

**FAMILY LEARNING STRATEGY AND
ACTION PLAN FOR COVENTRY &
WARWICKSHIRE 2003 – 2006**

Produced by **Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network** with help from **UK Research Partnership Ltd** and the support of **Coventry and Warwickshire Learning Partnership**
and
LSC Coventry and Warwickshire

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Introduction

This document draws together the collective thinking and combined experience of members of the Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Network (FLN), which was set up in 1999 to represent a wide range of Family Learning practitioners and policy makers from across the sub-region. The members of the FLN Steering Group who have drafted the strategy include:

- Children and Family Education Service, Coventry City Council.
- Community Education Service, Warwickshire County Councils.
- Warwickshire College.
- City College Coventry.
- Rugby College.
- The Coventry and Warwickshire Lifelong Learning Partnership.
- The Open College Network (OCN) Central England.
- The LSC Coventry and Warwickshire.
- Coventry and Warwickshire Adult Guidance Network.

The Strategy is the culmination of an extensive period of local research and consultation, beginning with an audit of Family Learning provision conducted throughout Coventry and Warwickshire during 2002. A series of Steering Group workshops were held to refine the focus of the study, and these were followed by a number of intensive group sessions designed to interpret and apply the findings. The first draft of the Strategy and Action Plan was copied to a large number of local providers, many of whom then attended a special consultation event in October 2002. Their views are reflected in this final version of the document, which is intended both to inform debate and stimulate new activity over the next three years.

Background and context

A number of recent developments suggest that now is the right time to clarify and document what we mean by, and know about, 'Family Learning' locally. We also think that local providers, policy-makers and planners will welcome this opportunity to develop a clearer sense of shared purpose and direction.

Family Learning (FL) has its roots partly in the pioneering educational work of organisations in the voluntary sector, such as the Workers' Educational Association, and partly in lessons learned and imported from American family literacy programmes in the 1980s. Since then, the scope and purpose of FL has grown to encompass a much wider educational, social and economic agenda. For example, in his 'remit' letter to the Learning and Skills Council in November 2000, the then **Secretary of State for Education**, David Blunkett, made it clear that Family Learning should be seen as contributing directly to at least one of the four national LSC priorities – Increasing demand for learning by adults:

“Family literacy and numeracy is one example that has shown real potential in helping to improve parents’ and children’s learning. I want to see more support for family learning, as part of the overall approach

to increasing participation, and to strengthen the capacity of communities to help themselves.”¹

This suggests that FL is about more than the individual educational attainments of the children and adults involved. FL is also seen increasingly as a weapon in the armoury against social exclusion, helping especially disadvantaged communities “...to help themselves.”

More recent supplementary guidance from the **Learning + Skills Council** to Local Education Authorities (LEAs) reinforces this broader message about the proper scope and focus of FL:

“The expectation is that family learning should include opportunities for intergenerational learning and that wherever possible this leads adults and children to pursue further learning, either for its own sake or for qualifications or for the enhancement of personal skills, social and work skills.”²

According to the LSC, Family Learning can now be taken to include activities that:

- Raise the attainment/achievement of adults
- Promote lifelong learning
- Build the confidence of family members of all ages
- Provide progression opportunities
- Support children learning with adults
- Help involve adults in children’s education.

More than £7m has been committed nationally to supporting the LEAs and local partners in making more and better FL provision this year. Whilst this is, of course, to be welcomed, the results of research and consultations with partners in Coventry and Warwickshire suggest that this is far too little. The potential contribution that FL could be making to the government’s ever-more inclusive list of educational, social and economic priorities is, in our view, very great indeed. But it is not too late for local partners to outline why, where and how FL services should be strengthened and extended in Coventry and Warwickshire – which is precisely the purpose of this strategy and action plan.

Defining ‘Family Learning’

The essential premise of the FL approach is that most people’s learning – and the most effective learning – takes place within, and is strongly influenced by, the home and family (in the many forms that home and family relationships take in contemporary society).

