



HAWWC
B  **YS**

High Achieving White Working Class (HAWWC) Boys Project

Final Report
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PART ONE: Project Description and Actions

1. Background

This Project addresses the policy question of how we might enhance the educational achievement of young, white working boys (identified as boys growing up in low income households) in order to close the gap in their attainment on entry to compulsory schooling, improve access to the free early education offer and enable greater social mobility.

The project has worked affirmatively with a carefully selected cohort of high-achieving, young, white working class (HAWWC) boys, their families and early education settings from 3 regionally selected urban, rural and coastal communities. The cohort provides positive role models to identify and then disseminate nationally through online platforms, home and setting behaviours and interactions that can enable underachieving, less advantaged, young, white working class boys to experience more positive home learning experiences, access a quality free early education place and improve their attainment.

2. Project Summary

The Project has been funded by the Department for Education (DfE) through a VCS grant in order to develop practical evidence based resources to tackle the challenge of white working class male underachievement as set out above. The project has been led by CREC working within three UK LA's, (Birmingham, Oxfordshire and North Yorkshire), in a way that does not stigmatise underachieving young children by capturing rich, constructive descriptions of the context of interactions and aspirations in the early lives of HAWCC boys. It has looked at those who succeed despite the known negative predictive factors, and attempted to extend the protective factors identified to those less successful through the development of a targeted home/settings enhancement strategy. The project group was a purposive sample of young boys from the defined background and in the highest 15% of the EYFS profile at 5 years in three contrasting white working class communities (urban, rural, coastal). The project retrospectively captured the characteristics of early learning opportunities in their homes and early education settings and the development of their attitudes and dispositions through the use of life story techniques. It has documented those behaviours and interactions for enhancement that can be identified and usefully transferred to other home and early education settings. A community questionnaire supplemented this data. Work is now underway to extend the positive factors identified to reach into other less positive environments within the local communities to enhance the attainment of other young white working class boys and then nationally, through an online dissemination strategy. The project has resulted in the following outcomes which will be directed to enhance the social mobility of young, white working class boys:

- a setting improvement strategy and parent support guidance, supported by information sheets and short information 'vlogs' for parents and early years practitioners, aimed at those participating in the free 2 year old early education and childcare entitlement programme, the implementation of the Early Years Pupil Premium, the Troubled Families Programme and wider parent support programme;
- a series of shorter practical guidance bulletins aimed at appropriate parent and professional websites and journals
- a series of local, regional and national dissemination events to encourage 'buy-in' and ensure that the project outcomes are extended to a wide range of stakeholders at policy and practice level to maximise impact.

The audience for these outcomes have been parents and early years practitioners, teachers, health workers, family support and outreach workers working with families and young children on the two year old early

education entitlement programme, the Early Years Premium, the Troubled Families Programme and wider parent support programmes aimed at ‘closing the gap’ in educational attainment.

3. Project Aims and Objectives

The project aimed to produce new evidence about home learning conditions and early education characteristics which enhance white, working class boys’ attainment. To achieve this it aimed to:

- work in an affirmative way with a cohort of 30 high-achieving, young, white working class (HAWWC) boys in three different communities across England, (urban, rural, coastal);
- identify and disseminate to parents/providers in these communities and nationally, the home and setting characteristics that enable less advantaged young, white working class boys to close the attainment gap;
- promote white working class engagement in the free early education offer in order to raise these boys’ attainment on entry to compulsory schooling;
- develop and deliver online dissemination material in partnership with the cohort participants and develop a group of successful parents who might work as Parent Ambassadors within the local white working class community to provide positive role models from within these communities.

The project addressed these aims through the following objectives:

- To generate new knowledge about behaviours and interactions for learning enhancement in homes and early education settings experienced by young, white, working class boys who succeed despite the known negative predictive factors by undertaking and analysing interviews with 30 families of HAWWC boys across three local authority areas of England;
- To identify, from the early lives of HAWWC boys, the enhancing behaviours and interactions that are prevalent by analysing the family interview data and supplementing this by conducting interviews with the educational settings identified as having played a significant role;
- To develop and implement a national online dissemination strategy based on this knowledge to better engage with underachieving, white working class communities and help providers delivering the two-year-old entitlement enhance the quality of practice and support white working class parents to create the best possible home-learning environment to close the attainment gap;
- To produce and disseminate a high level, rigorous research paper identifying the implications for policy that are drawn from the identification of the barriers/ issues white working class boys face, and from the process of giving both parents and providers the knowledge to be able to address these issues.

4. Project Rationale

The HAWWC Boys Project set out to address the policy question of how we might enhance the educational achievement of young, white working class boys in order to close the gap in their attainment on entry to compulsory schooling and so enable greater social mobility. White working class underachievement in education is real and persistent, (OfSTED, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014; Select Committee, 2014; Perera et al, 2016) and evidence consistently shows that *‘white British boys from low-income groups make less progress than most other groups’* and that recent reforms have done little *‘to lift the boats’* of children from these communities. In 2008, an OfSTED survey gave a brief overview of the evidence and outlined some illustrative ideas to address the issue, predominantly focusing on primary and secondary schools. Yet Feinstein (2003) has demonstrated, *‘effects of class difference on cognitive development are apparent even before nursery school’*

(p.24). White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group. The gap exists at age five and widens as children get older. The possible causes and contributors to white working class underachievement are many and various, and include matters in home life, early education and care practices, and wider social policies. A major national cross-party review, (Allen et al, 2009) and a recent study for OfSTED by the authors (Pascal and Bertram 2012) argued that the overwhelming evidence is that *early* intervention (critically, birth-3 years) makes the greatest long term impact on this socially excluded group. Feinstein’s research (2004) suggests complex interactions between contexts, behaviours and interactions with parents, carers, settings and practitioners and the dispositions of these young children lead to different outcomes, but currently there is very little qualitative evidence in the literature, as Springate et al (2008) confirm. This study aims to address this gap in evidence and target action on those involved in the 2 year old early education entitlement, the early years pupil premium and parent support programmes.

