

**Written evidence submitted by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Pedagogy, Department of Learning and Leadership, UCL Institute of Education**

This submission was prepared by Professor Dominic Wyse, Dr Rosie Flewitt and Dr Jake Anders. It draws on their knowledge of some key research in the early years and primary education field, and on their own previous research projects and scholarly work.

**The role of quality early years education in determining life chances and promoting social justice**

1. There is robust research evidence, primarily from the disciplines of education and psychology, that the quality of pedagogy in early years settings has an effect on children's development that persists up to age 16 and beyond. For example, the Effective Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education Project (EPPSE)<sup>1</sup> found that:
  - a. children who had early years education gained higher English and mathematics GCSE results and were more likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grades A\*C;
  - b. children who had experienced high quality pre-school education were better at self-regulation, social behavior and less inclined to hyperactivity;
  - c. children who had experienced high quality pre-school settings were more likely to follow a post-16 academic path.
2. It is important to note that 'high quality' pedagogy, as highlighted above, cannot necessarily be captured using easily available administrative measures. For example, Blanden et al. (2017)<sup>2</sup> show that using staff qualifications and Ofsted ratings as measures of quality (those that the Government has tended to focus on) are not particularly strongly related to later outcomes in the way that deeper measures of quality<sup>3</sup> are. Research is currently underway to evaluate such deeper measures as tools to improve learning in the early years.<sup>4</sup>
3. There is evidence from a range of relevant disciplines that early intervention to support specific aspects of all young children's learning,

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<sup>1</sup> EPPSE Research Reports are available at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/research/featured-research/effective-pre-school-primary-secondary-education-project/publications>

<sup>2</sup> Blanden, J., K. Hansen and S. McNally (2017). Quality in Early Years Settings and Children's School Achievement. *CEP Discussion Paper Series*. London, UK, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics.

<sup>3</sup> Mathers, S., Sylva, K. & Joshi, H. (2007). Quality of Childcare Settings in the Millennium Cohort Study. DfES Research Report SSU/2007/FR/025. Retrieved from [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8088/7/SSU2007FR025\\_Redacted.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8088/7/SSU2007FR025_Redacted.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/using-research-tools-to-improve-language-in-the-early-years/>

including children with additional learning needs, can be beneficial.<sup>5</sup> Since gaps in cognitive development emerge at early ages, early intervention can prevent children from “falling behind”. Reducing the numbers of children who fall behind can help to reduce educational inequality, even where programmes are universal, because children are not constantly trying to ‘catch up’<sup>6</sup>.

4. Although the benefits of early intervention are well proven, some risks have also been noted. For example, concerns have been raised about the potential impacts of inappropriately formal teaching too early in relation to children’s development.<sup>7</sup> There is also the ever-present risk of ‘labelling’ children, leading potentially to low expectations by educators and potential damage to children’s self-esteem. Research in this field has noted the diffuse nature of practices, services and policies that typify ‘special’ provision, and makes alternative recommendations for participation and inclusion for all.<sup>8</sup>
5. Although there is compelling evidence in general that good teaching is one of the most significant factors in children’s learning, we have less research in the UK on how teachers and other educators can be helped to be more effective<sup>9</sup>. Research from outside of the UK indicates that high quality initial teacher training and continued professional development combined with a focus on equity can lead to improved outcomes for children.<sup>10</sup>

### **The importance of communication skills and language development**

6. There is broad consensus that communication, language and literacy development is one of the most fundamental aspects of early learning. The consequences of not becoming sufficiently literate in modern societies are profound. If we extrapolate from the findings of a government-commissioned survey of adult skills, there could be as many as 4,500,000 people in England who may not have the literacy level to be able to read a train timetable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Government Office for Science. (2008). *Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008). Final Project report*. London: The Government Office for Science.

<sup>6</sup> Cunha, F., J. J. Heckman, L. Lochner and D. V. Masterov (2006). Chapter 12 Interpreting the Evidence on Life Cycle Skill Formation. *Handbook of the Economics of Education*. E. Hanushek and F. Welch, Elsevier. **Volume 1:** 697-812.

<sup>7</sup> <https://theconversation.com/too-much-too-soon-what-should-we-be-teaching-four-year-olds-43210>

<sup>8</sup> Rix, Jonathan (2015). *Must Inclusion be Special? Rethinking Educational Support Within a Community of Provision*. Current Debates in Educational Psychology. London: Routledge.

<sup>9</sup> Professor Sue Rogers, Department of Learning and Leadership, UCL Institute of Education has recently completed a new research project in this area.

<sup>10</sup> Hammerness, K., Ahtiainen, R. & Sahlberg, P. (2017). *Empowered Educators in Finland: How high-performing systems shape teaching quality*. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (Wiley).

<sup>11</sup> Department for Business Innovation & Skills. (2012). *The 2011 Skills for Life Survey: A Survey of Literacy, Numeracy and ICT Levels in England*. London: Department for Business Innovation & Skills.

7. As the development of reading and writing are both underpinned by language development, but also distinct modes of language in their own right, it is important that there is coherence and consistency in the way they are specified in national curricula. For both reading and writing there is clear evidence that contextualised approaches to pedagogy, that have a focus first and foremost on the communication of meaning supported by the development of the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding, are the most effective, and that excessive decontextualisation is a risk<sup>12</sup>. An example of excessive decontextualisation is the use of teaching programmes that emphasise one aspect of learning too heavily at the expense of other aspects of learning: synthetic phonics or the teaching of traditional grammar are two examples where this can happen.<sup>13</sup>
8. As far as research on effective language and literacy pedagogy is concerned the problem is not the lack of research but more the misalignment of curriculum policies with research evidence. For example, although the Early Years Foundation Stage clearly emphasises the importance of communication there is a logical disconnect between the specification of language and the specification of literacy in the EYFS. Language development is intrinsically important, and is vital for the development of literacy, so the specification of language and literacy curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in national curriculum policies, and their associated texts, needs to rigorously and coherently reflect the research base. Most important of all is the need to avoid over-reliance on single research studies: policy should be derived from meta syntheses and rigorous expert reviews of multiple research studies whenever possible.
9. The radically different emphasis on, and specification of, oral language in the EYFS compared to the national curriculum is another example of a lack of coherence in programmes of teaching and learning. A persistent problem in England, which is not for example a problem in Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence*, is the lack of a national curriculum that is continuous from the earliest years through to the end of compulsory education. Instead England has separate curricula for early years and for primary education. Finally, in addition to the current problems of coherence and continuity of teaching and learning, going forward there is a need to remember the importance of both early years education *and* primary education as part of understanding children and their development holistically, from birth to age 11 and beyond.

June 2018

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<sup>12</sup> E.g.s for writing: Wyse, D. & Torgerson, C. (2017). Experimental trials and 'what works?' in education: The case of grammar for writing. *British Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 43(6), p, 1019-1047. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3315

Wyse, D. (2017). *How Writing Works: From the Invention of the Alphabet to the Rise of Social Media*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

E.g. for reading: Wyse, D., & Goswami, U. (2008). Synthetic phonics and the teaching of reading. *British Educational Research Journal*, 34(6), 691-710.

E.g. of implications for teaching: Wyse, D., Jones, R., Bradford, H. & Wolpert, M. A. (due July 2018). *Teaching English, language and literacy* (Fourth Edition). London: Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Op cit.