From a policy point of view, we would endorse, but go beyond, the **Ofsted** definition, which suggests that family learning is:

¹ The LSC Remit Letter, paragraph 52, November 2000.

² Learning + Skills Council, *Family Learning Supplementary Guidance 2002/03*, paragraph 5, January 2002.

“... planned activity, in which adults and children come together, to work and learn together.”

We believe that one of the defining characteristics of the family learning approach is the notion of *intergenerational* learning – of children and their carers (be they friends or family) coming together at some point to learn more about themselves, about each other, about the family or the wider world. The point of family learning, ultimately, is that it is a professional technique that consciously builds on what we know about how people learn together, in intergenerational groups – in ‘families’.

So what do we mean by ‘Family Learning’?

We include all learning opportunities and services that are aimed at:

1. Parents/carers and children learning together.
2. Parents/carers learning separately, but as a preliminary to understanding or engaging in learning activities with children – including learning about family relationships (such as through parenting education), or how to support children in their learning (such as through reading and writing) or through sports and recreational activities.
3. Children learning separately, but as a preliminary to sharing learning with parents/carers or other family members – including learning about family relationships and responsibilities (e.g. parenting education), or through using ICT, etc.

However, we are only interested in family learning opportunities and services that are **planned, purposeful** and **progressive**. The sorts of learning opportunities and services we have in mind are all:

- **Planned and purposeful** – events and programmes that are thought-out, planned and delivered to meet any of the Family Learning aims outlined above.
- **Progressive** – events and programmes that are designed to encourage the learner to continue in learning, including further education or training, whether accredited or not.

From a strategic planning point of view, we have decided not to include educational programmes, events or encounters that *may* lead to ‘family learning’ outcomes *if these are unintended or incidental*. We need to achieve much more clarity and focus in our strategic thinking and resource planning by concentrating exclusively on family learning activities whose intention is explicit. This is why we have highlighted our 3 ‘Ps’ – the requirement for family learning activities to be planned, purposeful and progressive.

Nonetheless, our approach includes a wide range of formal and less structured family learning services and opportunities. But we have tried to

avoid straying into territory that defines almost every kind of interaction between adults and children in everyday life as ‘family learning’ and that counts essentially private moments, such as children and carers watching TV together or taking a walk in the park, as examples of ‘family learning’. These, for us, do not constitute family learning *unless* they are the conscious target, or planned result, of professional service interventions.

Who and what is family learning for?

Apart from trying to achieve more clarity, one of our other main aims is to extend the reach of family learning as an activity that has the potential to make a positive contribution to a range of other public policy fields. The strategy therefore targets a broad policy brief, suggesting that family learning has both intrinsic value - as an educational tool or device - and wider applicability and relevance, for example in relation to community capacity building and regeneration.