The improvement in outcomes for other ethnic groups over time gives cause for optimism that improvements can be made, but to enable this we need to work closely with families and settings to tackle problems in their local context, and encourage the sharing of good practice in home and settings during the early years of life. Policies such as the 2 year old early education entitlement and the early years pupil premium are to be welcomed as measures that could improve the performance of white working class children to ‘closing the gap’ in educational attainment and increase attention on this group. The outcomes of this proposal will feed useful information into these two initiatives to ensure this additional funding is well targeted and closing the gap strategies are more evidence based. The 2014 Select Committee Report concluded that further work is needed on the role of white working class parent practice and also that early years settings need more information about how to work more effectively with young white boys so they can make the most difference. As the Select Committee concluded, *“White working class children can achieve in education, and the Government must take these steps to ensure that that they do.”* (p.4). This proposal feeds directly into this policy initiative.

5. Informing National Delivery

The project aimed to inform a number of national policies, including the 2 year old free early education and childcare entitlement, the early years pupil premium, the Troubled Families Programme and wider early intervention programmes, all of which are aimed at ‘closing the gap’ in educational attainment and to be welcomed as measures that could improve the performance of white working class children and increase attention on this group. In particular it will focus on the most underperforming subgroup within these targeted groups: white, working class boys, where it is acknowledged that more work is needed, particularly in the context of early years. As noted by the Select Committee (2014), Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector (Sir Michael Wilshaw) has identified that the size of this group means that tackling this issue is an important part of the ‘closing the gap’ agenda. The underperformance of low-income white British pupils matters:

“particularly because they make up the majority—two-thirds—of such pupils. So the lowest-performing group of poor children is also the largest. If we don’t crack the problem of low achievement by poor white British boys and girls, then we won’t solve the problem overall” (p.5)

White working class boys living in urban, rural and coastal district communities are not only in danger of being the amongst the lowest educational achievers but also make the greatest demands on the UK’s social infrastructures including social care, health, crime and law enforcement. The group’s long term impact on social cohesion is not just in extremes of violence, drunkenness, drug dependency and lawlessness but also racism, suicide and domestic abuse. As Allen and Duncan Smith say, *“The philosophy of Early Intervention goes much further than prevention. It is about breaking the intergenerational cycle of underachievement.”* (p.4). This is the focus of this project proposal. At a time of a dramatic fall in social mobility in the UK (Nunn

et al., 2012, Pascal and Bertram 2012), we believe this project can make an important contribution to both policy and practice if this trend is to be redressed earlier and targeted early interventions can be developed which stem from evidence generated by the white, working class families and children themselves.

6. Project Approach and Participants

The HAWWC Boys Project aimed to generate new knowledge, in a way that does not stigmatise or pathologise underachieving young children by capturing grounded, rich and constructive descriptions of the context of interactions, aspirations and expectations in the early lives of high achieving HAWCC boys. Adopting the strategy of appreciative inquiry from Clark (1976) and Cooperrider et al (2008), the project looked at those who succeed despite the known negative predictive factors, and attempted to extend the protective factors identified to those who are less successful through a targeted home and settings enhancement strategy.

The study group comprised a purposive sample of 30 young boys and their parents (10 from each study site) from the defined background and in the highest 15% of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) profile at the end of the academic year in which they reached five years. The study retrospectively captured the nature and characteristics of early learning opportunities in their homes and in their early preschool settings and the development of their attitudes and dispositions. It set out to learn what behaviours and interactions for enhancement can be identified that can usefully be transferred to other similar environments, including the home and the preschool setting. This evidence was collected using life story interview techniques (Miller 1999) with the boys' parents, and their preschool key worker, supplemented by interviews with LA officers and parenting programme leaders, and a community questionnaire. In this way, we intended to adopt a strategy by which the positive factors identified by a range of participants in these successful contexts can be extended to reach into other less positive environments to enhance the life chances of other young white working class boys.

The approach was grounded in strong ethical considerations and protocols, and ensured that we achieved:

- Positivity and an appreciative stance;
- Staged informed consent;
- Anonymity and confidentiality;
- Collaborative documentation and participatory knowledge generation process;
- Developmental and empowering experiences for all participants;
- No harm;
- Social benefit and social justice.

On reflection, the action approach we adopted worked extremely well and we were able to recruit a sufficient number of families to the project in each area. However, engaging families who fitted the criteria was a challenging process, and locating the child's preschool key worker was also sometimes difficult due to high staff turnover in some areas. We also found that in all three study areas, using the Parent Ambassadors in the current climate of cuts to parenting support programmes and anxieties about safeguarding and risk also impacted on our planned strategy and caused us to reconsider how best to take the project outcome around parenting support forward in this climate. These issues are further discussed in Part Two.

We were also rather shocked to find that for most of our project parents there was an almost total lack of awareness of their son's status as a high performer in the schooling system. They were pleasantly surprised to have their son singled out as a high performer, and though many were aware that their son was making good progress at school, they had no idea that he was in the top 15% of achievement against the EYFSP scores in the country ie he was outstanding in his level of attainment on entry to school. The study boys were strong, highly competent, motivated young children who had high levels of social and emotional skill and

an ability to operate successfully in all areas of their life, at home and at school. Yet, this success (relative to peers) had largely passed these parents by in the feedback they had received in these formative years of the child's life. These highly attentive parents and competent parents were equally unaware of their parenting skills and had never had these affirmed, especially in the context of some of the life challenging personal circumstances they had, and continued to, face. Their lack of self-esteem around their parenting and their subsequent joy of having these skills acknowledged in a national project was transformative for many of the parents in the study, who we could see grow in confidence as the study process progressed. Some reported that it was the first time anyone had ever given them positive feedback on their parenting competencies and capacities, which were in all cases outstanding.

