

The role of parents and families in  
**Enterprise in Education**

**Think Tank Paper 2**

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# The role of parents and families in Enterprise in Education

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The Centre for Studies in Enterprise, Career Development and Work was created in 2003 to encourage evidence-based policy and practice in enterprise in education, career development and work-related learning. This discussion paper is the second in a series seeking to inform and stimulate debate on relevant topics. It may be copied for use for educational purposes provided the source is acknowledged.

### ***The next discussion paper in the series is:***

The Enterprising School (February 2004)

### ***Previous publications in the series:***

Quality Awards for Enterprise in Education: Their role in Scottish schools (June 2003)

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*'The only two things we can give our children  
are roots and wings'*

Parents' section of Skills for Adolescence

## Introduction

### The evidence

This paper considers the role of parents and families in Enterprise in Education and how their influence may be appropriately harnessed in the interests of young people. In order to plan effective work with parents and families it is necessary to understand the nature and extent of their influence. Therefore this paper includes a short summary of the research evidence on this, drawn from a number of Scottish studies and from a literature review of some of the evidence from the rest of the UK and internationally.

It is clear that most of the current research and development on the role of parents and families in *Enterprise in Education* is focused on secondary age children and relates to career development or to education for work. With little covering enterprise education. This discussion paper begins to address this gap through applying the key principles from career development research to parents' involvement in *Enterprise in Education* as a whole.

### The policy context

The obvious context into which this paper should be put is that of *Determined to Succeed*. The Scottish Executive's response (Scottish Executive, 2003) notes Recommendation Three and its response:

All local authorities must design and implement a communications strategy for raising the awareness and commitment of parents and carers to Enterprise in Education.

*We agree. Parents and carers have a critical role to play in the education and development of their children. They need to understand the aim of, and be enthused by, Enterprise in Education. We hope parents and carers will contribute to the delivery of Enterprise in Education in schools: this could be through direct, hands-on, help; or by supporting their children at*

*home. A communications strategy will be one element in delivering parent and carer commitment: we will ask local authorities to address this important issue in their Enterprise in Education Plans.*

Determined to Succeed, Enterprise in Education,  
Scottish Executive Response. 2003 (p10)

However, the evidence from the literature makes it clear that, while policy statements across a range of fields commonly recognise the important role of parents and carers, it has proved more challenging to harness their influence in practice. Individual projects have developed strategies that have, on the whole, not gone mainstream. We consider this further in the Issues section of this paper.

### Definitions

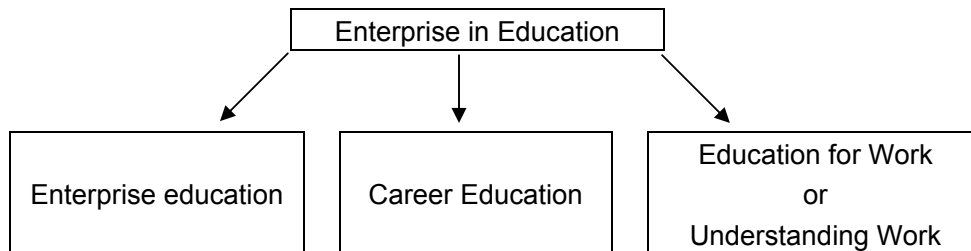
It is important to clarify the terms being used.

### Parents

When we use the term '*parents*' we also mean '*carers*', '*guardians*' and any adult who fulfills a parental role for the child. This, therefore, includes step-parents; and '*families*' encompasses step-families. At some points we also use the broad term '*informal support network*' by which is meant those individuals around children who are influential in how they see their world and their future, but do not have a formal or specialist role in supporting them in *Enterprise in Education* learning. The informal network of support can be very broad, encompassing the extended family (including the 'step' variety). It can include aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and godparents in addition to immediate family members such as older and younger siblings and, of course, parents. Also potentially influential is the friendship group, and in particular the 'best pal' or close friends. Those loosely attached to the family, such as family friends or neighbours, or colleagues of family members are also part of the informal network. The '*formal support network*' includes teachers in early years and primary education and teachers with a recognised guidance, PSE or *Enterprise in Education* role in secondary; it also includes Careers Scotland staff and staff with a guidance role in FE and HE.

### Enterprise in Education

It would seem obvious to look for definitions of this term in *Determined to Succeed*, but we would suggest that further fleshing out of the descriptions is necessary if we are to consider the role of parents and families in sufficient detail. We would describe the three elements of *Enterprise in Education* as follows:



*Enterprise education* is most commonly, and perhaps traditionally, thought of as projects or simulations where there are certain key features:

- 👁️ The activity is a real one, ie. something actually happens. Pupils are involved in planning the project from start to final outcome.
- 👁️ Real customers are involved, whether paying or not.
- 👁️ Pupils take responsibility for what happens – the decisions are theirs and the consequences therefore become very real
- 👁️ Every pupil involved in the activity has a clear role to play. In such projects, young people are given the opportunity to take charge, show initiative, be creative, make decisions and persevere.