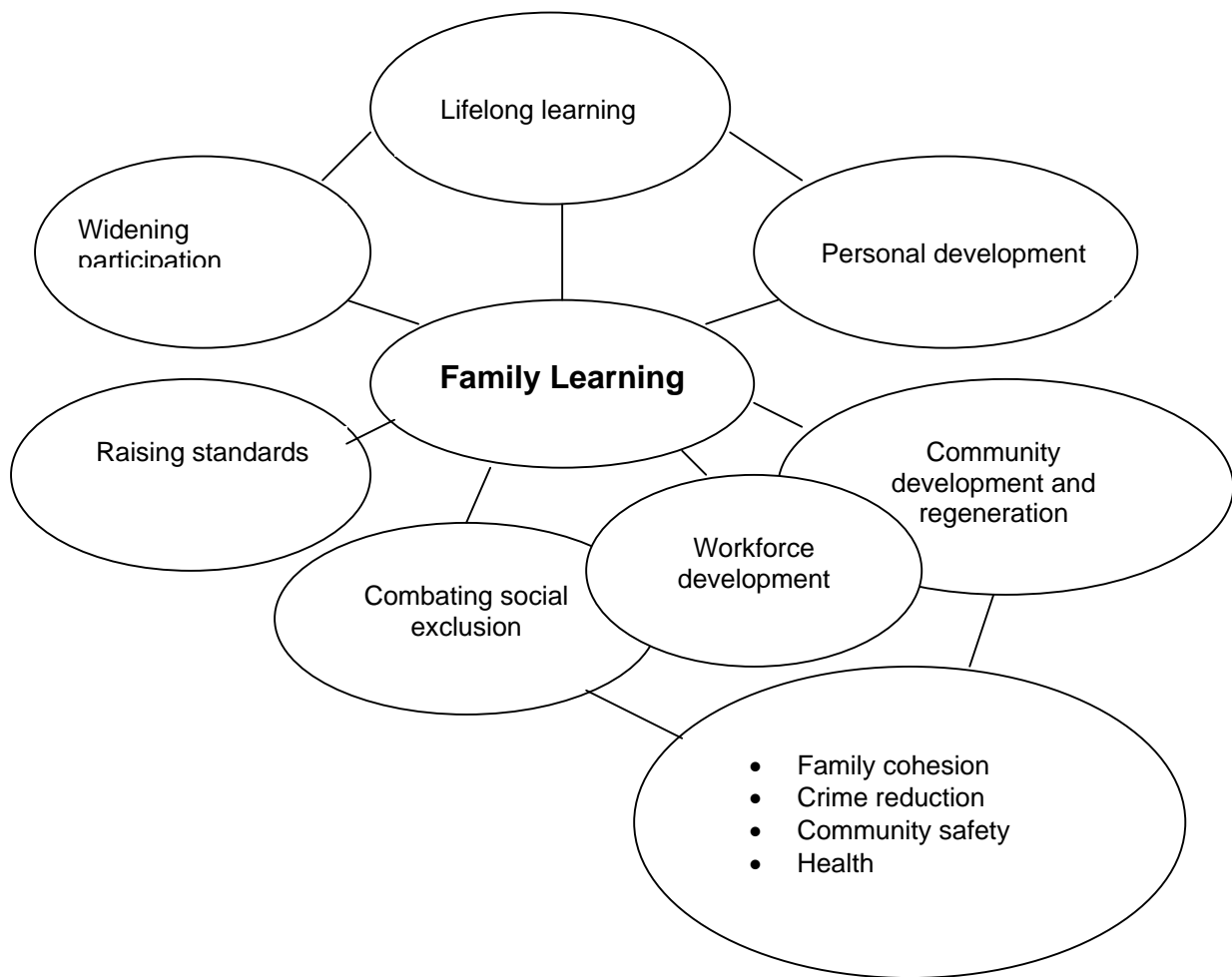
The Campaign for Learning³ published its *Manifesto for Family Learning* in 2000. This document argues strongly for more coherence in the government’s approach to FL and for a vision of FL that goes beyond the “... *narrow objective of raising standards by developing parental involvement in children’s schooling.*” The DfEE (as was) and national LSC have both hinted at a wider agenda for FL, as we have seen, suggesting that it should be supported “... *as part of the overall approach to increasing participation, and to strengthen the capacity of communities to help themselves*”⁴ and “... *to pursue further learning, either for its own sake or for qualifications or for the enhancement of personal skills, social and work skills.*”⁵ We would like to formalise and extend these attempts to place FL in its wider context by sketching the connections between FL and a number of related policy initiatives and challenges locally. These are illustrated in the diagram below, which traces the links (both established and potential) between FL programmes and the achievement of other public policy goals.

³ The Campaign for Learning (CfL), sponsored by ntl, works with a broad range of partners to realise its aims, one of which is Family Learning. Partners include NIACE, EdEx, CEDC and the Scottish Council Foundation.

⁴ The LSC Remit Letter, November 2000.

⁵ Learning + Skills Council, *Family Learning Supplementary Guidance 2002/03*, January 2002.