7. Project Target Group

Our project used an adaptation of the definitions set out in the Select Committee Report (2014) to identify the study target group:

- **working class:** Traditional notions of what constitutes 'the working class' are based on a categorisation of employment occupations but we are pragmatically going to use FSM eligibility as a proxy for working class. The Economic Policy Institute (an American think-tank) describes the practice of using poverty as proxy for class in generally positive terms (2013).
- **white:** 'White' is a broad heading within classifications of ethnicity which can be used to make comparisons against other aggregated groups such as black and Asian. Within the white group the overwhelming majority of children fall into the subgroup of white British, but other subgroups include white Irish, Gypsy/Roma, and 'Other white', which encompasses a range Economic Policy Institute of white mostly European ethnicities. The smaller size and greater complexity of other groups within the 'white' category has led us to focus primarily on the performance of white British children, and this matches the focus of Ofsted's Unseen Children report (2013).
- **high achieving:** 'High achieving' can be defined as relative to what a pupil could be predicted to achieve in terms of a comparison with another group, such as children from more prosperous homes, a different ethnic group, or a different part of the country. We used data that was most readily available at the end of Foundation Stage in 2015 which was the children who had achieved a 'good level of development' in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP), scoring a minimum of 38 out of 51 on the Profile. Where we refer to high achievement in this report we therefore mean that attainment is high, judged on the EYFSP assessment, and higher than other comparison groups.

8. Project Sites

The DfE's evidence (2015) reveals a significant regional variation in the performance of white FSM pupils by local authority and shows that white FSM children perform poorly in a range of areas, including in cities, coastal areas and rural areas. The project therefore focused its first phase of action on white working class communities in:

- City: Birmingham
- Rural: Oxfordshire
- Coastal: Scarborough, North Yorkshire

9. Project Actions

The project was designed to be action focused with the clear intention of producing practical knowledge for those enabling family and nursery environments and relationships which have the capacity of enhancing the

development of young, white, working class boys' attitudes, capabilities and talents. We quite deliberately chose an affirmative and appreciative stance in our project design, rather than a deficit approach and our research aims will be achieved through four interconnected, locality based mini-projects. Each of the four mini-projects were conducted within a clearly framed, and externally evaluated, ethical framework which is central to the work of CREC using the methods summarised below.

The following table sets out at a high level how the Centre for Research in Early Childhood in Birmingham met these objectives in 2015-16.

Planned Activity 2015-16	Outputs /Milestones	By
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree study sites in Birmingham (urban), Oxfordshire (rural) and North Yorkshire (coastal) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three community project sites identified (urban, rural and coastal) – letters of agreement obtained 	30/6/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and engage 30 study children and families (10 in each community) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 families in each site identified and engagement conditions agreed. 	30/6/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop life story protocols and ethical permission forms 	Life story protocols and ethical protocols developed and agreed with participants	30/6/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop questionnaire for wider working class community in project sites 	Working class community questionnaire developed and agreed	30/6/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project work in three sites begins 		30/9/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life stories of each child and family begin: Two interviews documented and recorded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording of 30 child and family life stories completed 	30/9/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early education settings in each community visited and interviews with setting leader undertaken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to early education settings in community underway and interviews of setting leaders completed 	30/9/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community questionnaire distributed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community questionnaire distributed 	30/9/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of life stories and identification of 'success factors' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success factors for early education access and enhanced home environments for attainment for young white working class boys identified 	31/12/15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of interviews and questionnaires and identification of barriers and enablers to early education access and attainment for young white working class boys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Success factors for early education access and enhanced home environments for attainment for young white working class boys identified 	31/12/15

• Recording of parent and child vox pops	• Recording of parent and child vox pops completed	31/12/15
• Training of Parent Ambassadors to work within the community	• Training of Parent Ambassadors completed	31/12/15
• Development of information bulletins	• Development of information bulletins completed	31/12/15
• Local dissemination action underway linked with community Children’s centres and early education providers supported by LA	Project evidence and material is utilised within the 3 participating local white working class communities, supported by Parent Ambassadors	31/3/16
• Dissemination material, including parent/child vox pops and information bulletins is targeted at existing online parent and professional websites, journals and training support organisations	• Project dissemination material is taken up by existing online parent and professional websites, journals and training support organisations; dates to share knowledge with key stakeholders and partners in Q5 including DfE, National College, LAs will be agreed	31/3/16

10. Project Outcomes

The project had four Key Outcomes which are set out below:

Description of Outcome	Proposed measure
More awareness of the home and setting factors which contribute to white working class boys attainment	Content of final report will detail the research findings.
Creation of online resource to share new knowledge	An online open access resource of video vox pops will be made available for download/sharing along with a copy of the final report and Parent Ambassador resources.
Creation of a localised support model using Parent Ambassadors	Each of the three Local authority areas will have a trained team of Parent Ambassadors.
Creation of sustainability action plan to outline how the knowledge created will be a) made available after the end of the funding period, and b) how the research will be further developed	Content of final report will detail the sustainability plan for post 2016.

Part Two of this report will set out how the above outcomes have been achieved.

PART TWO: Project Outcomes, Impact and Sustainability Plan

The HAWWC Boys Project aimed to achieve four key outcomes:

1. More awareness of the home and setting factors which contribute to white working class boys attainment;
2. Creation of online resource to share new knowledge;
3. Creation of a localised support model using Parent Ambassadors;
4. Creation of sustainability action plan to outline how the knowledge created will be a) made available after the end of the funding period, and b) how the research will be further developed.

Evidence in support of each of these four outcomes will be detailed in the following four sections of the report.

Section 1: Creation of new knowledge and more awareness about home and setting contexts which support HAWWC Boys attainment

The project had two main sources of evidence on which to base its developing action:

1. The results from a literature review of current published evidence about factors influencing the achievement of white working class and less advantaged/impooverished young boys;
2. The evidence generated by the HAWWC Boys case study families.

This evidence has been analysed and the new knowledge we have created is presented below conceptually in a framework which sets out to visually represent the complex interplay of contextual factors which we have found that appear to contribute to our high achieving young boys academic success. In addition there are two key concepts which help make sense of the emerging findings and how to focus the action to ensure wider impact for underachieving white working class boys. This theoretical framework is followed by the project evidence and suggested actions for enhancing white working class boys' achievement under each element of the framework.

Key Concepts and Conceptual Framework

The project evidence suggests two key concepts which are useful when considering how to improve white working class boys' achievement. The case studies reveal that successful white working class boys demonstrate '**Academic Resilience**' and successful white working class parents demonstrate '**Parenting Resilience**'.

'Academic Resilience' is defined as '*a complex process involving internal and external factors, where a network of bi-directional relationships between child, family, school, peers, neighbourhood and wider society factors come into play to overcome environmental risk experiences*' (Rutter, 2012, p.335). (See also Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter, 2013).

