



Department
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CANparent Trial Evaluation: Final Report Research brief July 2014

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Introduction

The CANparent trial was a government initiative to examine the development of a *universal* offer of parenting classes potentially to all parents of children aged 0-5 years. The aim of the trial was to evaluate whether the free provision of parenting classes would provide sufficient incentive to providers to start offering additional parenting classes nationally, including for parents beyond the foundation stage and whether a universal approach could normalise and de-stigmatise parenting classes.

This research briefing summarises the Final Report of the CANparent trial operated by the Department for Education (DfE) during 2012-2014. Two Interim Reports present findings from the earlier stages of the trial^{1, 2}. The trial was designed to stimulate the supply of classes suitable for universal use at a cost that it would be reasonable to expect at least some parents to pay, and thereby evaluate the market potential for high quality universal parenting classes to support the parenting skills of mothers and fathers of 0-5 year olds. In three of the areas, Camden, Middlesbrough and High Peak, the use of vouchers was trialled to stimulate both the supply of, and demand for, universal parenting classes. Parents of 0-5s who lived in these areas were eligible for a free voucher entitling them to access a CANparent parenting course. In the second year of the trial a change in eligibility allowed parents of all children in Year 1 at school to access the vouchers, regardless of their child's age. These vouchers, redeemed by the class providers, had a value of £75 for every parent starting, and of a further £25 for every parent completing³ the course.

In the fourth trial area, Bristol, there were no vouchers. Instead, some light touch support was available, such as use of the CANparent brand and website, support from corporate and other organisations and low/no cost marketing support. The Bristol trial was designed to encourage the development of different funding models, such as employers funding classes, providers being sponsored to run classes and parents paying for classes.

The DfE recognised that the CANparent trial was experimental. For example, there was a lack of evidence on which to predict the likely take-up of universal parenting classes by parents of 0-5 year olds. Consequently, the trial was designed to provide information during its two year implementation, both from the empirical study and a series of commissioned reviews of evidence. This developing evidence base was used to make modifications designed to enhance the effectiveness of the trial.

¹ Cullen, M. A., Cullen, S., Strand, S., Bakopoulou, I., Lindsay, G., Brind, R., Pickering, E., Bryson, C., & Purdon, S. (2013) *CANparent trial evaluation: First interim report*. DFE-RR280.

<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/RSG/AllPublications/Page1/DFE-RR280>

² Cullen, M. A., Strand, S., Cullen, S., & Lindsay, G. (2014). *CANparent trial evaluation: Second interim report*. Research report DFE-RR3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/canparent-trial-evaluation-second-interim-report>

³ 'Completion' was contractually defined for each CANparent course, as these vary in length. It equated to at least 75% attendance.

Key Findings

- The trial was successful in stimulating a supply of providers of parenting classes financed by fixed price vouchers; and some demand from parents who were offered classes that were free.
- The trial demonstrated that more time is necessary to increase the awareness of all parents of the benefits of quality universal parenting classes and thereby generate a culture whereby universal parenting classes are seen by most parents as a normal part of becoming a parent, similar to the culture of attending antenatal classes.
- The trial created the incentive for some providers to start offering online versions of their classes accessible to any parent nationally and, in the non-voucher area, to offer classes to parents of older children too.
- The trial led to a significant drop in the proportion of parents believing that parenting classes were only for parents with 'problems bringing up their children' i.e. it reduced stigma around parenting classes.
- The trial indicated that, at this stage of market development, parents paying for classes are likely to form only one of a number of income streams necessary to sustain supply of universal parenting classes.