Figure 1 – What is family learning for?



With the right support and funding, we can see FL making a major and measurable contribution to all of these areas. The connections we make here therefore help to set out our **agenda for action**, which is further developed in the Action Planning Framework that concludes this statement.

At the moment, as the results of our audit of local FL provision show⁶, most FL addresses needs in the left hand and top half of this schematic. The challenge for us is twofold:

1. **To consolidate and strengthen FL where it has an established foothold** – in raising standards for children and adult learners (e.g. through basic skills), in widening participation in learning, creating more lifelong learners, and in helping people to grow and develop as individuals. Most of this work is already concentrated in disadvantaged areas⁷ which naturally lends itself to more of a social inclusion/community development focus.

⁶ See *The Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Audit 2002*, by UK Research Partnership Ltd, October 2002. A summary of audit findings is shown in the following section.

⁷ See above for a breakdown of known FL delivery locations in the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region

2. **To broaden the base, extend the reach and increase the penetration of FL** - in programmes and initiatives that are designed to combat social exclusion, build stronger communities, regenerate disadvantaged areas (such as in the Coventry and Warwickshire Regeneration Zone) and contribute to workforce development (especially in relation to basic skills⁸).

So we want to do more of the same *and* more of something quite different.

The Coventry and Warwickshire Family Learning Audit – main findings

- Questionnaires were sent out to more than 500 known or possible Family Learning (FL) service providers in Coventry and Warwickshire, mostly schools. Returns were received from 97 organisations, only 36 of which identified themselves as FL providers.
- Schools account for the largest single group of FL providers (well over a third of the sample), followed by Adult and Community Education and voluntary sector providers. FE colleges are also key players in this respect, as are various other statutory services (libraries, one of the LEAs and the Health authority).
- This spread of FL activity and delivery is encouraging, suggesting perhaps that much more could be developed and delivered through established channels and via their links with partner agencies.
- The breakdown of *non*-providers who returned a questionnaire indicates considerable scope for more local schools to be offering FL opportunities (over 60% of non-providers were schools). A number of other key agencies are potentially very well placed to contribute to FL, such as Connexions.
- The rank order of providers in our sample, headed by schools, does not reflect the scale of FL activity being undertaken in other sectors. For example, libraries account for a very large proportion of all the one-off FL events staged in Coventry and Warwickshire last year.
- The main focus of local FL activity varies. About the same number of providers concentrate on parents/carers learning alongside children as do those focusing on adults learning separately (but as a preliminary to FL). Most tend to combine approaches, offering adults and children a range of learning opportunities that have a FL purpose.
- The scope and level of provision is also quite mixed, with a fairly even spread between those offering only one-off FL events, short programmes or longer FL courses and projects. Many offer a combination of opportunities, from one-off events through to longer programmes.
- There were almost 1,200 one-off FL events recorded in the previous 12 months, mostly involving adults and children learning together. Slightly fewer short programmes were delivered over the same period (1,108), but

⁸ See, for example, the Family Learning Works project – an ESF programme being piloted in Coventry and Warwickshire this year for eventual roll-out to the West Midlands region as a whole. Pilot projects will be helped with funding to develop new approaches to family learning in the workplace, with a strong focus on basic skills.

a similar proportion (80%) were devoted to parents/carers and children learning together. A lot less longer FL courses were being provided (just over 260), and these offered more opportunities for adults (67%) and children (20%) to learn separately as part of a planned FL theme.