'Parenting Resilience' is defined as '*the capacity of parents to resist and minimise the impact of risky contextual behaviours and conditions in the home and wider family to allow warm, boundaried parenting behaviours to predominate in their relationship with the child.*' (Pascal and Bertram, 2016).

The literature suggests that both academic and parenting resilience are dynamic and fluctuate within different domains and contexts, as well as within various stages of life, so a child or parent who demonstrates resilience at one stage may not necessarily display this at a different life stage. The issue this raises for the on-going development of the project is the sustainability of resilience conditions once the child enters primary schooling. We are aware that in the early years of the high achieving boy's lives, the child and parent have been successful in securing this resilience. The question remains as to how and if this can be sustained as the child moves through primary schooling to their young adulthood.

The literature also points to a number of risk factors which surround young boys and their parents which are associated with educational underachievement and which there is a need for wider social policy to address. These include:

- Socio- economic background/poverty;
- Parent unemployment;
- Low parental education;
- Single parenthood;
- Lack of social support;
- Inconsistent parenting practices;
- Family conflicts;
- Physical illness;
- Caregiver psychopathology.

Several of our HAWWC Boy families were living with these risk factors, as the evidence below reveals. However, there is also evidence that protective factors are also in play which can mitigate these risk factors. These include:

For the Child

- Good cognitive skills (motivation, concentration, memory, self-regulation etc.)
- Easy temperament (socio-affective competencies: good social competencies, empathy, social cognition etc.);
- Child's behavioural traits.

In the Home

- Parents' ability to cope with stress;
- Parenting style and behaviour;
- Parents' emotional expression.

In the Early Childhood Setting

- Positive and close Key Worker relationship;
- Individualised parenting support with a focus on coping strategies and sensitive parenting skills;

- Stimulating, child focused Early Education programme with a focus on improving children’s social competencies, self-regulation skills.

In our project, these protective factors were very evident in the high achieving young boys’ early lives, and were clearly active in in different degrees in enabling the study boys to develop academic resilience. The case studies reveal that the parents of these boys had managed to facilitate these protective factors in the face of quite considerable adversity in some cases, demonstrating high levels of parenting resilience.

Seen in this way, the evidence and actions we present below is optimistic, demonstrating that even in adversity, excellent parenting is possible and that the resilience the young boys and their parents in our project demonstrate shows the way for others to act. It is also evident from the case studies that this is not about dramatic or extraordinary capacities. Rather, that the required resilience is made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes. This resilience develops in spite of adversity when basic protective systems in human development are operating to counteract the threats to child’s development and parent’s capacity to parent. In short, resilience for both young boys and parents is a process that involves ordinary adaptive resources and systems. In short, it is in the grasp of everyone.

Key Message!

Adult’s **Parenting Resilience** and children’s **Academic Resilience** are both made of ordinary rather than extraordinary processes. They develop in spite of adversity when basic protective systems in human development are operating to counteract the threats to development. In short, both of these types of resilience emerge from a process that involves ordinary, adaptable and transferable behaviours and resources which are available to children and their parents.

In the case of the HAWWC families:

The extraordinary is their capacity to give and receive excellent (ordinary!) parenting in sometimes deeply challenging circumstances.

Our evidence from the project has been analysed and we have developed a conceptual framework which aims to capture and exemplify the complex network of inter-relationships which are involved in supporting the academic and parenting resilience that underpin young white boys high achievement. We have called this framework the *HAWWC Circles of Success* and this is represented diagrammatically below.



This framework has four inner elements and two outer elements, each of which can be seen as actively contributing to the ecological context (Bronfenbrenner 1979) in which the high achieving young boy is developing and which play a part in enabling (or inhibiting) their achievement. The four inner elements are:

- Child Temperament and Capacities;
- Home Relationships
- Setting Strategies and Practices;
- Home Learning Environment;

The two outer elements are:

- Complexity in Low Income/White Working Class Families;
- Approaches to Parental Engagement in Learning.

Each of these elements will be evidenced, exemplified and action points drawn out in the rest of this report.

Challenging Stereotypes: Complexity in Low Income/White Working Class families

Evidence:

- Official figures show that 'White British' boys in low-income groups are the lowest performing ethnic group in the UK and the difference between their long-term, educational achievement and that of their richer white peers is wider than for any other ethnic group.
- The effects of this class and income difference on their learning are apparent well before nursery school age and is starkly evident on entry to primary school.
- White boys from low income families also make less progress than most other groups after entry to school.

But

- Some young white low income boys are performing as well as, and sometimes much better than, those from more privileged families.
- Many white young boys are growing up in families facing a wide range of stressful economic and social challenges.
- Parenting can be much more difficult under such pressures yet parenting styles and interactions are crucial in supporting early learning and sustaining progress.
- Successful attainment in high achievers appears to be dependent on the early development of exploratory, self-managing attitudes and dispositions of these young children; responsive and supportive interactions and relationships in the home; the nature of talk and other home behaviours and experiences; and collaborative interactions between the home and preschool settings.
- The overwhelming evidence is that early intervention (critically, between birth to three years) makes the greatest long term educative impact on this socially disadvantaged group.
- Focused action supporting parents and early childhood settings is needed to address attainment of young white boys in local income families ensuring school readiness and ultimately greater social mobility.

Project Findings:

Family Marital Status: There are significant numbers of female single parents rearing these young boys but many do have regular contact with the estranged father. Two parent families often share parenting responsibilities.

Social Isolation: Many families have regular contact with a wider, supportive extended family, particularly grandparents, but some are estranged or geographically distant from family and friends and in these families relationships with the HAWWC boy can be intense.

Mental Health: Some parents have mental health problems which impact significantly on their parenting capacity and style. Some parents' wellbeing is significantly enhanced by their close relationship with their bright son.

Employment Status: Many low income families, including single parents, are working full time or accessing training. Some parents, however, positively choose to be at home rather than working during the child's first years. Some parents positively choose to be at home rather than working during the child's first years and because of this choice suffer financial hardship.

Access to Childcare and Early Education: Many of these low income parents have found funded early education places for their son from two years age. Fewer are accessing childcare prior to two years due either to financial constraints or personal preferences.