Such activities generally involve setting up and running a company (profit or non-profit making). Often it has a strong entrepreneurial strand and develops into a business. However, enterprise education should be more broadly defined to include any activity or approach which encourages and develops a 'can do' attitude, while giving young people more control over their own learning and the environment in which this takes place.

- 👁️ *Career education* also has a broad definition. It covers that learning which develops career management skills and encourages career development. This might include accessing and weighing up career information and guidance; gaining job or course search skills;



developing and reviewing personal plans for education, training and work in the light of values and aspirations; recognising the influences on individual choice; gaining knowledge and understanding about pathways and opportunities in post-school education, training and work, including the changing local and national labour markets.

- *Education for Work* (or Understanding Work) raises awareness of the world of work and helps young people to prepare to make an effective transition to the workplace. This includes an understanding of work roles and responsibilities; examination of various working environments; awareness of business; gaining the employability skills required; seeing the links between school and the workplace; understanding the continuing links between post-school and lifelong learning and work.

## The nature and extent of the influence of parents and families on enterprise in education

Based on research on career development, it is clear that the impact that parents and families have on young people is immense. Briefly, they influence aspirations and motivation; affect knowledge of educational and occupational opportunities; influence values and priorities about post-school choices (including education, training, work and self-employment); and provide the practical, moral and financial support that allows their children to implement action plans. This puts the influence of parents and families at the heart of the Enterprise in Education agenda. Young people are not blank sheets on which to write the hoped-for learning outcomes of Enterprise in Education: they bring the accumulated life and work experiences of their parents and families to their consideration of enterprise, work and career development.

*'The family context of attitudes and values, though, has huge unconscious persistence in the decision-making of 14-18 year olds, and we must regard the choices that are made during this time as being, for most young people, a synthesis of inherited values and emerging individual values. The choices of young people are never free of the influence of their family...'*

Foskett and Helmsley-Brown, 2001 (p204)

Parents and families (and the informal network in general) might be described as providing the 'background music' against which young people hear what the formal network is trying to say to them through Enterprise in Education inputs and personal advice and guidance.

We now provide some illustrations of the evidence-base for working with parents and families.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Only selected key references are given, but a fuller reading list is available on request from the authors.

### Aspiration and choices

Ongoing work at the University of Strathclyde which is researching the Economic and Educational benefits of Enterprise Education (5-14) has produced evidence that the importance of family members is quite striking, although probably more in terms of attitudes and values than in career aspirations. With older children, it is clear that parents are influential in decisions about post-school choices (Howieson et al., 1993; Middleton & Loughhead, 1993; Penick & Jepsen, 1992), about remaining at school and entry to further and higher education, about changes in direction post-16, about values in working and educational life (DeRidder, 1990) and about aspiration levels. Parental motivation is significantly related to aspiration levels of students, irrespective of the child's IQ or family social class. This last may give some part of the explanation why some young people are able to succeed despite major disadvantages (and vice versa). It has also been suggested that parents and families impact on the extent to which young people see themselves as likely to be powerful in the workplace, with possible links to the possession of a 'can do' approach.

### Educational achievement

Parents and families impact on educational achievement through the educational resources of the family, the environment of the family, family cultures and the general support and encouragement for the individual's education in the family setting.

### Finding jobs or courses for their children

Parents can be either an effective or an ineffective link to local jobs and other opportunities including educational provision. The Scottish School Leavers Survey (Lynn et al, 2000) found that almost half of young people (46% - 40% females and 50% males) found work through a family member or friend in contrast with around a fifth (20% - 18% females and 22% males) through public employment agencies such as the Careers Office (15% - 11% females and 18 % males) and the Job Centre (9% - 13% females and 6% males). The different impacts of these formal and informal networks were almost exactly reversed for entry into jobs that were part of government training programmes. The 'job-finding' effect of the informal network was still very powerful well beyond the school leaving period. The same study found that around a third of 22-23 year olds had found their current job or training scheme through family members or friends.

### Young men

As part of the focus on social inclusion the needs of lower attaining young men seeking to enter the labour market have been identified. Recent research with young men suggests that social networks still play a critical role in assisting young men finding work: young men with family support (Meadows, 2001) and those living with family members (Stafford et al, 1999) were more successful in the labour market. This latter study identified strong positive influences from living with family members on young men's chances of securing employment. It also described the nature of the support provided in the family setting, describing it as primarily financial, motivational and informational.

