

# Never too early, never too late

Naomi Eisenstadt  
Senior Research Fellow  
University of Oxford

## 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**

# 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

# Government, again very interested in parents, but why?

- **Are parents:**
  - Consumers?
  - Clients?
  - Pupils?
  - Co-producers?
- **Are parents really mothers?**
- **Are fathers providers? Male role models? Benefits cheats?**
- **Impact of adult conditions on capacity to parent; Think Family work on chasm between adults' and children's services**
- **Risks for government in parenting**
  - *Cultural diversity*
  - *Nanny state*

# 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**

# Interest in parenting is about early intervention

- Evidence now substantial on impact of severe stress on infant brain development
- But also evidence of ongoing brain plasticity: ie never too late
- Never too late because:
  - Stuff happens to children after they are five
  - Effort was to redirect investment where it had been neglected, not to give up on ten year olds

# The critical role of health visitors to foundation years

- Health organisations know where pregnant women are, and when they have their babies
- Health visitors understand and can support the development of early attachment, and can identify early signs of post natal depression
- Encouraging talking and playing in very early stages is best way of intervening early

# Current policy

- Welcome commitment to Foundation years, and particularly welcome renewed emphasis on parenting and evidence based programmes
- Concerned that:
  - **Risk of fragmentation between health and children's services as HVs taken back into GP surgeries from CCs**
- Increased unemployment will mean more not fewer poor children
- Emphasis on parenting behaviours reduces dual track of reducing pressures and increasing capabilities
- New localism means post code lottery for all children
- Lack of serious debate on what needs to be decided at what level