Action Points:

- It is important to recognise and acknowledge the complexity and diversity of ‘family’ type and circumstances in a non-judgmental way.
- The desire of a parent to be at home with a young boy in the early months of life needs to be acknowledged and supported, as much as the need for support for parental employment.
- Social and emotional support for parents and grandparents is as important as support for boys learning and development. Learning takes place in a social emotional context.
- The need for childcare for ‘under threes’ depends on particular family circumstances and preferences and is related to parents’ employment. The need for educative intervention for targeted users who are most in need is a different. It should be recognised and high quality, flexible, accessible and affordable services should be aimed at supporting both parents and children. Needs can be complex and require integrated responses from a range of agencies.
- In particular, mental health support for young parents needs to be made accessible.
- The case for the educational value of accessing funded early education places for boys from two years is persuasive.

Child Temperament and Capacities

Evidence:

- Certain personality or temperament characteristics seem to act as protective factors and increase young boy’s resilience to adversity. Those most frequently observed included sociability, affection, memory, flexibility, reasoning capacity and a sense of humour.
- Other protective child attributes which can enhance a young boy’s capacity to learn include being curious, being socially competent, being an independent learner, and having the ability to focus, concentrate and persist.
- Enjoying dialogue and engaging in sustained talk is associated with higher attainment and development in young boys.
- An enjoyment of the imagination and stories can facilitate deeper level learning for young boys.
- Physical outdoor activity is often important in young boy’s explorations, developmental capacity and wellbeing.
- Friendships and attachment to others provide young boys with a sense of belonging, and support their understanding of rules, behaviour expectations and boundaries. These relationships ‘anchor’ young boys in their social world.
- Developing a sense of agency and independence provides young boys with a sharpened sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-regulation and capacity for success.

Project Findings:

Socio-Emotional Characteristics: The boys have a capacity to make strong and loving attachments to their close family, to make and sustain friendships with their peers and others, to be affectionate, loving, empathetic to others and to ‘lead’ interactions are characteristics associated with high achieving young boys. Although tantrums and frustrations may appear, they are quickly overcome.

Attitudes and Dispositions: High achieving young boys have strong exploratory drive. They are inquisitive, curious, questioning and fascinated by how things and relationships work. They are capable of long periods of concentration, persistence and focus and can become obsessive about things they find interesting. They can memorise and mimic and seek detailed information for things that fascinate which they can retain. They are generally confident, independent, self-motivating and self-sustaining operators within their world, although

they also enjoy joint, 'companionable' activity.

Physical Capacity: The importance of physical and outdoor activity is evident in high achieving young boys preferred experiences. They enjoy rough and tumble play, movement of all kinds, scooters, trikes, bikes and football and seem to delight in exploring the natural world. They can also get immersed for long periods of quiet, still activities, including puzzles, reading, drawing, Lego and small world play.

Fascinations and Aspirations: Some high achieving young boys have already developed a prowess and a deep fascination for an accomplishment such as football, swimming, music, composing, maths or reading and express a strong motivation to develop this further. This prowess, however, sits in a wider range of achievement not as isolated success.

Action Points:

Supporting and sustaining strong, secure and trusting attachments of young boys to key adults and peers, both within and outside of their home, is critical to healthy development, resilience and wellbeing.

Encouraging a young boy's sociability, friendships and emotional competence is central to their capacity to connect and learn, self-regulate and manage relationships.

Giving young boys space and time to pursue their interests and develop their fascinations and supporting their capacity to focus and concentrate for extended periods of time will enhance their capacity to learn.

Encouraging the young boy to develop their capacity to 'lead and shape' his learning and engage in sustained dialogues about their interests and passions is hugely beneficial in motivating the child.

Building in regular and sustained periods of outdoor and physical activity will enhance the young boy's learning, motivation and wellbeing.

Family Relationships and Attachments

Evidence:

- The early months of a young child's life are very important developmentally but can be very stressful for parents. Many parents need support during these early months in their son's life.
- Parental health, including mental health and parental resilience in the face of stress and adversity, infuses the home ethos and atmosphere in which the young boy is anchored.
- Young children need to establish a deep attachment to their main carer(s), who provides the young boy with security, consistency of care and the confidence to trust. These deep psychological roots are linked also to intellectual development. Young boys need at least one person in their lives who would go to unreasonable lengths for them.
- Young boys can be an 'anchor' for their parent(s), providing deep meaning and purpose in their lives. They can be a stabilising and bonding force within the family.
- The style and nature of relationships and interactions between family adults and children, including siblings, provide the young boy with a strong model of how relationships work.
- The extended family can provide an important circle of care and support around the young boy and his parent(s), extending and enhancing his social, emotional and cognitive experiences, and providing respite for the main carer(s). Grandparents can be particularly important at this time.
- Family support and childcare services can provide additional strength to the web of support around the young boy and his family.
- Balancing parental employment and family life is a challenge for many families. For some parents being at home and raising their son during the early years of life is a priority but may cause financial

stress. For others, returning to work means support is needed from the extended family and/or child-care providers to ensure continuity of care and a secure context for the child.

Project Findings:

Stable, Loving, Committed and Relaxed Attachments: The need for strong, secure and relaxed emotional attachments between the main carer(s) and close family and the young boy are essential to the young boy's wellbeing. These close attachments are characterised by affectionate, loving, playful, physical and committed interactions.

Parent's Stress Resilience: Stress and mental illness shape and infuse family relationships and interactions. Parents who demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity and have the strength to minimise its impact on their young boy, and protect him from its harmful effects can minimise its impact on the child, and strengthen the child's ability to cope. Some young boys can also act to protect and provide sanctuary for the parent.

Positive Family Relationships and Interactions: Developing strong and positive relationships with the close and extended family offers the young boy with a wider range of social and emotional experiences and access to adults and children at different ages and with different interests. Grandparents often play an important role in the young boy's early life.

Family Support: Family support and childcare services can provide a vital additional tier of support for both the young boy and the parent. Accessing this support early can prevent the escalation of need, add a great deal of value to family life and provide the young boy with experiences they might not have in the home. It works best where family, child carers and support agencies are in tune.

