

# The Invisible Students

Young Parents in Education

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***Commissioned by the Teen Parents Support Initiative***

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## Foreword

As Minister for Children, I am pleased to publish this paper on young parents and education disadvantage, which has been commissioned as part of the evaluation of the Teenage Parents Support Initiative (TPSI). The aim of this paper is to identify and discuss key aspects of the policy landscape in relation to young parents' participation in education and to inform the work of the TPSI pilot projects.

For all young people, education and training offers a possible route out of poverty, social exclusion and isolation. Research suggests that teenage parents represent a particularly vulnerable group within the education system and that difficulties in continuing formal education and in accessing relevant training opportunities are significant issues for young parents and their children.

A central policy issue identified through the work of the projects is the importance of supporting young parents to reconcile pregnancy and parenthood and their own continued participation in education and training. The TPSI pilot projects made a key element of their work the support of young parents who wished to participate in education and training. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the ongoing development of necessary services and supports for young parents in the field of education and training.

*Brian Lenihan*

# Acknowledgements

## The Centre for Social and Educational Research

The Centre for Social and Educational Research, an independent research and policy analysis body, was established in 1997 and is located within the Dublin Institute of Technology.

In 2001, a dedicated Families Research Unit was established. This development was a consequence of the increasing number of research and evaluation studies undertaken by the Centre in the broad field of families research and of the need to consolidate and advance the families research agenda. The work of this Research Unit is informed by, and informs, the research carried out in two other units – the Residential Child Care and Juvenile Justice Research Unit and the Early Childhood Care and Education Research Unit. This is an important aspect of the research carried out, given the cross-cutting nature of various policies targeted at families and children.

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**Dr. Lorna Ryan, Manager**

## Researcher

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**Sinéad Riordan, Researcher.**

## Executive summary

This paper was commissioned as part of the external evaluation of the Teen Parents Support Initiative (TPSI) funded by the Department of Health and Children. The Initiative consists of three pilot project sites working directly to support young parents and a fourth element, namely the development of a resource pack and directory of services for key workers with young parents (see Box One for further details on the initiative). The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss key aspects of the policy landscape in relation to young parents' participation in education and to inform the work of the TPSI pilot projects.

A central policy issue identified through the work of the projects is the importance of supporting young parents to reconcile pregnancy and parenthood and their own continued participation in education or training. Research suggests that lower levels of educational attainment are strongly associated with a higher probability of teen parenthood as well as poorer long-term life outcomes (Kiernan, 1995; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). In response to this, TPSI pilot projects made a key element of their work the support of young parents' who wished to participate in education and training.

### Key issues arising

A number of obstacles limiting young parents' opportunities to participate in education and training are clearly identifiable. These include:

- **Family, social and cultural obstacles** including a lack of parental or familial support, social constructions of good mothering, cultural values, feelings of stigmatisation and exclusion; and
- **Structural and institutional obstacles** including exclusion from mainstream schooling, negative school experiences, childcare affordability and availability, financial needs (including secondary benefits), barriers to accessing existing alternative education and training opportunities (such as age criteria) and lack of external counselling and support programmes.

Since low educational attainment will compound the barriers to employment resulting from difficulties of child care and of balancing responsibility for early motherhood and work, the paper suggests that more flexible arrangements for the pursuit of educational qualifications need to be introduced to ensure that teenage parenthood does not lead to further diminution of life chances.



### Recommendations

The following policy recommendations are made:

- The naming of young parents as a specific target group under social inclusion and education measures and the appraisal of policies for their impact on young parents;
- The creation of a body of data on young parents in order to combat their present 'invisibility' within official statistics. In particular, a greater focus in official statistics on young fathers and non-nationals is required;
- The development of 'joined up' policy on education and training for young parents and the potential central role of partnership working arrangements and locally based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to the education support needs of young parents;
- The development of guidelines or policies by each individual school on teenage pregnancy and parenthood which should cover support on disclosure of pregnancy, support during the pregnancy and delivery, supports for young fathers and support and training needs of teachers; and
- Further research on the schooling experiences of pregnant and parenting teenagers.

The paper calls for a shift towards 'differentiated policy' (Davies *et al*, 1996) that is, policy which acknowledges and responds to the full range of circumstances among young parents and their diversity of support needs. The adoption of such an approach would result in a more holistic response to the full range of circumstances and needs of young parents. Teenage parents have a complex set of needs that require a response through a comprehensive support system involving all relevant agencies.

The paper suggests that TPSI pilot projects have played a central role in developing responses to the educational support needs of young parents. TPSI projects recognised and worked to support and resolve any issues arising from personal, familial or structural factors that may have influenced young parents' ability and desire to participate in education and training. By supporting all aspects of a young parent's life, the Initiative sought to overcome the numerous 'small' obstacles that can reduce even the most committed young person's ability to participate in education/training. In conclusion, the paper suggests that the Initiative is well placed to play a important role in the development of local and regional integrated networks to meet the education and training needs of young parents.

Section one

# Setting the scene

Education is the key to improving the life opportunities of all young parents (Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood, 2000:45).

## 1. Introduction

This paper was commissioned as part of the external evaluation of a national pilot programme, the Teen Parents Support Initiative (TPSI), funded by the Department of Health and Children. The Initiative consists of three pilot projects working directly with young parents and pregnant teenagers aged 19 years and under, and a fourth element, namely the production of a resource pack and directory of services for use by key workers with young parents. Box One provides further information on the Initiative.

### Box 1. Overview of the Teen Parents Support Initiative (TPSI)

There are four core elements to the Teen Parents Support Initiative, 3 pilot project sites and the development of a Resource Pack and Directory for key workers with young parents.

- The Dublin project is based within a voluntary organisation, Barnardos and covers the areas of Dublin 8, Drimnagh, Crumlin and Tallaght;
- The Limerick project is based within a community organisation, Limerick Social Services Centre and covers Limerick City and County;
- The Galway project is based within a statutory body, the Western Health Board, and covers Galway City and County; and
- Treoir (National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children) is producing a Resource Pack and Directory for Key Workers with Young Parents.

In recent years, new developments in education in Ireland have evolved against the backdrop of social inclusion policies in the European Union and the development of social partnership in national economic planning. Education is viewed as key to building and maintaining economic growth and activity in Ireland. For all young people, education and training offers a possible route out of poverty, social exclusion and/or isolation. Research suggests that teenage parents represent a particularly vulnerable group within the educational system and that difficulties in continuing formal education and in accessing relevant training opportunities are a significant issue for young parents and their children (McCashin, 1997; Joint Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs, 2001; NESF, 2001).

A central policy issue identified by TPSI project workers through their work with young parents is the difficulties faced by teens in reconciling pregnancy and parenthood and continued education or training. Consultation with project workers and young parents participating in TPSI suggests that the educational needs of some young parents are not being 'best met' through existing training and education pathways. This paper has been prepared, therefore, in an attempt to highlight an issue that requires more attention. The paper does not intend to provide an in-depth examination of the different types of education (that is, second level, alternative training and education

Research suggests that teenage parents represent a particularly vulnerable group within the educational system and that difficulties in continuing formal education and in accessing relevant training opportunities are a significant issue for young parents and their children (McCashin, 1997; Joint Committee on Family, Community and Social Affairs, 2001; NESF, 2001).

programmes, third level education) available. Rather, it identifies broad trends and issues arising for young parents who wish to return to or continue their education and training. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the development of necessary services and supports for young parents in the field of education and training.

The key objectives of this paper are:

- (i) To review and identify possible gaps in service provision and barriers to participation in education and training for young parents;
- (ii) To discuss the policy backdrop against which TPSI pilot sites offer support to young parents to continue in or return to education and training;
- (iii) To generate recommendations for the development of policy for young parents in education and training; and
- (iv) To briefly describe and discuss the work of the TPSI in education and training for young parents and to examine key demographic characteristics of young parents as they pertain to education and what this may mean for the work of the overall programme.

### 1.1. Rationale for paper

Real difficulties exist in providing young parents with comparable education to that which they would have received had they not become parents. Teenagers' personal, social and educational life may be disrupted by the demands of pregnancy and/or parenting and it can require considerable individual determination, family support and supportive agencies to resume or remain in education. For some there can be no doubt that in terms of their participation in education and training:

*The push to leave is stronger than the pull to stay (Lynch, 1999:342).*

Low levels of education combined with early parenthood will often have an immediate impact upon young men and women's life chances and may contribute to their and their children's long-term social exclusion (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). The growing recognition of the crucial influence of parental levels of education on children's participation in education and their school performance (see McCoy et al., 1999) contributes to:

*An increasingly compelling case for investment in the case of parents also (White Paper, 2000:49).*