### Perceptions and parameters

Parents can express anxieties to their children about the value of training (Semple, 1994) and about fair treatment by employers and trainers (Hodkinson et al, 1996; Semple et al, 1998). In all this they *'provide a general framework of aspirations and hopes for their children'*; *'a space within which choices are made and validated'* (Ball et al, 1998; Macrae, 1997); a *'framed field of reference'* (Foskett and Hesketh, 1996). From this comes the influence on values, for example, the level of priority to be put on factors such as security of employment, investment in training, being entrepreneurial, the value of lifelong learning, life-work balance etc.

### International and cultural comparisons

Families and communities vary in their influence and support functions in different societies and cultures (Penick and Jepsen, 1992; Clayton et al, 1993; Cordon and Antonio, 1997; Malmberg and Trempala, 1997). However, some dimensions of parental influence remain constant, for example in a review of 12 European countries Ianelli (2002) found that, despite significant country variations, parental education affected young people's educational and early occupational attainment in all the countries studied.

### Family systems perspectives

A more recent development has been to consider the dynamics of the family. Young people whose parents adopted an egalitarian style of parenting showed increased career development compared with those whose parents adopted an authoritarian or *laisse-faire* style. One of the key elements seems

to be the nature and extent of parent-teenager conversations, and interventions that encourage career conversations between the two have been shown to be effective in improving career development in young people and parent-teenager relationships (Osguthorpe, 1978; Palmer and Cochrane, 1988; Semple, 1992; Semple 1993; Morrow, 1995). Family functioning dimensions, as evaluated by 16 year olds and their parents, were more frequent and stronger predictors of career development than gender, socio-economic status and educational achievements.

## Illustrations of parent and family interventions

In this section we use the words of parents and their children to show the dimensions of parent and family influence in practice. We draw mainly from a 3 year ethnographic study (Howieson et al, 2001; Howieson et al, 2002) of a group of young people as they prepared to leave school and made their first (and sometimes subsequent) transitions. However, we also draw on examples from our experience over the years in working with schools, young people and their families.

### Ways in which parents and families influenced young people

It was clear that the involvement of parents and families could be put into three categories. The first category was that of *planned, explicit interventions* where those concerned actually intended to provide help and advice in career development. Most planned, explicit interventions were driven by parents. The second category of impact was that of *implicit assumptions* (usually from the family) whereby values, expectations and assumptions were shared without being clearly articulated. The third category of impact was that of *unplanned influence* where young people came into unplanned contact with other experiences or situations which nevertheless had an impact on career thinking. Here are some examples under each heading.

### Planned, explicit interventions

Most parents had a role in *encouraging and motivating* young people, for example by insisting that their children worked hard at school or stayed on at school because qualifications were important, or studied in their HE course:

*'I think there's a big thing to get out and earn, especially if a friend's left and doing that and what they don't realise is there's not the opportunities there to earn. You know, it's meaningless jobs, I think, at that age (ie. 16). You really need the qualifications, that's what we kept saying to her all the time.'*

Parent

*'We were anxious that he was slow at first in his (professional paramedical) course, he just got passes at first and we had to encourage and push him – we were nag, nag, nagging at him, but then he got a B1, so that was fine.'* Parent

Sometimes parents' efforts at motivation were directed at encouraging the young person to develop work discipline, get experience of earning a living and take responsibility for contributing to the family income:

*'I say to her repeatedly, if she's, 'Oh, no, I don't want to go to school today!' 'Well, away and scrub the floor, then, cos that's the job you're going to get when you leave!' She says, 'No, I'm going on holiday, I'll be on holiday for eight weeks' (during the school summer holidays) and I've thought, 'I'm sure you're no, you'll be going to look for a job!'* Parent

Parents were particularly important in *making young people proactive in seeking jobs* (part-time or full-time) and courses:

*'Jobs'll no come to you, you'll have to go and get them. Away down to the supermarket and see if they're looking for someone'* Parent

*Raising aspirations* was another important role for parents. A very common approach was to say 'don't do what I did'. A number of parents regretted that they had not taken the advantage of certain opportunities when they had been of a similar age and wanted their child to do better:

*'He's to go out and do what he has to, 'cos I didn't take the opportunities and you want more for your family than what you've had.'* Parent

Another example is the mother who had clear views about what she wanted for her daughter and was therefore encouraging her as much as possible:

*'I don't want her to be dependent on any man!'* Parent

The following quotes from a young person and her mother show that the mother's views had been forcibly expressed and clearly understood by the young person:

*'She says she'll back me up, told me to finish my qualifications and then get more qualifications.... She works in a factory and says " You work in a factory and I'll never speak to you again!"'*

Young person

*'I feel as though I'm the bad example, I'm the example of what not to do, I don't think there's anything wrong with working in a factory but I would rather she didn't.'*