Balancing Home and Work Commitments: Balancing home and work commitments can be very difficult for a parent. How this is achieved is a very personal choice. Where parents choose or are required to work, additional care and support is needed to ensure the child continues to thrive and develop and the parent feels secure that the child's needs are being fully met. Where the parent is at home, financial support may be needed, and also social support to prevent isolation and ensure the young boy has opportunities to socialise in a wider community. Balancing home and work commitments can be very difficult for a parent. How this is achieved is a very personal choice.

Action Points:

Giving parents time and opportunities to establish a close and loving attachment to their son is vital.

Support to reduce stress levels in the family and build resilience for parents living in challenging circumstances or with mental health needs should be a priority.

Interaction with siblings, the extended family and wider community provides the young boy with additional stimulation and role models. Grandparents can provide a special relationship which has long lasting effects.

Early access to family support, childcare and early education can act to significantly enhance the quality of family life and the development of the young boy.

Flexible working patterns for both parents can enhance family life and secure family finances.

Home Learning Environment

Evidence:

- Warm, nurturing, attentive, relaxed but 'boundaried', parenting, with regular routines, provides the basic nutrients for optimal development.
- Parents who enjoy spending time with their son, and support and encourage the young boy's inter-

ests and passions encourage self-motivation and self-directed learning.

- Giving children opportunities to initiate, self-direct and self-manage their activity and to take responsibility for their actions encourages the development of important lifelong learning habits and dispositions, which have been called the super-skills of learning.
- Children thrive with regular, familiar routines but which are not rigidly enforced, encouraging a flexible attitude and the capacity to be adaptable.
- Language development is critical for social and intellectual development and language rich environments, in which sustained shared dialogues between children and adults predominate with lots of story sharing and creating, provide the optimal conditions for learning to occur.
- The mind and the body are linked and young children need to move to learn. Physical activity and movement, both indoors and outdoors, is essential to healthy development.
- Children are fundamentally exploratory and curious and seek a broad range of play based experiences and activities through which they practice and extend their abilities and interests.
- Young children are born into a digital world and can be seen as ‘technology natives’.

Project Findings:

Warm, Nurturing, ‘Boundaried’ Parenting: Young boys need warm, caring and intimate parenting and interactions, where rules and behaviour expectations are consistent but not too rigid or onerous. The successful parents in this project were not overtly pushy or domineering. Parenting should meet the young boy’s five basic needs: 1. food and warmth; 2. protection and safety; 3. love and a sense of belonging; 4. a feeling of being valued; and 5. a sense of achievable fulfilment, drawing on aspiration and expectations. Boundaries and order can come from daily routines such as meal times, story times, play times, bedtimes, can be helpful in anchoring the child’s day and providing security and structure to daily life.

Sharing Time and Being Attentive: Having regular, one on one time, where the young boy is given individual, affectionate attention, sharing activities and interests can deeply impact on the boy’s sense of self-esteem, self-worth and wellbeing. Being ‘tuned’ into the boy’s emotional and cognitive state and needs and responsive to these gives the child security and the confidence to be independent and exploratory.

Child Initiated Activity: Parents of high achieving young boys follow their son’s lead and support their self-directed passions and interests, providing lots of support, encouragement and a playmate. They are not ‘pushy’ or ‘tiger’ parents but see their son as competent and with their own agency and play agendas.

Routines: Parents ensure that each day has clearly embedded routines (eg getting up, bath time, mealtimes, bedtime, sleep time) and regularity but these are not rigidly imposed and flexibility was also seen as important. Mealtimes often were seen as an important family time when talk was shared and relationships within the family were cemented.

Parent/Child Talk: Parents of high achieving boys enjoy their child’s company and have talked a lot to their child (engaged in sustained shared dialogues) since birth. Responding to children’s curiosity and questions is an important part of the dialogue.

Stories and Books: Sharing and creating stories from books and daily life is an important part of daily life for these boys and their parents. Reading together is an important part of daily routines and parents often model reading for pleasure themselves.

Outdoors and Physical Activity: Being outdoors a lot and sharing walks, playing in the park, on the beach, in the fields or in the garden is an important feature of home life, with lots of dialogue about the natural world. Physical activity is seen as central to child and parent well being, with football, cycling, wrestling, fishing from an early age featuring as an important shared activity.

Home Activities: A wide range of indoor and outdoor activities are identified as providing the young boy with stimulation and opportunities for both companionable and self-directed learning, including, table games, bricks, jigsaws, drawing, small world play and Lego. Many parents commented on their son's enjoyment of imaginative and creative play activities, including music making.

Technology: Technology was a present and recognised element in daily home life for most (but not all) the high achieving children, but 'screen time' was generally monitored and limited.

Action Points:

Encouraging positive, warm parenting with regular routines and reasonable expectations for their child can help parents to relax and enjoy their son's company.

Building in daily time for sharing activities and experiences, both indoors and outdoors, that motivate the young boy is beneficial for both the parent and child.

Giving extended and sustained time to talk, share experiences and celebrate the young boy's achievements is fundamental to securing boy's development and positive attitude to self.

Young boys need plenty of physical activity and continuous opportunities to move within their environment. The outdoors, providing first-hand experience of the natural world, is a particularly stimulating context, providing the young boy with a wide range of physical, sensory and cognitive learning opportunities.

Technology should be encouraged as part of the modern world of childhood but should not dominate in daily activities.

Setting Strategies and Practices

Evidence:

- Less advantaged children who access a high quality, early education programme, achieve better outcomes and enter formal schooling with enhanced school readiness.
- Both parents and children benefit from a close and individualised support from a trained and experienced educator, who has designated responsibility for ensuring their wellbeing and development.
- A play based, active pedagogy which encourages child initiated activity and offers a broad range of learning experiences provides a stronger foundation for lifelong learning than a narrowly focused, formal, didactic approach.
- Settings which offer support for parents alongside education and care for children are more effective in developing school readiness and engaging families in the educative process at home and at school.
- Early years settings which are an integrated part of a local system which supports children from birth to school offer better transition experiences for children and families.
- An effective local early years system provides an integrated network of support around families, including education and care, community and family activities, parenting support and health advice.