Detailed findings

- The CANparent trial was successful in stimulating the supply side of a market of 14 providers in the three voucher trial areas that offered a wide choice of types of parenting classes and modes of delivery.
- The trial succeeded in stimulating some demand for universal parenting classes across the spectrum of parent level of education, socioeconomic status and ethnicity.
- The free vouchers played a key role in stimulating demand; half (49%) of households that had received a voucher had already signed up to a class or were intending to sign up to a class. So too did face-to-face engagement of parents.
- The pre-trial planning assumptions of the proportion of parents of children 0-5 years who might be expected to take up a parenting class were substantially over optimistic; actual take-up of 2936 parents was, however, more in line with the level of interest in such classes we identified in the voucher trial areas, and take-up was accelerating at the end of the trial.
- There was wide disparity between providers in the numbers of parents recruited: four of the 14 providers accounted for 67% of participating parents.
- Only 9% of parents attending a parenting class were fathers or male partners, indicating the difficulty in involving fathers in classes despite targeted efforts to do

so; however, fathers were involved informally when mothers discussed with them the decision to attend a class and their learning from the class.

- The large majority of parents who completed their course were positive about their parenting class (92%) and would recommend the class to other parents (94%).
- Overall, after attending a parenting class, parents felt more satisfied with being a parent, saw themselves as more effective parents, and had higher levels of mental well-being than before taking the parenting class.
- At the start of the trial, attitudes to parenting classes were largely positive among parents of 0-5 year old children in the three voucher trial areas; however, only a quarter of parents said they were 'fairly likely' to participate in classes while their child was five or under and only 10% said they were 'very likely' to.
- There was little evidence that among the general population of parents of children aged 0-5 years the trial had an impact on either their attitudes to or their propensity to take up parenting classes; however, there was an indication of a reduction in parents' perceptions of stigma being associated with parenting classes.
- Parents' awareness of the CANparent brand increased substantially over the trial.
- Brand and voucher awareness was driven most extensively by early years settings such as children's centres, nurseries, playgroups and schools.
- The cost per parent of attending a parenting class varied greatly between providers due to several factors including length of the course, start up costs and numbers of parents attending.
- Overall, the cost to providers of running parenting classes was substantially greater than the voucher income received; cost effectiveness varied substantially between providers because of the wide variation in costs associated with length of courses, levels of parent recruitment and set up of infrastructure.
- Overall, including set up and fixed costs, the voucher value required by providers to break even was £325 per parent and the lowest cost of provision was £135 per parent; the lowest cost excluding set up costs was £117 per parent⁴.
- These high average costs of provision reflect the low take up of parenting classes and would be expected to decrease significantly following even a relatively modest increase in take up. It is unclear as to whether the average cost of provision would have been lower (or higher) than the voucher value if the notional maximum capacity of parenting classes had been supplied by providers.
- Parents differed greatly in their willingness to pay for parenting classes with about half unwilling to pay anything, a quarter *potentially* willing to pay some positive

⁴ These are probably high estimates of the average costs across the 14 providers as the providers with the highest levels of recruitment did not respond to our costs survey.

amount, and the remaining quarter *definitely* willing to pay some positive amount towards classes.

- The most important factor determining willingness to pay was higher household income.

Aims and objectives

The main aim of our study of the CANparent trial was to evaluate whether the free provision of parenting classes in Middlesbrough, High Peak in Derbyshire, and Camden in London would provide sufficient incentive to providers to start offering additional universal classes nationally, including for parents beyond the foundation stage, and whether a universal approach can normalise and de-stigmatise parenting classes.

The objectives were to investigate:

- The extent to which a new and competitive market for the universal parenting classes has been created by the trial and how successfully this could be sustained with or without subsidy.
- The relative effectiveness of different voucher distributors.
- The relative effectiveness of different types of vouchers and information provided to parents (three specific variations of voucher design and information to parents were trialled).
- Parents' awareness of, and attitudes towards, parenting classes.
- Parents' experiences of the parenting class offer.
- Impact on parents' perceptions of skills and confidence in parenting.
- The development of universal parenting classes outside the trial area.