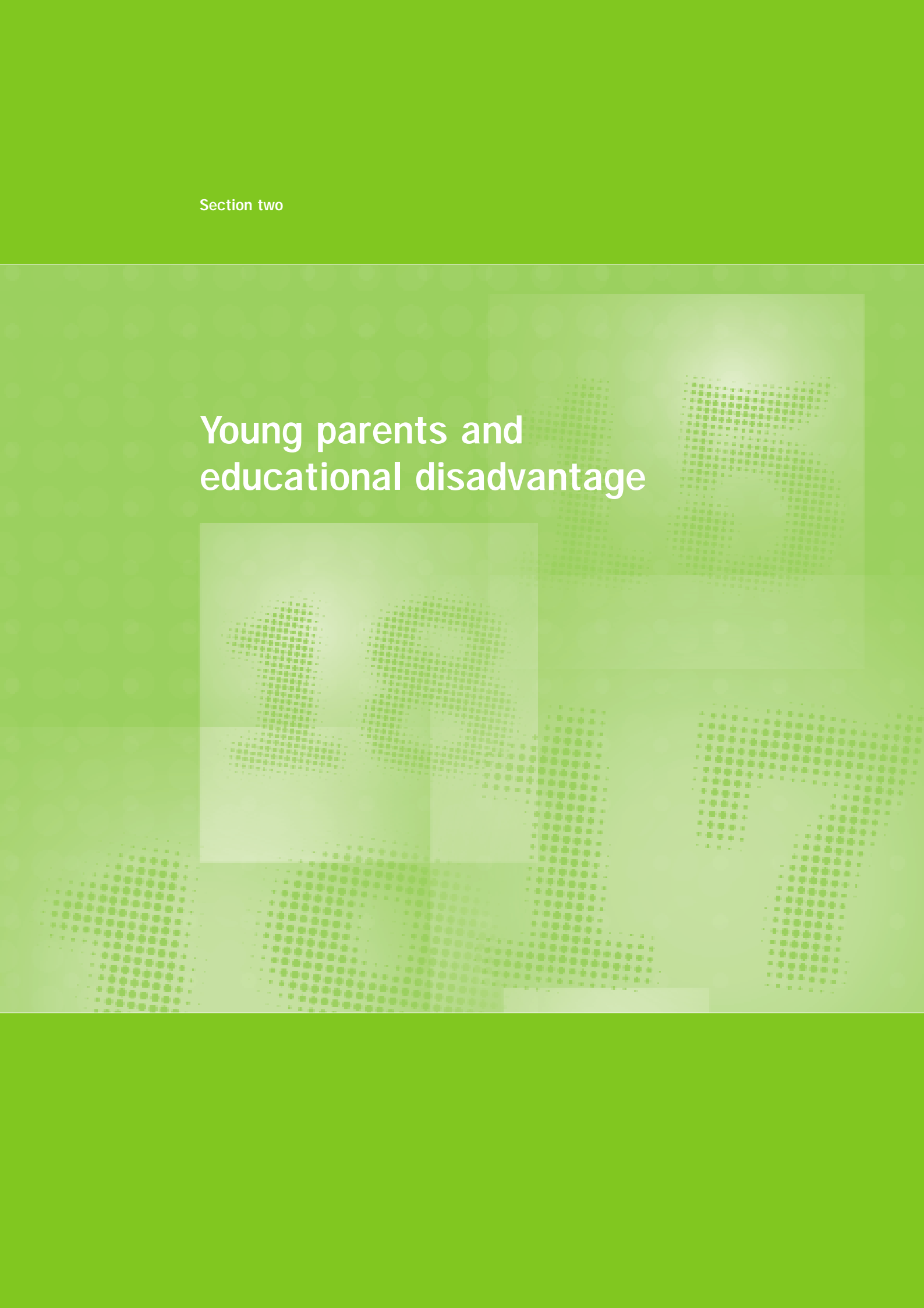
In 2001, a study based on the European Community Household Panel Survey, analysed the current positions of women whose first child was born when they were teenagers across 13 countries in the European Union. Outcomes considered include educational attainment, family structure, family

employment and household income. It concluded that teenage mothers were disadvantaged in all countries, but the severity of their position varied substantially between countries. Summarising the results by giving equal weight to the principal indicators (namely, poverty, education, family structure and employment) showed:

on this measure, taking all things into account, Ireland was the worst place to have a baby while still a teenager (Berthoud and Robson, 2001:56).

Section two

# Young parents and educational disadvantage



While the level of teenage childbearing in Ireland cannot be regarded as high, those who do become parents at an early age are more likely to experience multiple disadvantages including educational disadvantage, lower educational attainment and early school leaving (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993).

## 2. Introduction

International and national research suggests strong links between early parenthood and a host of negative outcomes including educational disadvantage. This section looks at the key statistics available in relation to young parents in Ireland and reviews national and international research to explore possible links between early parenthood and educational disadvantage.

### 2.1. Young parents and educational disadvantage

The intergenerational and cyclical nature of teenage pregnancy and parenthood and its links with poverty and disadvantage are widely recognised (Phoenix, 1991) and these issues also apply to any analysis of educational underachievement and early school leaving (ADM, 1998; O’Mahony, 2000). While the level of teenage childbearing in Ireland cannot be regarded as high, those who do become parents at an early age are more likely to experience multiple disadvantages including educational disadvantage, lower educational attainment and early school leaving (Hannan and O’Riain, 1993). Box Two provides an overview of key trends in teenage parenthood in Ireland.

#### Box 2. Key trends in teenage parenthood in Ireland.

The birth rate amongst Irish teens has remained relatively stable over the past decade with some minor increases and decreases.

- Teenage birth rates in Ireland are currently estimated as approximately 17 per 1,000 of all births (Berthoud & Robson, 2001); and
- In 1999, 6.1% of all births were to mothers aged less than 20 years. This represents 3,301 births to mothers aged less than 20 years out of a total of 53,354 of all births (DSCFA, 2000:21).

Although fertility among teenagers is not high in Ireland, it differs sharply from fertility among women in their late 20s and 30s in that it is much less likely to take place within marriage. The majority of teen parents are lone parents and female, and are not married or cohabiting with their partner and/or with the father of their child.

- In 1999, almost 96% of births to mothers under age 20 were registered as being outside of marriage.

Present day patterns of lone parenthood differ in that non-marital childbearing and marital breakdown are now the main causes of lone parenthood replacing premature death of a spouse/parent as the main source of parenting alone (Fahey & Russell, 2002). Yet it is important to note that not all births outside of marriage necessarily result in the formation of long term lone parent family units. A longitudinal study of unmarried mothers in Ireland indicated that one in five unmarried mothers had moved into marital relationships by the time of the child’s fourth birthday (Flanagan, 1996).

which represents 31.2% of all births. 2,876 of these births were to women under 20 i.e. 5% of all births and 16% of all births outside marriage. (CSO)

While the numbers of early school leavers have decreased over the last 15 years, the consequences of educational failure have become more serious over time. Those who do leave school early today may become more marginalised, with fewer prospects open to them and are increasingly limited to unskilled manual occupations or/and at high risk of unemployment (Boldt & Devine, 1998). Studies consistently demonstrate the differing rates of unemployment among those with no educational qualifications, versus those with Junior Certificates and Leaving Certificates, with the former representing the most vulnerable group within the labour market (Hannan, 1986; Rourke, 1994). Inequalities in education due to socio-economic differences are well documented and social class of origin remains strongly related to participation and performance within the education system (Clancy, 1995).<sup>1</sup> Research conducted by ADM on educational disadvantage in Ireland (1998) suggests that the employment position of poorly qualified early school leavers is more insecure and vulnerable. Equality of educational opportunity is therefore important for young parents from an individual labour market standpoint, as access to paid employment is increasingly tied to level of education attained (Lynch, 1999).

### Box 3. Key trends in early school leaving in Ireland

The NESF Report on Early School Leavers (2002) highlighted the following trends in early school leaving:

- In 1999, almost 13,000 young people left before completion of the Leaving Certificate, of whom 2,400 or 3.2 per cent left with no formal qualifications;
- Data from 1997 (most recent available data) estimated that approximately 1,000 students do not transfer from primary to second level schooling;
- In 1999, 4.1 per cent of males relative to 2.5 per cent of females left school without qualifications;
- The NESF note significant gender differences in school participation and early school leaving but argues that there is now a greater need to focus on the educational 'under-achievement' of young men rather than on the needs of young women with poor educational qualifications;
- However, the Report acknowledges that supports are still needed to enable young mothers to remain at school, particularly in relation to childcare; and
- The links between socio-economic background and early school leaving remain strong – the percentage of students from the Unskilled Manual group who left with no qualifications (9.1 per cent) contrasts with less than 1 per cent from the Higher Professional, Lower Professional and Salaried Employees groups.

<sup>1</sup> Those who leave school early without any effective qualifications primarily come from working class origins or small farms and children from unskilled and skilled manual backgrounds are much less likely than all other groups to reach Leaving Certificate level (Clancy, 1995).



Although boys are more likely than girls to leave school early or without qualifications, the available data suggest that for girls, early school leaving and teen pregnancy and parenthood are strongly related. Fahey and Russell's (2002) analysis of mothers with children under 15 by family status and education (based on data gathered through the Labour Force Survey 1997) found that, for women aged 20-24, unmarried motherhood was strongly related to low educational attainment. Just over 50% of this group had Intermediate Certificate or lower qualifications, compared to 17% of the whole age group. McCashin (1997) found that 25% of 'younger' lone parents had 'no qualification' or only 'primary level qualifications'. Being a married mother at this age was also linked to educational disadvantage (though not as strongly as was the case for unmarried mothers) with 27% of married mothers in this age group having Intermediate Certificate education or less (Fahey & Russell, 2002). Berthoud and Robson's (2001) analysis of the European Community Household Panel survey indicated that only 49% of teenage mothers in Ireland had upper secondary educational qualifications. In comparison, in Finland, which has approximately 14 births to teen mothers per 1,000, as many as 82% of teen mothers had upper secondary qualifications (Ibid, 2001:13, 22).