Project Findings:

Early Education Entitlement: Most but not all, the high achieving children had accessed their early education entitlement from two years, with many attending childcare before. A few parents made an active choice to be with their child at home, while others did not rate the provision available. Flexible and consistent provision, with a local focus and knowledge, is favoured.

Positive and Close Relationship with Key Worker: The perceived skills and competence of the key worker are critical in facilitating or reducing take up of places, with some parents needing a lot of encouragement to engage with provision. Where the key worker had developed a strong and lasting relationship with both the parent and child, prior to and during attendance, and tailored their support individually, the benefit to both child and parent was clear. Knowing the child and parent well is paramount. Parents generally preferred settings with more experienced, skilled and mature staff – “not kids looking after kids”.

Curriculum and Pedagogy: A play based, active pedagogy with a focus on social-emotional (friendships) and dispositional (self-regulation, persistence, concentration, curiosity) development was favoured by parents for their young sons, with plenty of outdoor, first hand, creative and exploratory rather than formal, highly structured activities.

Parent Advice and Support: Settings that provide parental support and advice, with a non-judgmental focus on coping and parenting skills, attract more sustained engagement. Links to local schools where access for boys with older siblings is easier and transition pathways are clear are welcomed.

Community and Family Activities: Settings that offered more than early education and childcare, including family activities, health advice and participation in local community events and life are appreciated and trusted.

Action Points:

Parents need to be encouraged and supported to access their young boys’ early education entitlement.

The Key Worker system should be further embedded in all early years settings, with each family having an identified lead practitioner, with a brief to support the child and family.

The training of the early years workforce needs further investment and its professional status emphasised.

The quality of EYFS curriculum and pedagogy needs to be further enhanced so that all settings which support less advantaged children are judged as good or outstanding.

The importance of outdoor experience and physical activity within a play based, broad and active learning programme should be promoted.

An integrated local system, with early education and care as a key component, alongside health and parenting support, with a birth to eighteen approach to ensure continuity and progression should be developed.

Partnership arrangements between early years settings and primary schools should be encouraged. Early years settings and primary schools should work together to become community anchors, actively supporting social cohesion and community participation.

Section 2: Creation of online resource to share new knowledge

The intention of the child and family case studies, the creation of which formed the first phase of this project, was to generate new knowledge about how to better support the achievement of white working class young boys at home and in early years settings. The co-construction of the case studies was intended to be affirmative, empowering and developmental for the parents and young boys involved in the project and to enhance the capacity for social mobility within the white working class communities in which they lived. A key outcome of the project was to develop a strategy to document and disseminate this knowledge in a variety of formats and forum to achieve maximum impact for underachieving white young boys. The dissemination strategy is under way and the forums which have been established to date are set out below. The key hub for this knowledge is an online resource which summarises and promotes effective parenting and foundation stage practice for achieving school success and enhanced social mobility for white working class boys.

Online resource: All the materials generated from the project (and listed below) have been formatted and

collated into an online resource which has been promoted through a website hosting strategy. Agreements with existing website platforms have been negotiated and more are under development. To date hosting agreements have been made with:

- Birmingham City Council;
- Oxfordshire County Council;
- North Yorkshire County Council;
- 4 Children;
- Centre for Research in Early Childhood.

Parent and Practitioner Information Sheets: 5 parent and practitioner Information Sheets with insert talking head 'vlogs', parenting or practice tips, information and resource links have been created and are freely available (see Appendix 1).

Child and Family Case Studies: A series of Family and Child Case Studies focusing on the enabling conditions for a high achieving white working class boy have been agreed for wider dissemination purposes. These case studies reveal the complexity of family circumstances and reveal the dynamic nature of the inter-relationships between those elements of success and how academic and parenting resilience is achieved in real lives (see Appendix 2).

A set of Parent Video BLOGS (VLOGS): A set of video films of white working class parents talking about their parenting practices and partnership with early years practitioners has been created, edited and made available for training and knowledge transfer purposes. These are being incorporated into parenting support strategies and programmes, as detailed later and extracts of these have been embedded in the Parent Information Sheets (see Appendix 3)

White Working Class Parent Ambassadors: In each of the project sites, a resource of 'signed up' Parent Ambassadors has been created with a commitment to contribute actively to the development of white working class peer to peer support, parent and child service development and information exchange. How these are being utilised in each of the study sites is detailed in the next section of this report.

Knowledge Bank: A knowledge bank of information, guidance and support strategies for promoting successful child rearing practices and impactful ECEC practice in white working class communities has been collated and agreement has been reached with the contributors to make this available for training, support and research purposes.

Project Reports: A detailed project report and a series of professional and academic papers have been written and submitted for publication and conference dissemination events, as detailed below.

Conferences and Events: A series of dissemination conferences and events have been agreed. These include:

- Local Authority conferences in Birmingham, Oxford and North Yorkshire during May – July 2016
- Presentation at LGA National Conference, London, May 2017
- Presentation to Department for Education (DFE), March, 2017

- Presentation at British Early Childhood Education Research Conference (BECERA), Birmingham, February 2017
- Presentation at European early Childhood Education Research Conference (EECERA), Dublin, September 2017
- BBC Radio Programme, The Educators, to be confirmed.

Section 3: Creation of a localised support model using Parent Ambassadors

The project was successful in recruiting a group of volunteers from the case study families who have agreed to act as Parent Ambassadors within each of the three local white working class communities in the study sites. It was intended that these Parent Ambassadors would be embedded in a range of existing parenting support programmes in each study site, including parenting programmes, peer to peer support programmes, self-help groups, children and family support services and other volunteering work. These programmes have been delivered through Children's Centres, day care/early education providers, schools, Early Help programmes, health service organisations, charities and other local service providers. Experience had shown that the key to successful integration of the white working class Parent Ambassadors would be consistency in commitment, training, on-going professional support and supervision, access management and oversight, accountability and relationship building across services and within the local communities.