Methodology

The research design required a complex, combined methods approach. It comprised both qualitative and quantitative methods, including large scale surveys, standardised questionnaires, in depth interviews, and cost effectiveness and willingness to pay analyses. The study was organised into three strands:

- **Strand 1:** Focused on the supply side in the three voucher areas and Bristol, comprising:
 - longitudinal case studies in three phases, including at each phase interviews with providers; trial management and delivery representatives from ECORYS, Parenting UK, the local support organisations, local parenting commissioners and focus groups with voucher distributors.

- desk research comprising analysis of outputs from class providers and voucher distributors; analysis of existing data on the three trial areas; and literature reviews as requested by the DfE during the study.
- **Strand 2:** Three surveys were carried out to measure take-up and impact.

Penetration survey

- An Early Penetration Survey (January –October 2012) of 1510 parents was carried out in trial areas to measure the extent to which vouchers had reached parents, the socio-economic status of families surveyed and ‘baseline’ attitudes towards parenting classes. All interviews were face-to-face with randomly selected parents (random probability sampling based on Child Benefit records); at the same time, a baseline survey of 1535 parents was carried out in 16 comparison areas (four per trial area);
- A second Penetration Survey (August - November 2013) in both trial and comparison areas to examine take-up of classes and normalisation (1603 parents in the trial areas, 1520 parents in the comparison areas).

Participating parents survey

- An ongoing Participating Parent Survey was carried out with class attendees in the three voucher areas to establish their experiences of the classes and their self-perceptions of impact on their parenting skills, mental well-being and the frequency and intensity of daily challenges (‘hassles’) associated with being a parent. The initial plan was a 10% sample of the DfE planning assumption of about 20,000 parents expected to undertake a parenting class in the voucher trial areas. As it became clear that uptake would be much lower than expected, a higher proportion of parents attending classes were included. By the end of the data collection period for the purpose of analysis (13 February 2014), pre-course data were available on 536 of the 1819 parents in the trial at that time (29.5% sample) with matched pre- and post-course data also available on 310 parents (17% of registered parents).
- Parents attending a class completed standardised questionnaires measuring parent mental well-being (Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale); parent satisfaction, confidence and sense of efficacy as a parent (Being a Parent Scale); and aspects of their child’s behaviour (Parenting Daily Hassles Scale).
- A non-intervention sample, comprising around 1000 parents in comparison areas, completed either the Being a Parent or Parenting Daily Hassles Scale as part of the baseline penetration survey and 6-8 weeks later completed the pencil and paper version of the appropriate scale, sent by post. This allowed a comparison of changes in scores over a comparable

timescale with the participating parents' sample before and after their CANparent class⁵.

- About 50 interviews (telephone and face-to-face) with parents, focusing on those who started a class but dropped out, those who completed a class, and on fathers.

Satisfaction survey

- A short online Satisfaction Survey offered via email to all parent participants in classes in the three voucher areas; 192 parents responded.

▪ **Strand 3:**

- **Cost effectiveness:** An in-depth questionnaire was administered to assess the costs of provision over the first 12 months of the trial: nine of the 14 providers responded. Cost effectiveness was calculated for each provider in terms of the total number of parents compared with the total costs (both set up and fixed costs, and ongoing costs of delivery of parenting classes).
- **Willingness to pay:** We adopted a *Contingent Valuation* approach to better understand the demand side characteristics of the market and assess the willingness of parents to pay for parenting classes. This approach presents descriptions of the services being provided and through a series of questions seeks to elicit the Willingness to pay for these different scenarios. This assessment was carried out as part of the Wave 2 Penetration Survey.

The future

The DfE-funded CANparent trial ended on 31st March 2014 as planned. The Department of Health took over responsibility on 1st April when a modified version of the CANparent trial commenced building upon the evidence from the CANparent trial 2012-2014 reported here.

Recommendations

The Final Report makes recommendations designed to increase demand and take up, and to support a sustainable supply of parenting classes. These are addressed variously to policymakers, local support organisations, local advocates and providers.

⁵ See [CANparent 2nd Interim Report](#)



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