No national information is available as to 'why' or what the defining factor is that leads to early school leaving. It is not possible at present to estimate how many early school leavers leave as a result of pregnancy and/or parenthood. Although males are much more likely than females to leave school without effective qualifications, McCoy et al., observe that with regard to early school leavers' participation in the labour force:

Labour market withdrawal (which primarily consists of home duties) is much higher for girls than boys (1999:11).<sup>2</sup>

Labour market withdrawals for this reason are particularly prominent amongst girls with the lowest levels of educational attainment. While it is not possible to estimate precisely what 'home duties' may consist of, it is not improbable to assume that this figure includes some young women who are no longer available to participate in the labour market due to pregnancy or parenting responsibilities.

It is important to note that:

Measures of education taken several years after the pregnancy cannot distinguish cause from effect (Berthoud and Robson, 2001:19).

<sup>2</sup> In 1996/'97, 3.4% of girls and 1.7% of boys withdrew from the labour market.

That is, it is not necessarily possible to distinguish within statistics between those who had already performed poorly within the education system and decided to have a child and those who left education in order to care for their child. Nevertheless, there is a strong indication that educational progress does not continue after a first child is born particularly amongst teen mothers (ibid:20).

Section three

# Literature review: key issues arising: young parents participation in education



For lone parents aged under 25 years ..... the demands of parenting alone at such a young age and without adequate supports such as childcare and financial resources militate against continuing education and participation in training (NESF, 2001:57).

### 3. Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the key issues arising in relation to young parents' participation in education as identified through a review of relevant national and international research and literature.

#### 3.1. Literature review: key issues arising

A key issue to consider when discussing young parents and their participation in education is that not all young parents are early school leavers nor is there necessarily a cause and effect relationship between early school leaving and young parenthood. However, a range of educational deficits are associated with teenage pregnancy and parenthood particularly in relation to lower levels of educational participation and attainment. Research in both Ireland and the UK suggests that, compared to mothers who are older, teenage mothers face higher educational risks such as early school dropout and gaps in education (Kiernan, 1995; McCashin, 1997; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Yet teen pregnancy or parenthood is not necessarily the causal factor in the observed lower levels of educational attainment amongst teen mothers. The relationship between lower educational attainment and teenage pregnancy may be 'two-way' (Clarke, 1999).

Research suggests a relationship exists between young mothers' perceptions of the educational and employment opportunities available to them, teenage pregnancy and parenthood and lower levels of educational attainment (Phoenix, 1991; Milne-Home et al., 1997; SEU, 1999). The lack of future employment or educational opportunities for young women means some may not see early motherhood as in any way damaging their future opportunities. Phoenix's (1991) study of young mothers in the UK found that those in full-time education usually did not finish their courses following birth but did not necessarily mind this as the majority did not consider themselves to be academic. Additionally, negative school experiences prior to or during pregnancy may also serve to sever already weak links between young parents and the formal educational system. Consultations with TPSI project staff and young parents suggest that this is an ongoing issue that needs to be tackled.

Caring responsibilities arising directly from parenthood may also impact upon a person's attachment to the labour market or education. Motherhood itself may become an exclusionary factor for young women because of the lack of childcare and child friendly practices in places of education and training. Studies in both Ireland and the UK have observed that some young parents actively choose parenting as their 'career' for the immediate future thereby choosing not to continue or engage in education or employment (McCashin, 1997; Kiernan, 1995). However, young parents' decision not to participate in education or training may be driven by a number of different factors.

Community and family values may impact upon young parents' decision whether to remain at home or return to education or employment. Communities may differ on the 'most acceptable' option for young mothers to follow – some may place greater value on young mothers 'staying at home' with their child while others may prioritise participation in employment or return to some form of 'paid' education

### 3.2. Factors influencing young parents decisions to participate in education and training

In order to benefit from appropriate educational opportunities and experiences the specific educational support needs and barriers encountered by young parents must be recognised and acknowledged within policies and services. National and international research identifies a range of barriers and factors that may serve to negatively influence young parents' decision to participate in education or training. These include:

- (i) Family, social and cultural factors; and
- (ii) Structural and institutional factors.

#### 3.2.1. Family, social and cultural factors

These are factors that derive primarily from individual choices or preference or the influence of individual, familial or community values. With regard to young parents' participation in education, factors that may negatively influence participation include:

1. *A lack of parental support*: parental support is identified as a key factor enabling students to cope with the stresses of new parenthood and to continue in education. Young mothers' choices in education, training or employment can be restricted by the extent and level of family support, particularly where they are dependent upon family support (especially with childcare) to facilitate these choices (Phoenix, 1991; SEU, 1999; Report of the Limerick Teen Parenting Project, 2000);
2. *The impact of cultural and value differences* on young people's decisions to participate in education. Community and family values may impact upon young parents' decision whether to remain at home or return to education or employment. Communities may differ on the 'most acceptable' option for young mothers to follow – some may place greater value on young mothers 'staying at home' with their child while others may prioritise participation in employment or return to some form of 'paid' education for example, Youthreach (O'Brien, 1990);
3. *Social constructions of 'good mothering'*: young women may not wish to return to employment or education during the early years of their child's life expressing a preference for remaining at home during these years. However, this preference may be driven by an understanding that this is what is expected of them (Phoenix, 1991), and;
4. *Social stigma*: The social stigmatisation that may arise from teenage pregnancy may serve to allow adolescent girls to 'drop out' out of school for example, by creating the perception that pregnant schoolgirls should not be seen in schools. This in turn may be linked to the 'disappearance' of teenage mothers from opportunities for education and training (Milne-Home et al., 1997).

Many of these factors can be positively affected or impacted upon through the provision of practical support and encouragement including providing information and advice, assistance with childcare costs and access to childcare. This support may be received not only from family members but also from school personnel, Home School Liaison Officers and key workers including TPSI project workers.

### 3.2.2. Structural and institutional factors

Structural or institutional factors include those that arise as a result of the administration or functioning of particular systems for example the social welfare, taxation or education systems. With regard to young parents' participation in education, factors that may negatively influence participation include:

1. *The exclusion of school going mothers-to-be from the formal educational system during pregnancy:* The response by a school to a pupil's pregnancy plays a significant part in determining the extent and nature of the pupil's involvement in mainstream education. Exclusion may occur from a reluctance on the part of schools to accept pregnant schoolgirls particularly in the absence of specific guidelines on the treatment of pregnant schoolgirls, a lack of suitable facilities in schools for pregnant schoolgirls or teenage mothers, and negative staff attitudes (SEU, 1999; Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood, 2000; Joint Committee on Social, Committee and Family Affairs, 2001);
2. *Negative school experiences:* Students who become young parents and who have a history of negative experiences of school may be more likely to leave school early (O'Brien, 1990; Boldt, 1994). In order to assist those who were previously disengaged from school prior to pregnancy, agencies must work to counteract a history of possibly negative school experiences as well as overcoming any obstacles arising from their status as a young parent;
3. *Lack of childcare:* the lack of quality affordable childcare is a key factor in determining whether or not young parents return to education or training after the birth of their child. A number of reports have noted that reimbursement of childcare costs is essential if participation in education or training is to become a realistic option for young parents (Joint Committee on Social, Committee and Family Affairs, 2001; NESF, 2001; Dempsey, 2001);
4. *The limited availability of home tuition* or grinds to enable schoolgirls to 'make-up' for time lost during "maternity leave" can also serve to discourage students from continuing in education as it may not be possible for them to complete their full curriculum due to the limited number of hours available per week for home tuition and the limited numbers of tutors (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999);
5. *The requirement for full-time* participation in education as part of the entry criteria to mainstream second level education and particular second chance training and education programmes can act as a deterrent to participation. Most courses provided by mainstream training agencies are full-time and follow a normal working week pattern of provision (Monday

to Friday, 9 – 5pm). This model of provision is often unsuitable for those parenting alone without access to childcare and where parents own preference is to study or train part-time (NESF, 2001);

6. *The complexity of the welfare benefits system:* The amount of financial assistance received can significantly influence a young person's decision whether to remain or return to education or training.<sup>3</sup> The pull to receive income may be greater than the push to remain in second level education (Lynch, 1999) and this may influence a young parent's final choice on whether to return to mainstream education (where if they are under 18 years and a lone parent, they will receive no allowance or financial support other than the One Parent Family Payment) or participate in a training programme where they will receive an additional training allowance. When the choices made by a young parent negatively affect their entitlement to secondary benefits, this can have a significant impact on a young parent's decision on whether to return, resume or continue in education and training (NESF, 2001);<sup>4</sup>
7. *Current age criteria for entry* to training or 'second chance' education programmes serve to exclude many young parents. Many existing training schemes have an age criterion of 21 or over or require a young person to be out of school for two years to participate in the scheme. These criteria effectively exclude those who are either too young to participate or who have not been out of school for the required minimum time (McCashin, 1997; Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs, 2001);
8. *Lack of external counselling and support programmes:* there is a clear gap in service provision in this area (Report of the Limerick Teen Parenting Project, 2000). One of the main conclusions of the Waterford Student Mothers' Group<sup>5</sup> is that where counselling, childcare and peer support are available for young mothers, it is easier for them to stay in school and complete examinations (NESF, 2001, 68);
9. *A lack of suitable accommodation:* overcrowding or inadequate accommodation within multi-family households can impact upon a young parent's ability to return to education or training (Waterford Student Mothers' Group, 2001); and
10. *Access to transport:* the availability of transport to allow young parents to access to alternative schooling or training schemes is an important enabling factor particularly for those residing in remote rural areas.