Parent

Most parents tried to raise aspiration, but a small number of other parents had different concerns. One mother was concerned about too much pressure on young people:

*'A lot of them set their sights very high and then if they don't get the grades, they're very disappointed.... Sometimes I think you're better not to set your sights too high because a lot of them, they get into depressions. They should be happy, you know, you hear a young' un's maybe taken their own lives, I wouldn't like to think I'm pushing my family... you can't give any more than what you've got to give.'*

Parent

Parents gave practical assistance, for example in counteracting peer group influences. Parents who wished their children to stay on beyond S4 were aware that there could be a motivation to leave school early for a wage, and they were often joined by grandparents, aunts and uncles in providing increased pocket money over this period;

*'I think there's a big thing to get out and earn, specially if a friend's left and doing that, one of the things we had to do was to make sure she had enough money so that if her friends (i.e. that had left school and were working) wanted to go on holiday or something like that, she would be able to do that too. Otherwise money gets to be too big an influence. That's what happened to me.'*

Parent

Members of the informal network of career support explicitly intervened to give a range of practical help with respect to *opportunity search*. This included:



- Parents and other family members completed, or helped to complete, application forms for jobs, Skillseekers training places and college courses
- Parents and other family members phoned or called in to get prospectuses and application details, to get information packs on education and training opportunities and to negotiate application time-scales
- Parents, family members, neighbours and family friends fixed up part-time jobs or work experience for young people

In some cases, parents 'checked out' the possible opportunity for their children, and followed up the application through indirect means:

*'The job? It was advertised in the local paper. I noticed it for her and I says to her would she be interested? So we applied for an application form and since I had made enquiries from people that I know that worked in [name of company] and I knew it was very high demand that had applied for it. So I sort of said to her, 'Don't worry too much if you don't get started, it is your first interview' sort of thing. Seemingly from what I have heard she sailed right through it and she was the top of the list to get started to be asked. So I was quite chuffed for her.'*

Parent

Where families had *contacts in areas of work* that the young person was considering as a career choice, these were drawn in to advise on what specific occupations were like. For example, one young man's parents had acquaintances working in accountancy and in optometry. In fact, he dated his interest in optometry from when his mother first began to work as a dispensing optician:

*'The initial push towards optometry hadn't crossed my mind until she started work there.'*

Young person

His interest in accountancy was stimulated by contact with a family friend (in whose firm he was subsequently able to do work experience, a company which did not normally offer this to school pupils). His parents facilitated the contacts for him:

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*'My parents put me in touch, and I asked him about the job (accountancy), what's it like and is it worth going down that (route) because there's a lot of folk do it.'* Young person

He also spoke to two opticians at his Mum's work.

*'I was lucky cos I knew lots of people'* Young person

This raises a broader issue, which we will refer to later, about what happens to young people whose families do not have these contacts. A second issue is that of the limiting effect of the informal network. On the one hand, it is capable of providing detailed information on specific careers that are within its compass. On the other hand, as can be seen in the experience of the young man outlined above, although he thought he 'knew lots of people', in practice he made limited use of the contacts available to him and really only gave serious consideration to these two occupational areas. In most cases, the informal network cannot provide breadth of choice, and it may present a partial and personally-skewed view of the satisfactions and difficulties of different career areas. This is an example of where Enterprise in Education provision can have a key role, to work to counteract the limitations of parents and families.

Parents and family members *commented on career ideas* suggested by young people and by others:

*'My Mum told me she didn't think I'd like that type of work'* Young person

*'We tried to put her off catering, she hadn't really thought about the hours'* Parent

The mother of another young woman had discouraged the armed services.

*'I talked her out of it, I told her, You'll no last in that, you'll no want tae dae that.'* Parent

Parents and families regularly suggested possible career ideas, often based around a particular interest or strength in a school subject. Sometimes they suggested college courses, based on their own experiences or those of neighbours or friends; sometimes they looked through prospectuses together

and discussed possible options. Parents and families commonly tried to help by identifying and encouraging skills or aptitudes, and some of these were linked into family 'tendencies':

*'He's good at art, he's maybe got that from his grandpa, they're all a bit creative on that side of the family.'* Parent

*'Since she was wee she's been wantin to help in the kitchen, wantin to see how things got made an wantin tae tell us whit tae dae! Her Dad says tae me, that yin'll go far, she'll be running her own restaurant and keeping us in meals! But we've encouraged it as much as we could, no just for getting free meals!... but for her own sake.'* Parent

### Implicit assumptions

Implicit assumptions were, inevitably, more difficult to identify as they were by definition rarely expressed. Here are some examples.