However, when we entered this phase of the project it became clear that the wider context of children and family service delivery had changed and all services were going through a period of severe cuts and service delivery transformation. This has meant that existing programmes which we had hoped to link into were being closed, run down or radically reconfigured in all three study sites and managers of these programmes were unable to offer any commitment or resources to work with the HAWCC Boy Parent Ambassadors at this time. This context has led to us adopting a process of experimentation in each of the three study sites around how the HAWWC Parent Ambassadors might be used. This experimentation is exploring new approaches to delivering parenting support, particularly through the use of online communication, social media and digital technology. We are also increasingly seeing the commissioning out of these services to third sector and private bodies which means that negotiating collaborative partnerships is taking more time. A summary of links and developing action in each of the three study sites to take this parenting support work forward is listed below.

Birmingham Parenting Support Prototypes

1. *Approachable Parenting Programme*: A parent training programme which works across the city and nationally to offer parenting support and training and which has agreed to incorporate the HAWWC Boys knowledge and resources into their programme.
2. *'Sparklers' Parent Mentor Programme*: A parent mentoring programme which uses parent volunteers from the city's Muslim community to counter radicalisation and promote social inclusion. We are working with them using Intergroup Contact Theory (Allport 1954, as promoted by the Home Office) to explore how we might bring the two communities, muslim and white working class together, through this parent mentor programme.
3. *Family Support/Early Help programmes*: The knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project is being built into these parent and family support programmes and the use of Parent Ambassadors is being explored.
4. *LA online information portal*: The knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project is being posted in the local authority online child and family service portal.
5. *LA social media strategy*: The local authority is interested in experimenting with developing a HAWWC Boys Parenting App for social media which adopts a 'Triage Approach' with three levels of access:

1. Universal parenting information and support, 2. Targeted and individualised parenting information and support, 3. Specialised and face to face parenting information and support. The Parent Ambassadors will be part of a development group to take this work forward.
6. *MASH Leadership Training*: Leadership training for the newly created Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH) in the city will incorporate the new knowledge from the HAWCC Boys project and the contribution of the HAWWC Parent Ambassadors to this leadership training programme.

Oxfordshire Parenting Support Prototypes

1. *Parent Champions Programme (Action for Children)*: A network of Parent Champions has been developed in each community in Oxfordshire who are trained and supported to promote and support parent perspectives and rights within services. The role of the HAWWC Boys Parent Ambassadors in this programme is being explored.
2. *Digital delivery of parent programmes*: Action for Children, Barnardos and Spurgeons are developing digital delivery of parent programmes in Children's Centres and the knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project and the contribution of a HAWWC Boys Parent App are being explored.
3. *LA online information portal*: The knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project is being posted in the local authority online child and family service portal.
4. *LA social media strategy*: The local authority is interested in experimenting with developing a HAWWC Boys Parenting App for social media which adopts a 'Triage Approach' with three levels of access: 1. Universal parenting information and support, 2. Targeted and individualised parenting information and support, 3. Specialised and face to face parenting information and support. The Parent Ambassadors will be part of a development group to take this work forward.
5. *Contact a Family Programme*: This self-help group is currently focused on supporting parents of children with SEND and we are exploring if a similar approach could be used to support white working class families with young vulnerable boys.
6. *PEEP Programme*: This parent and child support programme is interested in assimilating the knowledge generated from the HAWWC Boys project into its resources and strategies.
7. *Nature Effect Project (outdoor parenting)*: This parenting support programme is interested in assimilating the knowledge generated from the HAWWC Boys project, particularly around outdoor and physical activity, into its resources and strategies.

Scarborough Parenting Support Prototypes

1. *Scarborough Pledge*: The local authority has committed funds for innovative work around raising achievement and aspirations for Scarborough's coastal community. As part of this initiative a project has been proposed to develop a HAWWC Boys Parenting App for social media which adopts a 'Triage Approach' with three levels of access: 1. Universal parenting information and support, 2. Targeted and individualised parenting information and support, 3. Specialised and face to face parenting information and support. The Parent Ambassadors will be part of a development group to take this work forward. social media strategy/parent app
2. *LA online information portal*: The knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project is being posted in the local authority online child and family service portal.
3. *LA Parental Engagement strategy*: Work is underway to develop a parent engagement programme for coastal community families. It is hoped that the HAWCC Boys Parent Ambassadors will contribute to this programme.
4. *Early Help programme*: The knowledge from the HAWWC Boys project is being built into these parent and family support programmes and the use of Parent Ambassadors is being explored.

5. *Widening Horizons: Family by Family Solution*: Work is underway to develop a peer to peer, family support programme for white working class families with young vulnerable boys. It is hoped that the HAWCC Boys Parent Ambassadors will contribute to this programme.

Section 4: Creation of sustainability action plan to outline how the knowledge created will be a) made available after the end of the funding period, and b) how the research will be further developed

The HAWCC Boys project has reached the end of its funding period with the DfE. We have worked closely with national bodies and the local authorities in each of the three project sites to promote and disseminate the new knowledge gained and embed it in their children and family service delivery strategy. We have also worked with those responsible for extending access for the two year old Early Education Entitlement, Early Help and Intervention and Parenting Support Programmes in each of the three study sites to embed the HAWCC Boys' project knowledge and explore the use of the HAWCC Parent Ambassadors. These strategies, and the national dissemination plan outlined earlier, have ensured the sustainability of the action undertaken in the work plan at the end of the funding period.

We are also actively seeking further funding to extend the HAWCC Boys project in the following ways:

1. To extend the current HAWCC Boys project focusing on young white working class boys in other local authority communities, with the intention of developing local parenting strategies which can better support underachievement, enhance school readiness and promote social mobility. We have had great interest from several other local authorities to take this work forward.
2. To track the current cohort of HAWCC boys through their Primary schooling to see how the parents and primary school sustain the HAWCC Boys high achievement, particularly through the use of the Pupil Premium, as the boys become more independent from their parent(s) and more influenced by peer group dynamics.
3. To support the development of innovative parenting support strategies at a time of funding cuts, especially:
 - Social Media: Parent App Triage Approach
 - Online delivery of parenting programmes
 - Sparklers Parent Mentor programme to support intercultural relations
 - Physical/outdoor parenting
 - Family by Family strategy

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[Appendix 1: Parent and Practitioner Information Sheets](#)

[Appendix 2: Child and Family Case Studies](#)

[Appendix 3: A set of Parent Video BLOGS \(VLOGS\)](#)

(All appendices also available at www.crec.co.uk/hawwc-boys)



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