- Significant numbers of FL participants have been captured in this sample – around 30,000 in total. Within our sample alone, over 14,000 local parents/carers and children attended one-off FL events together last year, with the majority recorded by libraries. Ten thousand adults and children learned together in short FL programmes, and well over 4,000 were involved in joint FL through longer courses or projects.
- Almost two-thirds of respondents could not say whether or what proportion of their learners had gone on to other learning. For those we do know something about, only a minority are thought to have progressed to other learning. Of these, the largest single group (48%) go on to FE. Other significant learning destinations include the voluntary sector and adult and community education. This gap in provider knowledge about learner destinations is addressed in the Action Plan that concludes this report.
- There is a strong emphasis in local provision on basic skills and ESOL (numeracy, literacy and ESOL together account for 29%), followed by creative activities (20%) and ICT (13%). The FL ‘curriculum’ locally is nevertheless quite broad, with parenting, health and fitness, and understanding how children learn accounting for about a quarter of all recorded FL activities.
- The majority of targeted provision is aimed at disadvantaged areas and excluded groups in the community (accounting for almost 50% of all such services). There is also a range of more specialised provision, including FL for asylum seekers, for example, older people and those in rural locations. We see a heavy emphasis as well on specific geographical pockets facing multiple disadvantage.
- This suggests that the FL tradition, at least locally, is linked to anti-poverty and, more recently, regeneration policies and programmes. These links begin to define an agenda for FL that goes beyond seeing it (quite legitimately) as a good and useful thing in its own right. In a wider policy context, FL can be seen as a development tool alongside, and equal in value to, the array of regeneration tools that are being deployed in areas of greatest need.
- FL venues range quite widely, although over half involve the use of school premises (often by non-school providers, such as adult education and FE). Other locally accessible outlets – community centres, libraries, etc. – provide most of the rest. A neighbourhood presence of some sort does appear to be a distinguishing and necessary feature of FL.
- The vast majority of staff involved in the FL services we surveyed (128 people) are paid employees (98%). Although a small proportion of the total, volunteering remains a valued and valuable way into paid FL work. Most of the paid FL staff in the sample (80%) are already qualified, and the remainder are all working towards a qualification of some sort.

- Although the range of funding sources currently being used to support FL delivery features local authorities as important (accounting for 46% of all funding sources cited), most of this actually originates from the LSC. The range of other sources mentioned – from SRB through to ESF – suggests that funding for FL is still quite heavily dependent on specific, time-limited project monies. There is a fairly long tail of provision, therefore, that subsists on ‘hand-to-mouth’ funding.
- Despite this, 41% of respondents were planning to increase provision in the coming year and the same proportion expected it to remain the same. This net result is a forecast of modest expansion.
- We referred earlier to the wider network of links that ‘frontline’ FL provider have with other agencies. A number of obvious inter-connections show up between established FL providers (such as adult and community education services, FE colleges, etc.), but mention is also made of agencies that do not (as yet) define any part of their work as FL, notably Connexions and Area Co-ordination. The potential for building more FL into their operations is worth exploring further.
- But what quality standards are FL organisations seeking to achieve? The majority of the FL providers surveyed have not yet achieved any formal quality standards. Nor do they appear to be planning to seek any such accreditation. One task in future might be to draft a FL quality standard and work on ways to help local providers to achieve it.
- The survey concluded by examining perceived gaps in local provision and barriers to further development of the FL service. The largest gap identified (by over 40%) was in the range of client groups being catered for. Future development needs tend to be weighted towards improving service contents, provider capacity and quality.
- Nevertheless, funding remains a big barrier (accounting for 30% of all barriers mentioned, and cited as the single most important barrier by 57%). Things that make it more difficult for learners to get into FL – their attitudes to learning, the relevance of provision, etc. – are also seen as very important, as are capacity constraints, such as staff shortages, lack of appropriate venues and inadequate childcare provision.

Strategic issues and local priorities

We outline below a series of headline issues and development tasks that will need to be taken forward by stakeholders at various levels. The activities and targets we list here vary according to whether they are best approached at a local, regional or national level. We have not set any timescales on these tasks yet, or suggested priorities in rank order. This is work that the FLN Steering Group will be taking forward now that local consultations have been completed.