3 The nature and level of benefits which pregnant or parenting teenagers may be entitled to are also dependent upon a number of other factors, such as the age and personal circumstances of a young parent.

4 The most often mentioned secondary benefits are rent allowance or rent/mortgage interest supplements, medical card and the Back to School Clothing and Footwear allowances.

5 See Section 5 for a fuller description of this group.

### 3.3. Promoting equality of opportunity for minorities

Teen parents do not necessarily form a homogenous group and policies and strategies to promote their ongoing participation in education must take into account the different needs of teen parents from minority groups. These groups may include pregnant or parenting teenage refugees or asylum seekers, particularly those who are unaccompanied minors, and Travellers. It is important to consider how best to strengthen existing strategies or options such as second level education to increase their relevance for these groups in general, but also how best to provide the additional support needed for those who are pregnant or parenting.

Young parents who are refugees or asylum seekers may be particularly vulnerable and face many of the barriers identified in Section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.<sup>6</sup> For some, there will be little or no support from family members while others may have experienced gross levels of trauma in their country of origin. Key personnel working with pregnant or parenting teenagers from these groups identify schools as a major source of support and note the high degree of motivation expressed by these young people regarding entering, continuing or returning to education. Key issues and strategies to be considered in supporting these young parents may include:

- The provision of anti-racist and anti-discrimination training for teachers and implementation of an inter-cultural approach to education (NESF, 2002:107);
- The establishment of a tracking system to see how Traveller children and young people from other minorities and young people with special needs are progressing through the education system (NESF, 2002:107). This will in part, enable policymakers and service providers to determine the extent to which pregnancy and parenthood impact upon these young people's participation in education and training;
- Additional resources to provide English classes and overcome language barriers (personal communication, TPSI project worker; IVEA, 2001);
- Access to home tuition for young parents who are not in a position to attend mainstream second level schools, particularly specialist English language teachers (personal communication, TPSI project worker);
- Increased availability of support time to deal with queries extra tutorial time for weaker students and availability of grinds to assist in students exam preparations (IVEA, 2001); and
- Greater access to psychological and counselling services through schools and training centres (personal communication, TPSI Project Worker; IVEA, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Refugees, asylum seekers or other non-national children are entitled to primary or post-primary education.<sup>6</sup> Approximately 20% of all asylum seekers are under 19 years of age and approximately 25% of these are of post-primary age. Provision of educational services throughout the country varies from VEC to VEC - where a large number of persons from these groups are based, educational provision is better organised and better reflects the needs of this target group (IVEA, 2001). 71.5% of the VECs surveyed by the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) were actively involved in the provision of educational services to refugees, asylum seekers or other non-nationals.



Section four

# Policy context

## 4. Introduction

This section examines some of the range of different policies that may impact upon pregnant and parenting teenagers' participation in or access to education and training. Plotnick (1993) argues that "services and incentives provided by social policies significantly affect teenage pregnancy and child-bearing outcomes", although this view is challenged by those who warn of the complexity of relationship between policies and demographic outcomes (Hantrais, 1994). Participation by teenage parents in education or training ultimately occurs within the framework provided by existing structural, economic and ideological constraints.

Countering educational disadvantage has occupied a central position within Irish public policy over the last 15 – 20 years but a striking feature of current education policy is the absence of a clear national strategy, policy or funding framework addressing the support needs of young parents who wish to remain in full-time education.<sup>7</sup> A coherent strategy or action plan for mapping the school experiences of groups considered 'at risk' or vulnerable to exclusion from education including young parents' has yet to be enacted in Ireland. There are currently no specific policies or guidelines for schools on how best to support pregnant teenagers and teenage parents in full-time post primary education although there are Department of Education and Science (DES) guidelines for schools on how best to accommodate pregnant schoolgirls during state examinations.<sup>8</sup>

However, assisting persons to remain in education is seen by Irish policy makers as key to preventing persons from "getting caught in cycles of disadvantage' (Action Plan for the Millennium, 2000:24). The State has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to addressing "educational disadvantage at all levels across the system" (Action Plan for the Millennium, 2000: 25) and to providing children with "a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need" (National Children's Strategy, 2000:53). The question is, to what extent are the needs of young parents in education considered within these broad commitments?

### 4.1. Policy context

Since 1997, a range of policy documents have been published setting out Government commitments to tackling educational disadvantage. The *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (1997) saw education as a central mechanism in any efforts to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. It

7 A number of cross-cutting considerations have been taken into account in compiling this paper. Specific account has been taken of the broader anti-poverty and equality frameworks that underpin current policy particularly: the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS) whose aim is promote equal access and opportunity; and, the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) may also play a key role in meeting the educational needs of young parents. Quality customer service and improved service standards are key aims of the SMI which underpin the current modernisation of the public sector.

8 The DES has expressed the hope that in any particular case, school management would have regard to the sensitivity of the situation and would have as its priority, the wellbeing of the pupil concerned. It would also hope that pregnancy would cause no more than a temporary absence from school and that each pupil would in a position to resume their education following the birth of the child (Statement from Department of Education and Science, 25th November 1995). The DES has recently expanded its Home Tuition Scheme and these provisions are warmly welcomed by those working with young parents in education and training.

identified a need for special supports for teenage parents "to encourage teenage parents to remain in school to completion of senior cycle" (1997:11) and recognised that 'educational poverty' could extend beyond material deprivation to include obstacles to equal access, participation and outcomes.<sup>9</sup> *The National Development Plan 2000 – 2006* (NDP) committed the Government to the development of an integrated programme of education, training and infra-structural measures to promote social inclusion, in part by preventing early school leaving.<sup>10</sup>

Framework IV of the *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (PPF) 2000* committed the Government to the development of strategies to prevent early school leaving and support optimum participation in education to completion of upper second level education. It spoke of the need for:

*Consideration of a strategy to enable young parents to participate in education and training (Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, 2000).*

It identified three specific objectives namely (1) the monitoring of participation rates of specific groups considered most 'at risk' of disengaging from the education system, (2) the elimination of unqualified early school leaving and (3) a commitment to ensuring the availability of appropriate second chance education and training opportunities for those who left school early or those who wish to re-enter the educational system. These objectives were to be achieved within the three year timeframe specified by the PPF. Actions have been undertaken in relation to objectives 2 and 3, the most significant being the establishment of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) through the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000. The Act addresses the issues of school non-attendance; early school leaving; poor educational attainment; and, increases the school leaving age to 16 years or completion of three years post primary education (whichever is the later).<sup>11</sup> Box Four provides further information on both the Act and the proposed role of the NEWB.

9 This recognition is particularly important with reference to teenage parents as they may display a wide range of levels and types of support needs – they may not experience material poverty or deprivation but may disengage from the educational system due to a lack of social or emotional support.

10 The NDP does commit to investment in a number of educational initiatives that aim to promote greater opportunities in 'alternative' education routes, including: a £1.027bn investment in the Back to School Initiative, a Third Level Access Measure provisions for a substantial expansion of part-time options across PLC, Youthreach/Traveller and VTOS programmes. These measures are accompanied by increased investment in childcare under measures co-ordinated by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

11 It requires parents to ensure that their children attend a recognised school or otherwise receive an appropriate minimum education. Press release. Department of Education & Science, 15th June 2001. Source: [www.gov.ie/educ](http://www.gov.ie/educ).

#### Box 4. The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and The National Educational Welfare Board

##### The Education (Welfare) Act 2000 & the National Educational Welfare Board

The main aims of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 are:

1. To assist children at risk namely disadvantaged children, children at risk from substance risk and/or at risk from homelessness;
2. To assist those experiencing difficulties in or out of school; and
3. To provide a range of supports and strategies to discourage absenteeism and early school leaving (in co-operation with schools and other relevant agencies) including specific provision for the continuing education and training of young persons of 16 and 17 years who leave school early to take up employment. It provides for the registration of children being educated outside the regular school system.

The National Education Welfare Board will assume the lead role in implementing the provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. It will be responsible for developing, co-ordinating and implementing school attendance policy so as to ensure that every child in the State attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education. The Board will appoint Education Welfare Officers (EWOs) to work in close co-operation with parents, teachers, school managers, community bodies and other relevant agencies to promote regular school attendance and prevent absenteeism and early school leaving. The EWOs will replace the School Attendance Officers. The Board will maintain a register of children receiving education outside the recognised school structure and will assess the adequacy of such education on an ongoing basis. The Act imposes an obligation on a school's Board of Management to consult with EWO's regarding the preparation of codes of behaviour and school attendance strategies for the school, to include: (a) Rewards for good school attendance; (b) Identification of children who are at risk; and (c) Establishment of closer contacts between the school and families of those at risk (Ruddy, 2000).

Membership of the Board include representatives from key voluntary and representative organisations and statutory agencies. Government departments represented on the Board include the Department of Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Justice and Law Reform, and the Department of Education and Science.

