- early on staff had a lot to learn. As knowledge and experience grew, and training and support for staff improved, so did results improve.**

Third impact study 2010

Impact of established Sure Start programmes on 5 year olds and their families

Significant differences between SSLP area children and MCS children

- Mothers reporting greater life satisfaction
- Less chaotic homes
- Better home learning environments
- Children better physical health, less likely to be overweight
- Greater reduction in worklessness in Sure Start families

But

- Less attendance at school meetings

Where are we now; new government, big cuts.....

Actually, some good news

Brilliant statement on Foundation Stage just published includes:

- Free entitlement to 15 hours a week for all 3 and four year olds maintained
- Poorest 20% of 2 year olds also to get 15 hours a week free
- Ongoing commitment to Children's centres
- Expansion of Health visitor work force by 50%

But some real dangers

- Removal of the 'ring fence' on children's centre and child care funding, discretion at local level
- Great emphasis on improved parenting to reduce the likelihood of poverty in next generation, weakening of commitment to today's poor children
- Strong emphasis on Sure Start for the 'neediest' and payment by results funding systems
- Childcare element of working tax credits reduced from maximum of 80% to 70% of childcare costs
- Biggest danger is increase in child poverty as unemployment rises due to overall cuts in public spending

Summary lessons

- **Community development essential for engagement, but not enough to shift child outcomes**
- **The need for reliable data**
- **Clarity on policy intent: anti-poverty or improving parenting capabilities, current emphasis on the latter to the expense of the former**
- **Challenges of working across agencies**
- **Staff development, salaries, career structure**

New Policy Environment

- **increased demand and reduced resource to meet demand.**
- **Payment by results extremely tricky in early years territory**
- **Tensions in Big Society ideas, new localism, and evidence based interventions**
- **But...commitment on children's centres, universal provision for 3 and 4 year olds 15 hours free still stands**
- **so far infrastructure created in ten years is proving robust.**

If you want to know more, 3 books to read:



Sylva et al and Waldfogel, already published. Eisenstadt out in September. Pre-order from info@isbs.com or Amazon.