Action Planning Framework for Family Learning in Coventry & Warwickshire: 2003-2006

Priorities	Planned activities and targets at different levels		
	Local	Regional	National
Expand FL provision across C&W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double the number of one-off FL events by 2005 • Double the number of FL short courses/projects on offer by 2005 • Double the number of longer-term FL programmes and projects on offer by 2005 		
Map FL provision across C&W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish ongoing research into the: extent, coverage, content, quality, development needs and impacts of local FL providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share results of local mapping studies with regional FL networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain links with national LSC, NIACE and other FL research
Improve quality (provider support and development)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform, enable and support providers in achieving relevant quality standards • Develop and agree a local FL quality standard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share and promote the local quality standard with regional FL partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage national LSC recognition of a FL quality standard
Develop FL staff skills, capacity and competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run staff briefing and update sessions • Provide networking, information and good practice exchange opportunities • Develop FL resources and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a regional FL staff development group and programme delivered across the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage new national FL training programmes and opportunities across the country
Acquire more resources and build the delivery infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure additional funding to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - develop the FL infrastructure (FL resources and materials, local networking, communications, etc.) - build the capacity of providers to deliver FL - increase the volume of FL participation and the scope of FL delivery • Build working links and resource sharing with other networks, including Family Learning Works, the Adult Guidance Network (AGN) and the Basic Skills/ESOL Development Partnership and Resource Centre • Recruit a FL Development Worker to support our quality, curriculum, staff and infrastructure development objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target AWM for funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify national and European funding opportunities (LSC/DfES, ESF, etc.)
Develop and expand the FL curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support OCN Central England FL accreditation programmes and opportunities • Promote the new FL accreditation to providers • Develop and promote new curriculum materials, resources and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote OCN Central England FL accreditation across the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and maintain links with other (national and regional/local) FL curriculum development projects

Priorities	Planned activities and targets at different levels		
	Local	Regional	National
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share resources and materials with other networks, including Family Learning Works, AGN & BS Resource Centre 		
Promote the wider purposes and benefits of FL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and improve local referral and progression links Build closer working links with AGN members Improve the quality and scope of Family Learning IAG services Build closer links with related projects and initiatives, such as Sure Start, Children's Fund, etc. 		
Improve the tracking of learner progress, outcomes and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a local tracking research programme to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gathering case study materials - conducting longitudinal studies of FL journeys and outcomes Seek funding for research from the local LSC and/or influence the LLSC's future research programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share results of local research with regional FL networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate local findings to national audiences Use the results of national studies to throw light on likely local impacts and development options
<p>(a) Build links to other strategies and services</p> <p>(b) Promote the need for more strategic FL planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote wider understanding, adoption and integration of the FL Strategy with key partner agencies and services, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CSWP - the local LSC - the RZ Board - Local Strategic Partnerships - local authority departments and services (education, social services, library and recreation services) Ensure integration of family learning activities with other thematic strategies i.e: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Basic Skills/ESOL - E:learning - Information, Advice and Guidance Identify gaps, needs and opportunities in order to widen the scope of FL delivery Create a common platform of standards and shared purpose across all local FL deliverers 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage more inter-departmental dialogue about, and consistency of approach to, FL in national government circles, especially via the Family Policy Unit.

Priorities	Planned activities and targets at different levels		
	Local	Regional	National
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage more awareness of and commitment to the values and value of the FL approach in LEA, LSP and LSC strategies and plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage commitment to the value and values of FL in AWM strategies 	
Develop a FL marketing and promotion strategy and campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish a quarterly newsletter - provide information to existing and potential providers about FL activities, materials and resources Make clear the links between local FL programmes and wider government educational, social and economic strategies (e.g. widening participation, lifelong learning and regeneration) Publish case studies and examples of good practice Win more press coverage of FL events and good news stories in local newspapers and radio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish case studies and examples of good practice Win more press coverage of FL events and good news stories in regional newspapers, radio and TV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish case studies and examples of good practice Win more press coverage of FL events and good news stories in national newspapers, radio and TV