While the Act fails to identify young parents as a specific group requiring support or assistance, its objectives pose a challenge to the education and training sectors to develop appropriate and flexible responses to enable young people aged 16 to 18 years (the age category to which the majority of young parents belong) to continue participating in education.

Young parents are rarely specifically identified by education policies as a group 'at risk' of experiencing educational disadvantage or targeted by strategies or initiatives to combat early school leaving or educational disadvantage.

The White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life: the White Paper on Adult Education* (2000) states that "the Government is committed to maximising second level completion for those up to 18 years old" (40).<sup>12</sup> The Paper highlighted the need for, and benefits accruing from, developing "parallel or alternative routes" through education for young people. It suggested that adult education, particularly that provided through the Community Education strand could play a crucial role in "breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty through targeted interventions with vulnerable parents" (49). It also recognised the shortcomings arising from a lack of 'systematic data' on the educational needs of minorities particularly in terms of hampering developments in the setting of benchmarks from which future progress can be monitored (48).<sup>13</sup>

#### 4.2. Policy gaps and issues

Young parents are rarely specifically identified by education policies as a group 'at risk' of experiencing educational disadvantage or targeted by strategies or initiatives to combat early school leaving or educational disadvantage. It would appear that there is an assumption that the needs of teenage parents are met through policies addressing the educational needs of lone parents, early school leavers or the general population of children or through policies promoting social inclusion. Teenage parents who are neither lone parents nor early school leavers are even more neglected as it is assumed that their needs will be met through social policies designed for the general population.

Education policies and strategies need to recognise the diversity of needs and life experiences and circumstances amongst teenage parents and that this may require a response through a comprehensive support system involving all relevant agencies. Not all teenage parents will require assistance or support with all these obstacles: some will have extensive family support, generally positive school experiences and may simply require some assistance with childcare expenses or provision. Others may be detached from education for a number of years and have considerable family support but lack adequate accommodation or require extensive financial support.

Both the report of the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) (2001) on Lone Parents and that of the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs, *Teenage Parenting* (2001) identified a need for specific educational supports for those who become pregnant while at school. The NESF report called for a more 'preventative' approach to tackling the issue of lone parents leaving school early including the mainstreaming of intervention and support projects such as the

<sup>12</sup> Although government White Papers and Green Papers do not have any legislative footing they serve to draw together key debates and issues in various fields and act as a guide for potential legislative developments.

<sup>13</sup> The forerunner to the White Paper was the Green Paper on Adult Education: *Adult Education in an Era of Lifelong Learning* (1998). It did not specifically focus upon the educational needs of young parents but recognised the range of barriers to participation in 'second chance' or further training opportunities and the value of providing specific supports and outreach strategies in order to reach certain groups. It recommended: (i) easing access to financial supports; (ii) provision of more courses with flexible attendance hours particularly in VTOS, Youthreach and PLC courses; and (iii) increased provision of adult education and training courses to be accompanied by specific supports, clear targeting and effective outreach strategies for specific groups (1998:83).

The review by the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs (2001) of key issues in education and training for young parents concluded that current support for teenage parents in continuing their education is weak and warned that this could lead to a "permanent detachment" from education and training.

Waterford Student Mother's Project (2001). The review by the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs (2001) of key issues in education and training for young parents concluded that current support for teenage parents in continuing their education is weak and warned that this could lead to a "permanent detachment" from education and training. It recommended a number of measures ranging from:

- The provision of financial support: it called for the payment of an emergency short-term payment and other financial provisions to young parents to encourage and ease their return to education or training to;
- The preparation and issue of guidelines to all post-primary schools on the care of pregnant and parenting teenagers by the Department of Education and Science; and
- Changes in the criteria for entry to existing education and training programmes: namely, the discontinuation of the age barrier to facilitate the participation of pregnant adolescents and teenage parents.

Unpublished reports in both the South Eastern and Mid-West regions concur with the need for a national policy in relation to pregnant teenagers, teenage parents and education and a financial allowance for teenage parents who are students (Dempsey, 2001; Limerick TPSI, 2001). Other issues identified include the necessity of providing additional financial support for schools to help meet the costs of providing support for students, the need for alternative examination centres for pregnant teenagers circa their due dates and the importance of childcare facilities to enable young parents to continue in education.

#### **4.3. Key factors contributing to policy gaps**

Contributing to the virtual invisibility of teenage parents as a specific target group for education policies are the following factors:

- (i) The absence of a clear definition of a 'teenage parent' in social policy;
- (ii) The lack of data available on young parents;
- (iii) The lack of consideration given to aspects of young parents lives in compiling definitions of 'at risk' particularly with regard to early school leaving;
- (iv) The absence of guidelines addressing how management of schools and other relevant education and training agencies can best meet the needs of pregnant schoolgirls and young parents; and
- (v) Uncertainty by policy makers as to how to treat teenage mothers and fathers.

##### **4.3.1. The absence of a clear definition for a 'teenage parent' in social policy**

Commentators have noted the continuing lack of differentiation between teenage parents who are aged less than 18 years and those who are aged between 18 to 20 years (Selman & Glendinning,

1996; Milne-Home *et al.*, 1997). There are significant differences between the needs of teenage parents' aged 18 or 19 years and those aged less than 16 years. Young parents who are aged 18 years plus are more likely to have a higher incidence of birth<sup>14</sup> and are in a different social and legal position with regard to their decision making capacity, self-identity, ability to claim benefits, employment and educational status.

This distinction between the opportunities available to young persons aged less than 18 years and those older than this, is particularly relevant to the discussion on education and training opportunities available for young parents. Age based criteria are used in many of the alternative education and training programmes offered in Ireland (outside of mainstream education) to define who can access such programmes and more significantly, receive additional financial support while participating in the programme. Such criteria appear to work to preclude some young parents from accessing alternative forms of education.

#### 4.3.2. Data deficiencies

Considerable shortcomings are notable in the official collection of 'family' statistics in general in Ireland.<sup>15</sup> Although a growing body of data exists on lone parents there are still noticeable deficiencies (NESF, 2001)<sup>16</sup> and few data are available on young parents. Existing data deficiencies contribute to the 'absence' of young parents from educational policies. The lack of data is particularly acute in relation to young fathers. No information is collected on single fathers in the Census, the Quarterly Household Survey, Vital Statistics or the Living in Ireland Survey. Information is collected on the age of mothers at the birth of each child but not on the age of the father. While information is collected on the participation of single mothers in the labour market, little or nothing is gathered on the participation of single fathers and little is known about their levels of educational attainment.

Lack of knowledge regarding the number, geographic location, age, family status et cetera, of young parents renders effective targeting of resources virtually impossible at national, regional and local level.

This paper supports Galligan's (2000) call for the development and implementation of a range of gender equality indicators in the area of education including the collection of data on the percentage of teenage mothers and fathers in full-time education in order to overcome these gaps in knowledge.

14 In Ireland in 1999, 75% of all births to parents under 20 years of age were to women aged 18 or 19 years (Joint Committee on Social, Committee and Family Affairs, 2001:14).

15 This arises partly from the way official statistics count and collect information on families in general and lone parent households specifically, as well as deficiencies in data collected on participation in, and usage of, programmes and services (McKeown, 1998; 2001).

16 NESF (2001) called for greater coverage of lone parenthood in official statistics including the Census of Population and the Quarterly National Household Survey. It suggested that additional information be gathered on fathers as well as mothers at the birth of each child and information on household status, marital status and the education and employment status of both parents.

### 4.3.3. Inadequate definitions of 'at risk'

A key focus of recent educational policies is on ensuring the retention of all young people in school until they are at least eighteen years or have acquired a formal qualification. In order to achieve this objective, educational policies are targeted at particular groups especially those considered 'at risk' of negative educational outcomes. However, many aspects of young parents' lives (particularly as they relate to young women) are not addressed by the definitions of 'at risk' used to monitor agency specific outcomes (for example, those used by health, education and social services).

The issue of teenage pregnancy and parenthood are currently outside the operational definitions used in educational policies to define 'at risk', although these clearly impact on girl's and boys ability to remain in education.<sup>17</sup> Where definitions of 'at risk' exclude these factors, strategies for addressing students deemed to be 'at risk' clearly lack an appreciation of these related issues and their impacts (Milne-Home *et al.*, 1997). Hamburg (1986) recommends the use of the term 'school age pregnancy' as opposed to 'teenage pregnancy' when discussing the educational needs of young parents, arguing that the former gives a better sense of the risks arising from pregnancy for a school-age girl.<sup>18</sup> This terminology is used in the UK by the Department of Education and Skills in its initiatives to re-integrate school age parents into education.

### 4.3.4. Lack of guidelines for educational and training organisations

There are no specific rules or guidelines in Ireland for the treatment of pregnant and parenting teenagers by second level school authorities. This is a key omission as anecdotal evidence suggests that some school authorities use this absence of guidelines to implicitly or explicitly discourage pregnant schoolgirls from continuing in school, particularly during pregnancy.<sup>19</sup> The report of the UK Social Exclusion Unit on teenage pregnancy (1999) found that the lack of guidelines on these issues were a contributing factor to the exclusion of young parents from education. In order to address this deficit, joint guidance from the Department of Health and the Department of Education and Skills were issued in 2001 to all schools and Local Education Authorities on how to support school-age parents in education.

### 4.3.5. Political context

It is arguable that social policy in Ireland is unsure how to treat teenage mothers. This ambiguity stems in part from society's deep ambivalence about adolescent sexuality and preference for

17 The Green Paper on Lifelong Learning (1998) defines girls 'at risk' as those not completing secondary education and therefore less likely to be in long-term employment or training programmes leading to improved employability and higher income brackets.

18 These risks do not apply in the same way for 18 and 19 year old females who are legally considered to be adults.

19 Reasons cited by school authorities include some of the following: issues of health and safety, insurance, lack of suitable classroom facilities, and school regulations including for example, the need for all students to wear uniforms (Feedback from TPSI project workers).



'traditional' family forms, in particular, "a historical ambiguity over the status of lone mothers" (Standing, 1999:483). Adolescent sexuality is 'not supposed' to occur yet a pregnant adolescent directly confronts this assumption and challenges dominant cultural norms. Anecdotal evidence suggests that within mainstream, second level schools the approach to teenage parents and the underlying attitudes vary widely. While some schools are very supportive, others implicitly discourage young women from staying at school. Even within national initiatives and strategies that seek to achieve gender equality in Ireland (particularly for women), minimal attention is paid to teenage mothers.

Section five

# National and local education initiatives and financial supports available to young parents

## 5. Introduction

This section describes the main alternative education and training programmes offering 'second chance' education and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of these programmes in terms of meeting the educational support needs of young parents.

### 5.1. National initiatives and schemes

Key national initiatives and schemes specifically aimed at increasing retention levels within post-primary education or facilitating access to 'second chance' or alternative education are described below.

- **Home Tuition Scheme**

A welcome development is the newly announced Home Tuition Scheme funded by the Department of Education and Science (DES). Under this scheme, all post primary students who require home tuition for one reason or another are entitled to 9 hours per week for 10 weeks. Parents of students must apply to the Department for funding, once they receive this, parents pay the Home Tuition teacher directly. This new scheme may meet the need for home schooling experienced by some young parents in the months immediately prior to and after birth. It's explicit identification of 'pregnancy' as a circumstance that may lead to a need for home tuition for a student is particularly welcome.<sup>20</sup>

- **Stay in School Retention Initiative**

The Department of Education and Science's 2001 review of 'Educational Initiatives to Combat Disadvantage' states that issues surrounding young parents participation in education and training will be met through the Stay in School Retention Initiative.<sup>21</sup> The Initiative is aimed at increasing the retention rate to completion of senior cycle and priority is given to schools and vocational education community schools with retention rates appreciably below the national average. Little information is available to-date on the extent to which schools participating in the Initiative have targeted young parents as a priority group to benefit from in-school and out-of-school programmes.

- **Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS)**

The Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS) is administered by the Department of Education and Science and provides second chance education courses for up to two years in Junior Certificate, Leaving Certificate, Post Leaving Certificate and City and Guilds

<sup>20</sup> The Home Tuition Scheme provides individual tuition for those who because of illness or pregnancy may be out of school for some time (NESF, 2001:67)

<sup>21</sup> This initiative was amalgamated with the 8 – 15 Year Olds Early School Leavers Initiative into the new School Completion Programme in 2001. Work will include same-day tracking, after-school, family support, staff development, literacy and numeracy.

Certificates.<sup>22</sup> It is viewed as particularly suitable for those "who have been out of school for some time" (DSCFA, SW 70:1). A key barrier is that VTOS is only open to those aged 21 years plus thereby excluding young parents aged less than this, who as McCashin (1997) argues, are the very category of lone parents whose familiarity with the formal school system is most recent and thus most likely to find it easier to re-integrate and participate in it.

- **Youthreach**

Youthreach is targeted at young people between the ages of 15 and 18 who left the formal educational system with minimal or no qualifications, who are unemployed for six months or more and socially disadvantaged. Young parents (or any persons) aged 18 – 20 years are unable to participate in the scheme. This is seen as unfortunate by those who argue that the holistic approach followed by Youthreach combined with its emphasis on building on the skills of participants may offer a more appealing route back to education for some young parents (McCashin, 1997).<sup>23</sup>

- **Post Leaving Certificate Courses and Colleges**

Post Leaving Certificate colleges (PLC) may also act as a key pathway for young parents wishing to progress to third-level education. These courses are already recognised as offering a valuable alternative to young persons (aged less than 21 years) wishing to gain further vocational skills and training without attending a 'traditional' University setting.<sup>24</sup>

### 5.1.1. Regional or local based initiatives

Other initiatives seeking to address aspects of young parents educational support needs are primarily located in the community and voluntary and local development sectors. Many of these are offered through youth programmes and other such schemes. Examples of these schemes are provided in Boxes Five and Six.

22 VTOS is administered by the Department of Education and Science and operated through the VEC's.

23 A newly developed partnership arrangement between Dublin City Council, Youthreach, FAS and local community and statutory agencies illustrates the potential inherent in Youthreach to meet the education and training needs of young persons. The Fast Track to Information Technology (FTIT) programme will be offered through Youthreach to persons aged 17 – 20 years who wish to obtain information technology skills.

24 In 1997/98, only 25.5% of participants in PLC courses were over 21 (Green Paper, 1998, 49)

### Box 5. Waterford Young Mother's Group

#### Waterford Young Mother's Group

The Waterford Young Mother's Group has been in operation since 1997 and functions as a Community Partnership between the local schools, St Joseph's Day Care Centre, parents groups, the South Eastern Health Board, Waterford Area Partnership, the DSFA and the young mothers. It provides a support service for teenage mothers currently within the school system. The aim is to enable young girls, who are pregnant or have babies, to recognise the benefits of education, remain in mainstream education and break dependence on the State in the long term.

Initiatives working to support young parents or pregnant teens (at national and local level) participation in education and training include:

- Teenage Parents Support Project pilot projects in Dublin, Limerick and Galway;
- Muirhevnamor Mhór, Dundalk, Co. Louth;
- Moving Young Mothers into Education Project, Galway City;
- An Cosain, Tallaght, Co. Dublin; and
- Youth Horizons, Tallaght, Co. Dublin.

Several calls have been made for priority action to be taken to support locally based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to tackling educational disadvantage and early school leaving (McCashin, 1997; Open Your Eyes to Child Poverty, 2001). The boxes below provide details of a number of regional or local initiatives currently operating.

### 5.2. Financial supports available to young parents in education

The financial support offered through the social welfare system can play a major role in a young parent's decision to return, continue or resume participation in education or training. The availability and extent of financial support for young parents can act as an enabling factor or a barrier to their participation in education. This section describes the administration of the welfare benefits scheme and discusses the impact it may have on young parents' decisions as to whether or not to remain in mainstream second level education.

At present, many young parents (particularly young mothers) are often forced to choose between being full-time parents or students. This is particularly evident in the operation of the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA), administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs (DSFA) as part of the Back to Education Programme. The BTEA is primarily designed to facilitate 'second chance' education at a range of levels for persons aged 21 years plus who are unemployed for at

least six months and in receipt of welfare benefits. Young parents aged between 18 – 20 years, in receipt of the OFP and who are 2 years out of formal education can also apply for the BTEA. The allowance enables recipients to pursue approved full-time and part-time education courses at second, further and third level while retaining an allowance in lieu of social welfare entitlement.<sup>25</sup> Those claiming the BTEA who are getting for example, the OFP receive an allowance at a rate equivalent to the maximum rate of their current social welfare payment. A key benefit of the BTEA is that its recipients retain their entitlement to secondary benefits (for example, rent supplement) for the duration of their course and may receive an annual allowance towards the cost of their studies which is payable at the start of each academic year.<sup>26</sup> However, the BTEA is not available to persons aged less than 18 years who wish to return to education regardless of type of school or training programme they wish to follow.

Similarly, the administrative system of the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) can act as a disincentive to return to mainstream education particularly for those aged less than 18 years. Section 172 of the *Social Welfare Consolidation Act (1993)* debar all persons engaged in full-time education from receipt of supplementary allowances. Therefore, if a young parent aged less than 18 years is in full-time education at the time of application for the OFP, they are not automatically entitled to receive any form of supplementary welfare allowance while they await receipt of the OFP.<sup>27</sup> Young parents not in full-time education are legally entitled to apply for such allowances.<sup>28</sup> This can create what Lynch (2000) calls the 'push' factor to leave education particularly where the young parents wider family does not have the income to financially support their choice to return to education. The Act allows for appeal and while under 'exceptional circumstances' a young parent in full-time education may receive SWA while awaiting payment of the OFP, in reality where the young parent resides within the family home it is unlikely that the appeal would be granted.<sup>29</sup> The lengthy period of time required for the processing of such appeals has also been criticised by persons working with young parents.<sup>30</sup>

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that difficulties can arise for pregnant teenagers and teenage parents who are participating in training schemes such as Youthreach. Training allowances are available for participation in such schemes however, ongoing participation is required in order to

25 Education and training options approved under the programme include: Second Level Certificate Courses; Third Level Education Courses; Education, Training and Development Courses; and, Part-time Education Courses.

26 In 2000/2001, the allowance was £200 (euro 253.95) (DSFA, SW 70:6).

27 This is notwithstanding the fact that any SWA payments received while awaiting the OPFP are deducted from the 'back amount' due once the application is processed.

28 Personal communication with Dublin TPSI project worker

29 The exclusion of young parents in education from receiving SWA is heavily influenced by the operation of the Child Dependent Allowance system which allows a parent/guardian to receive an allowance until their child is 18 or 21 (if in full-time education). The assumption is that the parent/guardian is responsible for the welfare (including financial) of the young parent until then (personal communication, DSCFA, October 2001)

30 Personal communication, Dublin TPSI Project Leader.

The 'school hours' pattern of provision followed by many education and training schemes in conjunction with a general absence of crèche facilities, are key critical factors that work to exclude many young parents who may otherwise be eligible to attend.

receive this allowance and the schemes do not provide for maternity leave. It appears that some young parents choose to return to such schemes very quickly following birth. This 'quick' return was explained as being due to the difference in financial support available through discretionary payments from the Community Welfare Officer (CWO) while awaiting processing of the OFP and that received when participating in a training scheme. Some young parents may be substantially 'better off' in receipt of a training allowance and this acts a 'push' to their returning.

For young parents (aged less than 20 years) who go on to third-level education, financial difficulties often arise. A key obstacle is the fact that third-level participants are assessed for grants on the basis of their parents' income. This can cause particular difficulties for those who may no longer be in regular contact with their own parents. An additional barrier faced is the loss of secondary benefits incurred once a young parent is a registered full-time student in third level education. Young parents in full-time third level education without any significant, previous absence from participation in education (that is, not disengaged from education for 2 years or more) cannot receive for example, rent or rent/mortgage interest supplement. The loss or retention of these benefits can have a major impact on young parents' incentive to participate in third-level education. If, on the other hand, a parent aged 19 years who had dropped out of education for two years but now wishes to return to, education would probably be entitled to the BTEA and also retain any secondary benefits they are entitled to.

### 5.3. Limitations to existing schemes and initiatives

While the schemes detailed in the previous sections have many positive features it is clear that alternative education and training opportunities for young parents (particularly those aged less than 16 years) remain limited. There are acknowledged gaps in current provision for the education of young parents.

The 'school hours' pattern of provision followed by many education and training schemes in conjunction with a general absence of crèche facilities, are key critical factors that work to exclude many young parents who may otherwise be eligible to attend.<sup>31</sup> A number of commentators have called for a move away from the dominance of full-time programmes within these structures (McCashin, 1997; Green Paper, 1998). Other criticisms include the lack of clarity regarding the objectives of such programmes (most notably Youthreach, see ESF, 1996) and the limited availability of data on outcomes for participants particularly in terms of formal qualifications attained. The lack of data is key as it renders it difficult to judge if these programmes have the potential to upgrade the general educational profile of teenage parents (McCashin, 1997). Additionally, pregnant or parenting teenagers who are refugees, asylum seekers or non-nationals face particular difficulties at present in accessing alternative education, particularly training

<sup>31</sup> A childcare measure was introduced in 1998 for Youthreach, VTOS and Senior Traveller programmes. Some 997 (795 participants) are benefiting from this measure in 2000/2001 (DES, 2001).

schemes and courses provided by VECs. The system whereby many VEC services are funded by the European Social Fund means that the majority of non-nationals (depending on their category) are not permitted free access to these services (IVEA, 2001).

The restrictions on the BTEA effectively exclude young parents who may not wish to return to their school due to negative school experiences or for whom traditional full-time school hours conflict with their wish to combine parenting and education. This may increase the vulnerability of young parents to permanent detachment from education as they are not eligible to use Youthreach or participate in Adult Education Centres as they can 'in principle' attend their local secondary school. In addition, the BTEA is not payable for the intervening period between courses. This can result in a situation where, for some young parents, it makes more 'money sense' to defer or postpone participation in education (particularly third-level education) until they are aged 18 years plus and have been disengaged from formal education for at least 2 years. They would then be entitled to receive full secondary benefits and the BTEA.

Therefore, avenues that might be expected to address the education and training needs of young parents are not specifically designed to do so resulting in a system of provision that is far from seamless. A number of agencies potentially have a role to play in supporting policy development in this area therefore, partnership working arrangements between voluntary and statutory agencies could act as a central mechanism to progress the development of 'joined up' policy and practice (McCashin, 1997). It is suggested that inter-agency links and joint initiatives be strongly encouraged. Such initiatives could be developed between mainstream second level schools, FÁS, health and welfare services, Area Partnerships, Local Employment Services and employers. It is recognised that such an approach would require considerable innovation and flexibility by school authorities, particularly in their dealings with young parents.

The recently established National Educational Welfare Board could play a key role in responding to the challenge of providing co-ordinated responses to the needs of young parents aged less than 17 years. It is hoped that it will drive the continued development of evidence based policy in the area of education. It is envisaged that it will be strongly positioned to complement and extend existing cross-departmental initiatives and to support the development of policies and service provision for young parents in education and training, due to its wide-ranging brief and its broad representation of voluntary and statutory agencies and representative bodies.



Section six

# Supporting young parents in education: work of TPSI pilot projects



## 6. Introduction

The Teen Parents Support Initiative (TPSI) is a pilot programme composed of three pilot sites based in Dublin, Galway and Limerick. The programme is funded by the Department of Health and Children and has been in operation since March 2000.<sup>32</sup> The Initiative's emphasis on addressing all a young parent's support needs places it in a unique position to identify and work towards meeting the myriad of obstacles that may combine to impact upon young parents educational attainment and long-term life opportunities. A fourth element of the Initiative is the creation of a Resource Pack and Directory of Services for key workers with young parents undertaken by Treoir (the National Federation of Services for Unmarried Parents and their Children). The resource pack aims to compile all key aspects of information on a wide range of topics (for example, social welfare entitlements, health and social services) centrally for use by key workers to respond to queries from young parents. A key feature of the national programme is its emphasis on supporting and enabling young parents who wish to participate in education and training.

### 6.1. Educational profile of TPSI participants

By the end of June 2002, a total of 91 young parents were participating in the Dublin project, 108 in the Limerick project and 216 in the Galway project. Information on the educational profile of participants was not always readily obtainable particularly where projects engaged with parents by inter-linking with pre-existing support groups. The majority of participating young parents were female and all were aged less than 19 years at time of referral to the project. Table 1 provides an overview of the level of engagement with education by TPSI participants at the end of the evaluation period.

Table 1. Participation in education by TPSI participants, June 2002\*

Project site/ Type of education/training engaged with	Dublin	Limerick	Galway	Total
In secondary school	16	16	41	73
In Youthreach/Youth Horizons	17	27	3	47
In FAS/Jobs Club	7	2	6	15
In Adult Education	2	-	-	2
In third level education (inc. PLC courses)	7	10	20	37
Other	-	-	7	7
Total engaged in education at each site	49	55	77	181

\* Based on information available

32 The terms 'initiative' and 'programme' are used interchangeably throughout the text.

### 6.1.1. Dublin TPSI

With reference to participating parents at the Dublin project site, information was available on the educational level of 87 of the participants. Thirty five (or 38% of total referrals received) participants were not engaged in education or training at the end of June 2002. Of these:

- 7 had completed their Leaving Certificate;
- 15 had left school after completing the Junior Certificate; and
- 13 had left school before completing the Junior Certificate.

Forty-nine (or 54% of total referrals received) young parents were in education or training at the end of June 2002. Of these:

- 16 were in second level education;
- 17 were in Youthreach;
- 7 were in FAS or Jobs Club;
- 7 were in third level education; and
- 2 were in Adult Education.

Of the 17 young parents engaged with Youthreach or Youth Horizons, the majority had minimal educational qualifications (8 had completed primary school only and 9 had completed the Junior Certificate). Those involved with the FAS Jobs Club also had generally low levels of education - 5 had completed primary school only, 1 had completed the Junior Certificate and 1 had completed the Leaving Certificate.

Overall, the data indicates:

- Approximately 18% (n = 16)) of participants were still in mainstream second level education;
- Approximately 31% (n = 27) left school without obtaining any formal educational qualification i.e. before Junior Certificate;
- Approximately 30% (n = 26) left after completing the Junior Certificate but before the Leaving Certificate;
- Nearly 21% (n = 18) had completed the Leaving Certificate; some of whom (n = 7) were participating in some form of third level education (for example, Post Leaving Certificate Courses).

### 6.1.2. Limerick TPSI

Information was available on the educational status of 85 participants (79% of total participants by end of June 2002). Thirty (28%) of the young parents were not engaged in education or training at the end of June 2002. Of these:

- 12 had completed their Leaving Certificate;
- 11 had completed their Junior Certificate;
- 3 had completed only primary level education; and
- 4 were on a 'year out' and information was unavailable as to their highest level of education completed.

Of the 55 young parents in education or training at the end of June 2002:

- 29% (n = 16) of young parents were still in mainstream second level education;
- 53% (n = 29) were engaged in alternative education or training programmes namely, Youthreach (n = 27) and FAS (n = 2) programmes. Of these, 4 had completed the Junior Certificate, 2 had left school with only primary level qualifications and information is unknown on the educational status of 29 of these participants; and
- 18% (n = 10) were in third level education.

### 6.1.3. Galway TPSI

Data were available on the highest level of education completed of 152 participants (70% of total participants by end of June 2002). Of these:

- 88 had completed their Leaving Certificate;
- 20 had completed their Junior Certificate only; and
- 6 had completed primary level education only.

Seventy-seven participants (36% of total participants at Galway project) were involved with education and training at the end of June 2002. Of these:

- 41 were in mainstream second level education and a number of these were also participating in the Young Mothers in Education Group;
- 17 were engaged in third level education;
- 16 were engaged in alternative education or training programmes (for example, FAS, Youthreach hairdressing courses et cetera); and
- 3 were engaged in post leaving certificate courses.

Forty-three young parents were participating in employment (23 in full-time and 20 in part-time employment).

## 6.2. Barriers to participation in education: issues identified by TPSI

The following factors, which act as barriers to young parents' participation in education and training, were identified in consultation with TPSI project staff and participant parents.

**(i) Childcare**

The availability and accessibility of childcare has particular significance for school aged parents. Difficulties in accessing affordable, quality childcare was repeatedly cited by young parents, their families and TPSI project workers as a key factor in determining whether or not young parents can participate in education or training.

I think the biggest barrier for anyone is that no schools have crèches with them – there's just no crèches available. I'm working part-time at the moment but I want to go back to school. I was in college before I got pregnant and I want to go back next year. But at the moment there's no crèche in the place, like if there was a crèche in the college I could go back whenever I want (Young mother, aged 20 years).

Major difficulties can arise in terms of:

- Having the financial means to pay for full time childcare;
- Being able to find affordable and quality childcare in their local area; and
- Being able to find childcare for younger children particularly infants aged less than one year.

Many teen parents rely upon their family to provide childcare to allow them to resume their education. However, where such family based childcare is not available, the majority of young parents need assistance with organising childcare and childcare expenses.

**(ii) Financial support**

I mean, people want to go back to school anyway to try and get themselves off welfare. If the help isn't there to go back to school you can't get off welfare so then you're just bumming off of them for a lot longer. I mean they should just put more help towards young mothers going back to school. I mean its fair enough you can say if you got yourself into trouble in the first place its your own fault.....so why should we spend our taxes and all that trying to get you back to school? But at the end of the day it's either that or live off welfare for the rest of your life which costs a lot more in the long run, rather than money you use to get yourself finished in school and get yourself working (Young mother, aged 18 years).

Ensuring access to adequate financial support for pregnant schoolgirls and teen parents is identified as being of major importance by TPSI project workers. Financial barriers to participation in education can arise in a number of different lights both at the level of the young parent and for education and training agencies including schools. Difficulties arise in relation to:

- Meeting childcare expenses;
- Paying for course fees and books;
- Paying for grinds: TPSI project workers noted that grinds for young mothers in second level education who are on maternity leave or those taking 'time off' following the birth of their child are considered essential by teachers. However, many students do not have the means to pay for such grinds and may fall behind in their studies as a result; and
- The different amounts of financial support available through social welfare supports depending on whether the young parent participates in mainstream second and third level education or training schemes.

Young parents who are full-time post-primary students are not automatically eligible to receive Supplementary Welfare Allowances (SWA) from Community Welfare Officers while they await payment of the One Parent Family Payment (OFP). Some choose to participate in training schemes such as Youthreach rather than return to mainstream second level education as they will receive a training allowance. Some return to such training schemes within a very short period after giving birth in order to claim their training allowance as one must attend a scheme full time to receive it. No provision is made for participants to take maternity or parental leave. Choosing to stay at home following birth, generally means having to apply for the SWA. However, these payments have traditionally been lower than training allowances. For some, particularly those seeking to enter third-level education, it can make more sense to defer participation until they are aged 24 years of age due to the administration and criteria used to determine if a young person is eligible for the Back to Education Allowance (BTEA).<sup>33</sup>

### **(iii) Barriers at school level**

While many schools respond admirably and support pregnant and parenting teens attending school, anecdotal evidence suggests that some schools discourage these teens from attending.

*They were very supportive here in the school. Teachers were all really nice to you and you can wear tracksuits here like, in other schools you can get thrown out because you're not wearing a skirt when you're pregnant (Young mother, aged 16 years).*

The most common barriers identified at school level include:

- Lack of guidelines for school management on treatment of pregnant teenagers or young parents: some have noted the difficulties posed for them in supporting young parents and pregnant schoolgirls by the absence to-date of any formal Health and Safety guidelines

<sup>33</sup> See Section 5.2. for a full discussion of the criteria governing eligibility for the Back to Education Allowance.

concerning maternity leave for pupils, school uniforms and support provision. At present, it is left to the discretion of each individual school management to decide how to support them;

- Unwillingness on the part of schools to engage with pregnant teenagers or young parents for example, insisting upon pregnant teens wearing the full school uniform;
- Lack of suitable facilities within the school; and
- Need for additional financial support to help schools provide additional support for young parents.

Some of the parents interviewed as part of the evaluation would not return to their former schools for a variety of reasons including embarrassment and conflicts with school staff, yet some of these also found it difficult to enter educational programmes focused on adults.

I had been in school when I found out I was pregnant. I was in Leaving Certificate and it was March when I left which was probably a bit stupid but I didn't feel like I could stay in school. Like all the younger girls are there and here's me walking around pregnant – I just felt like I shouldn't be there. But the teachers were the hardest thing for me. I felt like that they were looking down on me even though I was only 3 months pregnant and not really showing so probably a lot of them didn't even know. It wasn't the principal's fault though, as I'd say he'd have been grand with it all but the rest of them, I couldn't take them looking down on me like 'oooh you're only 17 and you're pregnant' – I felt like I had to leave (Young mother, aged 18 years).

Imaginative programmes that combined academic subjects, work experience, and intensive personal attention seemed to work best at sparking the interest and commitment of those who were not suited to mainstream second level education or adult education courses. Schedule flexibility was also imperative to enable the teen mothers to deal with sick children, childcare breakdowns, transportation problems and other crises.

Like I tried saying it to the teachers, "Look I can't seriously to do this in 3 days with a baby and with study and whatever else" and they were like - there's another girl in another course that has a baby as well but she happens to be 25, to be married you know? She's living with the father so she can like "take him off me for half an hour" and go into the computer. I can't do that but they just don't seem to take that into account at all. Its like "oh if the other girl with the baby can do it, so can you" and you're like 'but she's married, she's 25 etc". You know, my mother isn't going to take him (young mother's child) as soon as she comes back from a full day's work so that I can go study (Young mother, aged 19 years).

Programmes identified by TPSI project workers as responding well to these issues included:

- In Dublin, the Youth Horizons project and An Cosan in Tallaght;
- In Galway, a computer course run by FAS; and
- In Limerick, Youthreach and Limerick Youth Service.

#### **(iv) Age criteria for entry to training or 'second chance' education programmes**

Current qualifying age limits on training schemes act as a barrier for some young parents. Many of the existing training schemes in Ireland require participants to be aged of 21 years or over, effectively excluding young lone parents. See Section 5.2. for further discussion of these issues.

#### **(v) Lack of external counselling and support programmes**

TPSI project workers and other key workers with young people identify major gaps in the provision of external counselling and support programmes for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents in education (Report of the Limerick Teen Parenting Project, 2000). However, the support offered by home school liaison teachers were widely praised by young parents and project workers:

*Its' good to have the home school teacher here if there's anything bothering you, you can come down and talk to her and she won't judge you. Even though she knows you, she wont judge you and anything you say to her is confidential and you know that like. She will give you very good advice as well. She gave me leaflets and told me how to get in contact with this person or that person. The project worker (TPSI) and her sorted out the money for my mother for her taking care of the baby (Young mother, aged 16 years).*

#### **(vi) Family support**

It was widely agreed that strong parental support is fundamental to students continuing in education. Young mothers' choices in education, training or employment can be restricted by the extent and level of family support, particularly where young mothers are dependent upon family support (especially childcare) to facilitate these choices.

*All you hear is how "Oh we support people going back to school" but yet they really don't. They don't offer anything. I was just lucky I had my mother, cos if I was living at home in a flat by myself there's no way I could have done it (gone back to school). Not a hope (Young mother, aged 18 years).*

### **6.3. Supporting young parents in education: work of TPSI pilot projects**

The provision of support to young parents in the area of education and training forms a key element of the Teen Parent Support Initiative. Support is provided in a number of different ways and at a number of different levels. Each project site offers a range of supports to young parents



currently involved in education and training. Additionally, young parents not currently involved in either training, education or employment are encouraged and supported by project workers to consider re-entering or resuming educational or training activities.

A key issue emerging from the Initiative is the importance of project staff being prepared to solve practical problems that keep teenage parents from fully participating in activities that promote self-sufficiency, that is, in education, training and employment.

### 6.3.1. Joint initiatives in education with other agencies

A key element of the work of the pilot projects is joint agency working with existing educational and training agencies including mainstream second level schools. Joint working initiatives may represent a significant step in the move towards providing 'joined up service provision' (McCashin, 1997). Key agencies with whom TPSI projects collaborated included:

- Mainstream second level schools (including secondary level, VEC and community schools) and Post Leaving Certificate Colleges;
- Home-School Liaison Officers;
- Institutes of Technology and Universities;
- Youthreach;
- FÁS training centres; and
- Specialist projects working with young parents including: the Young Mothers in Education project in Galway City, An Cosain and Youth Horizons in Tallaght, Co. Dublin and Limerick Youth Service and V.E.C., in Limerick city and county.

The benefits of developing joint working with other agencies are considerable as it:

- