

The Family Commission



Happy families today and tomorrow

A national inquiry into the extended family and the support it needs in the 21st century



- What is life like for families in the UK?
- What does the future hold for families across the generations?
- What support do families of all generations need to flourish?

Throughout we will consider:

Where could family policy be more supportive and where does it work against the grain of family life?

Are family resilience and resources given enough acknowledgement?

What might new proposals for family support be?



Ask any family and they are likely to tell you that life can be hard, with the pressure of fast modern living pressing home in every aspect of the way they live. For those that are particularly vulnerable – those in poverty, Black and Minority Ethnic families, those newly arrived in the UK and those with complex needs – life can be even more challenging, with too many still finding the difficulties they face too hard to overcome.

Whilst family life has changed beyond recognition over recent decades, there is little doubt that at best our families remain one of the most important elements of our lives, the buffer and link between individuals and community and a source of support and strength.

But the challenges of our vastly expanded personal world, coupled with a more 'individualised' and fast paced lifestyle, are also taking their toll. Whilst three-quarters of people in Britain are optimistic about the future for their families, 70% of people still believe family life was more successful in their parents' generation¹. The Family Commission aims to untangle some of the complex realities of families in the UK, to understand how families manage in the changing world, what the state can and should be doing to help them do so, and to explore some of the tensions which people still feel.

Backed up by groundbreaking research and consultation with thousands of families, The Family Commission will present an unparalleled insight into the strengths and challenges of the family today, leading to far reaching recommendations in every aspect of public policy.

The Family Commission is chaired by Esther Rantzen CBE. The inquiry draws together academics, industrialists, media representatives, policy makers and specialists who will examine the future needs of families and recommend solutions going forward. Uniquely, these solutions will be shaped by families themselves. Through a National Family Panel and consultation with thousands of families, from the countryside to the city centre, families will play an active role in identifying their needs and defining the answers.

The Family Commission comes at a time when the world for families is full of opportunity but also challenge. With a growing recognition that family circumstances have a dramatic impact on the outcomes and life chances of children, this study is searching for solutions. Families deserve the best chance we can offer. Through The Family Commission, families will design their own solutions. Our challenge to policy makers is to respond.

1. Poll prepared on behalf of The BBC by ICM Research, Nov 2007, www.bbc.co.uk

The big issues

The Family Commission is asking some key questions:

- 1 What is life like for families in the UK today? How will this change in the future?
- 2 What support do families need now and in the future to fulfil their potential? Are there regional differences?
- 3 How can we build positive family involvement and interaction across communities and generations?
- 4 How should we respond to families who struggle to cope with hardship, health, relationships, employment and finances?
- 5 What should the role of Government, communities and employers be in supporting families?
- 6 What would a blueprint for support for modern families look like?

“50% of people see extended family members just twice a year or less”

“50% of Britons say family life is harder today than it was 20 years ago”

“1 in 4 people think that tight finances are the biggest threat to family life”

YouGov survey for 4Children, March 2009



How does The Family Commission work?

The biggest consultation with families ever undertaken

Over the next year we will be travelling the country to talk to families of every generation. Our aim is to talk to over 10,000 families, creating one of the largest conversations ever undertaken.

Submissions

As well as travelling the country we will be encouraging people to submit their views to us. These will be taken in writing, electronically or verbally.

Commission meetings

These meetings will consider written evidence and hear presentations and verbal submissions from experts.

National Family Panel

A unique Commission of families will 'reality test' the findings and ideas of the Panel. All recommendations will be approved by the Panel, meaning that families become the architects of their own support.

Research

The Family Commission is mapping UK and international evidence through research and best practice examples.

The Family Commission has a unique approach with in-depth and innovative research and analysis. We will be looking at a number of themes...

Families as carers

We will explore the role, potential and aspirations of families in their caring role for children and older people. We will look at how we can support families to provide care for the people they love whilst balancing work, finances and complex lifestyles.

Intergenerational relationships

We will look at ways of nurturing and maximising the potential for intergenerational support and relationships within the family and ask how we can support families across the generations as lives become increasingly complex and fast moving.

Families new to the UK

We will examine the support needs and aspirations of families who are new to the UK as economic migrants, asylum seekers or refugees and ask how families new to the UK can turn high aspirations into reality.

Families under stress

We will consider the needs of vulnerable families, looked after children and families with a parent in prison.

We will explore how the resilience and capacity of the family can be harnessed and strengthened, and ask how services can provide the tailored help and support that families with complex and challenging circumstances need.

Supporting parental relationships

We will examine the impact of parental conflict on children and young people and ask how we can support parental relationships whilst understanding the unique, complex and intensely personal nature of these. Importantly, we will ask how we can help families withstand the strains and stresses of family life during times of economic difficulty.



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Regional events

The Family Commission is holding regional events and visits to find out what families in different parts of the country think and to search out inspirational practice.

High level policy seminars

High level seminars in Westminster are planned on the key issues of: families as carers, intergenerational relationships, families under stress, families new to the UK, and supporting parent relationships.

Family life has changed dramatically over the last 30 years. From the structure and relationships of families to the way families operate both as a direct family unit and as part of the extended family and wider community, life is different.

Working with families to find solutions

Despite wide ranging interventions and a supportive political climate, the reality of families in crisis still casts a long shadow over the family policy debate, with the overarching policy response still based on the notion of family collapse and inadequacy. More fundamental are the difficulties that policy makers have in truly viewing interventions through a family lens.

The consequences for some families can be a toxic mix. Rather than a state being there to support them, families are too often the hidden casualties of a mismatch of policy interventions – there to take the blame when things go wrong but with inconsistent consideration or support to help resolve the situation.

And families have much to be optimistic about. Most families are faring well despite the pressures they face. The modern family exists in many varieties and will change significantly during different stages in family life. Most will have high hopes for their families – determined to outwit disadvantage, get around the challenges and reinvent their support structure as needed and over time. But these stories are rarely heard, with the narrative of disaster, doom and breakdown drowning out the messages of

how people survive and sometimes survive well. Translating this optimism, resilience and potential into public policy is a major challenge.

Families may once have been a private matter – of consequence for others only when things go wrong – but they are now firmly a concern for us all. If that is true, we need to start giving them a say.

The Family Commission looks to find new answers to age-old problems. It sets sights high to create a policy agenda for all families for generations to come.



Who is The Family Commission?



Esther Rantzen CBE
Chair of Commission

Sir William Atkinson
Head of Phoenix High School, West London

Stella Creasy
Community Campaigner

Meadhbh Dempsey
Young Ambassador

Josh Dowgill
Young Ambassador

Alex Graham
Chief Executive and founder, Wall to Wall Productions

Rachel Johnson
Journalist

Anna Kennedy
Director and Founder of Autism Services

Professor Kathleen Kiernan
Professor of Social Policy and Demography, University of York

Charlotte Leslie
Parliamentary candidate

Anne Longfield OBE
Chief Executive, 4Children

Caroline Marsh
Property Investor and Channel 4 Secret Millionaire

Seyi Obakin
Chief Executive, Centrepoint

Pip O'Byrne
Children and Families Advisor

Richard Reeves
Director, Demos

Yvonne Roberts
Writer and Broadcaster

Alexander Rose
Campaigner

Jean Stogdon
Founder, Grandparents Plus

Alex Timpson
Mother and foster parent

John Timpson
Business Leader

Karen Woodall
Director, The Centre for Separated Families

Professor Sue Yeandle
Professor of Sociology, University of Leeds

Have your say

The Family Commission wants to hear from as many people as possible. If you have views on families today, please let us know. Submissions to The Family Commission should generally be no more than four sides of A4 and should address the six key areas outlined on page 2.

Please send submissions to:

The Family Commission
4Children
City Reach
5 Greenwich View Place
London E14 9NN

Tel: 020 7512 2100
Fax: 020 7512 2010
familycommission@4Children.org.uk

The Family Commission will also be taking a limited number of oral submissions. If you would like to present your views to the inquiry in person, please write to the above address.

We look forward to hearing from you.