There were instances where *perceptions of the opportunity structure* were shared, for example, where both parent and young person responded in a similar way to a challenge:

*So you've decided on FE college? Had you ever thought about the different ways of training, such as Skillseekers?* Researcher

*'Oh no, I've never wanted to do that, never thought about it, it wouldn't be for me.'* Young person

A similar question to her mother received the response:

*'Well, we've never talked about it, she's never mentioned it, she probably knows that there's no way we'd let her go on one of these things.'* Parent

Another example was a young person with good academic potential

*'I don't know, I've just never thought of doing anything but go to university.'* Young person

*'Ever since she's been wee, the whole family has kind of expected she would go to university, and there's never been anything to make us think otherwise.'* Parent

In both these situations, parents and families had already put parameters on choice, without discussion.

Another way in which assumptions were passed on implicitly was through *shared values about work*. Both young people and their parent(s) were asked to rate in order of importance a set of work values. Comparison of interviews between parent and child showed many cases in which key work values were shared, and others where clear links could be seen. In a number of cases both parent and child used virtually the same words to illustrate or define a key work or education value. It is likely to be in this way that parents and families share perceptions of what 'enterprise', 'entrepreneurship' or 'self-employment' might mean, although some parents and families do also make their positive or negative views of these concepts explicit to their children.

The sharing of work values was sometimes deliberately done, but more commonly appeared to be unintentional and casual. Many families were heavily involved in support of their children's career development but would often state that they were leaving the choice to the young person. There is no contradiction in this, but it was clear that some of the parameters on young people's choices had resulted from family influence.

### Unplanned influences

The experiences of families and friends often affected young people's perceptions in an unplanned way. Young people absorbed values from the experiences of their parents and families. This could include a parent's experience of redundancy, of running a business, of re-training or a parent's stories of the workplace from the perspective of a shop steward. Some young people had helped out at a parent's place of work, and this had encouraged initial career ideas (for example, helping with outings of elderly people in care homes first started to form one young person's picture of himself in a caring role).

Young people had absorbed aspects of others' conversation and applied it to their experience, often without examination – *'He says it's a good job'*. One

young person had become interested in the navy because of a cousin's comments:

*'I was into the navy because it's like one of the emergency services so he said if nothing else works, fall back on the navy cos you can get into it.'*

She also recounted a tale of another cousin with a different experience when explaining why she had not considered going to college or university:

*'My uncle was telling me that my big cousin that was at uni, it was awfy hard to keep him there cos of a the pressures he's been under fae course work and then fae the job he was still in.'*

Another young person who subsequently dropped out of HE after two months of a business course had previously referred to a cousin's experience:

*'He was doing accounting at college, and he made me start thinking about it. But he's dropped out, didn't like it, too long a course.'*

The most striking aspect of statements like these is that, when the researcher tried to open these out for discussion it became clear that they had been absorbed without examination into the young person's thinking, almost by what might be called a process of mental osmosis. And yet some of these statements were key drivers of young people's career-related decision-making and actions. Examples included the value of going to university and the dangers of running your own business:

*'Someone that works beside my mum, she had done a degree in art and couldn't get a job.'* Young person

*'There's all these people who have been to uni and are working in McDonalds.'* Parent

*'My uncle, he lost his business and his house and everything, I wouldn't like that.'* Young person

Other research (Semple, 1994) shows some parents over-estimating the level of youth unemployment by as much as five times, and even where this

is not explicit, the threat of unemployment for young people can feel a major one:

*'Down this way I would imagine that the biggest majority [of school leavers] are all going to leave school in the summer and they are no going to get a job and I think it is really sad for young ones and if they leave school with no job they have got nothing to look forward to. And the longer you are without employment the harder it is to get in on that one.'*

Parent

## The current level and nature of the involvement of parents and families in Enterprise in Education

We will look in turn at the different elements of *Enterprise in Education*.

### Enterprise education

It is probably true to say that enterprise education is more developed in primary and special education than in secondary schools, though there are targets for this to change. The Schools Enterprise Programme has encouraged and supported these developments through packs such as '*Enterprising Infants*' for use in early primary; '*Go For Enterprise*' for the later stages of primary, and more recently '*Up for Enterprise*' for S1/S2 pupils. S3 pupils have '*Get Into Enterprise*' and the Young Enterprise programme has in the past worked most often with groups of students in the upper secondary school.

The most obvious ways that parents and families are likely to be involved in enterprise education are the following:

- Providing resources and materials for enterprise activities or projects;
- Buying products, and suggesting contacts which might be used to market these more broadly;
- Attending celebration or competitive events at the end of activities.

However, it is clear that more work needs to be done to ensure that parents understand the benefits of enterprise activities, especially recognising the learning that such projects can deliver. They can be at best confused and at worst concerned or anxious about the use of school time in such a way. At the very least, therefore, parents need to understand the rationale so that they do not work against the aims of these activities. At present for many parents and families, their experience of enterprise is that children run a business and they are 'expected' to buy the product. The product then becomes the focus, rather than the 'bigger picture' – the process by which it came about and the experiences which children have had during this process. Parents and families can be active agents for supporting the development of enterprising skills and attitudes if they understand how to do

this. Discussions with parents whose children have been involved in enterprise projects indicate that they can identify changes in skills, attitudes, learning and future intentions. Here are some examples:

*'I said to her, you seem a lot more confident since you started doing this – she was really quiet outside the house, but we noticed a real difference.... I didn't know whether to say to her or not.'*

Parent

*He was getting really anxious, he was the quality control manager and at one point he thought he was going to have to sack one of his friends cos he wasn't doing it right, he said, Mum, I'm never going to be a manager again! But we calmed him down and said he was doing fine and we spoke to the teacher. It was quite a lot of pressure but he learned a lot from it, just hope it hasn't put him off!*

Parent

Further work with parents would, in many cases, enable them to see further benefits of such activities.

Parents may also be involved through community links with the school: this may particularly be the case for parents who might be called social entrepreneurs.

## Career Education

Parents are likely to have little involvement in career education lessons, and are often only vaguely aware of their existence. This can happen even when details of career education provision (usually included in the Personal and Social Education timetable) are included in school handbooks. Some schools include elements of career education within workshops at parents' evenings at early stages in secondary school. However, they are more likely to be aware of careers *guidance* services or of events organised outwith the classroom such as careers conventions and fairs. While the new career education materials being prepared by Careers Scotland include several home-based career education activities, it is rare for these to be a feature of current programmes.

Given that many of the outcomes of career education are likely to be achieved through school based lessons and activities in careers libraries and



resource base, career education is the element of Enterprise in Education that is least visible to parents.

### Education for Work (or Understanding Work)

Parents are often involved in giving approval for visits outwith the school environment from primary school through to secondary school and may therefore be aware of visits to workplaces. It is not clear, however, if they are aware of the Education for Work learning which is gained from such visits. In addition, regular visitors to schools talk about their work. This may or may not be communicated to parents. Many parents support *'Take Your Daughter (and Son) to Work'* days. But for most parents their teenager's week on work experience seems to be the key element of this aspect of provision. Many help their children to find a placement through their own contacts and can be involved in 'trial runs' for travelling to a new location and in discussing the experience with their children.

Parents are rarely aware of the extent to which business contexts and links are used within subject teaching, even in what might be termed the most vocational of subjects.

## Strengths and weaknesses of parents and families with respect to enterprise in education

It is clear that some young people's informal networks of support are better equipped to help than others.

### Emotional, social, educational and financial 'capital' of parents and families

Some parents and families understand education, training and occupational systems better than others; some are more confident about intervening than others; and some families have their own internal difficulties such that they are limited in what they can do for their teenagers. Young people considering routes that are outwith the personal experience of the informal network (for example, going to university) benefit greatly from the formal support network (ie., the Enterprise in Education school provision and the guidance services of schools and Careers Scotland).

### Understanding and using the formal support network

Parents consider that a key role for schools is to help their children prepare for working life (Howieson and Semple, 1996), and they can experience considerable anxiety about their children's future after school. Most wish to be involved in helping their children, but often feel excluded or ill-informed about how to do this as individual parents or in conjunction with careers services and schools. Studies in Scotland, the UK generally and internationally confirm that the involvement of parents and families in the work preparation and career development done by schools and careers services is, with few exceptions, minimal, and less than parents would wish.

### Reactions against parental views

Many parents are initially surprised about the extent of their potential influence on their children, and parents of older adolescents may express scepticism about the extent to which they are listened to:

*'One word from me and he does the opposite!'*      Parent

*'You can't tell a 16 year old anything...'* Parent

However, American research suggests that, while short-term values (such as when to come home at night, who to have as friends, what to wear) are often close to the peer group, longer term values about the importance of education and the definition of a 'good' job are likely to remain closer to those of the parents.

But a parent's lifestyle may have a stronger unplanned effect than what they say:

*'They say, stick in at school and go to university and you'll get a good job! But that's what they did, and look at them, they're working all the time, stressed out, never enjoying themselves – no way!'*

Young person

### Protecting children from perceived exploitation

Many parents are cautious and try to help their children weigh up what they are being told: in doing this they may deliberately or accidentally work against the agenda of those who seek to influence their children through them. Scottish research (Semple, 1994) found that parents could be suspicious of highly glossy materials produced for them or their children or what seemed like strong marketing of a particular option. One parent's views, gathered in the last year, illustrates this:

*'You wonder what's at the back of all this... where's the money coming from, and whose interest is all this in, that's what I wonder? Y'see, I know that there's no manufacturing industry in this area, so why are they punting it like this? It's no in my lad's interest, that's for sure!'*

Parent

### Young people without parental support

It seems that parents can be of the greatest importance in supporting their children as they learn about work, career and enterprise. What are we to say, then, about those young people who have limited parental and family support?

The strength of the informal support network was a key factor for young people in transition from school (Howieson et al, 2002). While a strong network was not a guarantee of a successful transition, a weak one was a good predictor of difficulties. A weak network was not necessarily one where there were no parents or family present: the issue seemed to be how effectively those in the network acted as a support. The challenge is to empower those in the network. As we shall see in the next section, a key element of activating appropriate parental involvement was to ensure they understood the importance of intervening and were aware of strategies and services which could be used. For those who lack parental or other adult support, early intervention strategies can ensure that extra support (for example through a mentor or key worker, or through pastoral care and guidance support in school) can be provided to those with weaker networks.

There is no question that some parents and families present considerable challenges to those who seek to involve them in Enterprise in Education, and some young people are seriously disadvantaged by their lack of good support. But the majority of young people remain close to parents and families and rely heavily on them. There is a danger that the difficulties experienced by a minority of young people and their families can dominate planning, particularly within the political context of social inclusion. These difficulties should not be an excuse for failing to engage the vast majority of parents and families in the aims and objectives of Enterprise in Education.

## Principles and strategies for involving parents and families in Enterprise in Education

There is considerable evidence from both research and practice of the principles that need to underpin strategies to involve parents and families in Enterprise in Education, and we list them briefly here.

### Parents need to understand their own role and value in the process

A number of pieces of research, across a range of disciplines, suggest that there are two elements which identify parents most likely to take part in what might loosely be described as ‘interventions intended to involve, inform or educate parents’. These interventions include: events at school; leaflets and newsletters sent out to the home; taking part in shared learning with their child; supporting school tasks such as homework, enterprise activities etc. For parents to play a proactive part in these they need two things:

- Firstly, they need to understand why it is important to their children that they are involved and to be fully aware of the benefits of such involvement. They need specific examples and evidence of this. In the context of Enterprise in Education, they need to realise that many of their children’s ideas and aspirations may initially be formed by the experiences and values of their family; and that parental involvement is key to a successful start into working life. This might be done through a range of strategies, for example a school leaflet or section on a website on ‘Why your involvement in Enterprise in Education is important to your child; this needs to be done on a year-by-year basis.
- Secondly, they need to accept that they can improve their understanding and skills in supporting their children. Interpreting this for Enterprise in Education, simple strategies and ‘parent prompts’ to help parents talk with their children about Enterprise in Education activities might be designed. If this starts from early years education, parents’ confidence and skills can be developed and their key role emphasised and built on.

## Awareness of support from school and Careers Scotland

Parents can feel overwhelmed by the rapid changes in the labour market and education, and this may result in anxiety about their children's future. Here is an example from one parent:

*'On the one hand, I'd want her to do everything she can with her life... but I don't understand all these things she's thinking about, and I'd hate it to go wrong for her... so sometimes I'm just saying to her 'don't take any risks, play it safe' and that's no right, I know that'*

Parent

Several studies suggest that parents can be greatly reassured by understanding what the school's actual provision is. This needs to be very specific, so that parents can see the content and timing of the Enterprise in Education inputs in the current year intended to develop enterprising attitudes, skills, and understanding. It should be remembered here that there is a full range of activities which might be classified as Enterprise in Education, ranging from specific projects to ongoing activities within the school and the community and this may also need to be explained to parents. This applies also to the careers guidance services of Careers Scotland which will support the personal career planning of their child.

It is important to emphasise a key element of this: the information has to be localised or parents are unlikely to make effective use of it. Parents need to be informed about the provision of their child's school and their child's Careers Scotland centre: it is not sufficient to give examples of what a 'typical' school has on offer. If we are to ensure that there is an inclusive approach to Enterprise in Education, then all relevant factors must be considered. This presents logistical and resource challenges.

## Unbiased sources

Materials intended to inform and educate parents need to come from an unbiased and valued source, and the intention behind the contact needs to be made transparent to parents. Most parents are likely to trust schools and careers services but to be suspicious of 'government' documents unless distributed through a trusted source. A key element for being accepted as unbiased is that the information or organisation is not just 'pushing' one opportunity or idea but is adding to a range of possibilities for their children. While it is clear that careers advisers are trusted to be unbiased by young

people (Howieson and Semple, 2001) care has to be taken with Careers Scotland's developing role to ensure this perception is maintained. By this we mean that initiatives to raise awareness of areas high on the political agenda (such as manufacturing industry, tourism, health service occupations etc) need to be presented within the context of a range of opportunities.

### Home-based learning for parents and families

This seems to be the most difficult recommendation to apply in practice by those who seek to inform and educate parents. The most obvious answer to parental involvement appears to be to find ways of 'getting them in' to the school

*"For some, the debate revolves round 'getting people in' to the institution, and while this is clearly one aspect of involvement, the need to consider the concept more globally is clear. Attitudes, expectations and approaches need to be examined if a level of involvement that both informs and enriches practice is to be established."*

Jowett and Baginsky, 1991

However, one Scottish study of parental career education provision (Semple, 1992; Semple, 1993) found that parents of S3 pupils chose home-based learning (reading leaflets or working on distance learning materials (Semple, 1993; Semple, 1994) with their children) over attendance at school-based events. This was so marked that in none of the six secondary schools involved were there sufficient parents volunteering for the school-based events for them to be viable. Parents' were reluctant to come to the school-based events for a range of reasons. These included: lack of confidence; discouragement from their children; and family or shift work commitments.

Some of this reluctance may be more apparent in the secondary school, particularly in the later stages, but there are nonetheless some important messages that apply across the whole school experience. Firstly, it is important to have a method of engaging with parents in settings that are non-threatening to them. Secondly, home-based learning is flexible and allows parents control over their learning. A final point is that, once informed and aware of their role, parents may become more confident and able to engage effectively with school Enterprise in Education events. This was certainly the case in the Scottish study mentioned above: following involvement in home-

based learning, parents turned up in unprecedented large numbers at a subsequent career event in the locality.

### Parents as learners and users of careers guidance

Parents can be engaged with the objectives of Enterprise in Education through their own experience as learners and career planners, and vice versa. Parents who took part in home-based learning were more likely to think about accessing learning opportunities in their own right, and to be stimulated to think about their own career development and lifelong learning as a result. There is also a potential effect in the other direction: parents who access adult provision based in their child's school (perhaps as part of New Community Schools) can be helped to become better informed about the provision of Enterprise in Education for their child as a result. The new all-age guidance role of Careers Scotland has immense potential to encourage work at all levels with parents and families: career development (in its broadest sense) for family groups and individual family members (for example older brothers and sisters, redundant aunts and uncles etc) may be a powerful tool in encouraging understanding and engagement with the aims and provision of Enterprise in Education for the children of the family.

And lastly, parents and family members are also employers, trainers, teachers/lecturers, employees and trainees and this perspective can be used to increase their understanding of Enterprise in Education and make them more effective supporters of their children's development of enterprising skills and attitudes and of effective career planning. There is a need for innovative parent and family-focused approaches to workforce development and to the increased involvement of the business community in Enterprise in Education likely to result from the implementation of Determined to Succeed.



## Conclusions and questions

We have spent some time in this discussion paper reviewing what is known about the nature and extent of the impact of parents and families on young people's understanding of the world of work, on their career development and on the development of enterprising attitudes, skills and behaviours. While there is clearly more work to be done on the last of these three, the key principles that need to underlie effective involvement of parents can be applied across the whole of the Enterprise in Education agenda.

***The first question is: Do policy makers and practitioners really wish to take seriously the involvement of parents and families in Enterprise in Education? Or is Recommendation 3 of Determined to Succeed more aspirational than real?***

If the answer to the first part of this question is 'yes' we must consider how radical the approach needs to be, and this will depend on how we see the role of parents and families. On the one hand the aim might be to make parents and families a 'clear channel' for the messages of Determined to Succeed to be passed on. This tries to ensure that parents and families are sufficiently well informed so that they do not work against the aims of the initiative. A more radical approach is to recognise the major influence of parents and families and to see them as active agents of some of the desired changes. This might also be beneficial in the partnership between schools and parents.

***The second question is: How proactive do we expect parents and families to be in developing the enterprising skills, attitudes and behaviours that lie at the heart of Enterprise in Education?***

If a more radical approach is taken, then this is likely to require the application of the principles underlying effective strategies with parents and families as noted above, namely:

- Locally and individually focused approaches
- Home-based and flexible parent and family programmes/learning strategies

- Unbiased materials from an accredited source
- Clear explanation of parent and family role and value in Enterprise in Education
- Practical strategies for each stage of schooling

***The third question is: How is this to be resourced?***

Some work needs to be done at a Scottish level, some at authority level and some at school level. Does the current method of allocating funding recognise the need for all three levels?

Lastly, we must review the extent of the influence of parents and families and ask our final question.

***The fourth question is: Given that parents and families are so influential on the development of attitudes, values, expectations and aspirations (including those relating to education, enterprise and work) does Determined to Succeed have any chance of succeeding in its objectives without securing their central involvement in Enterprise in Education?***

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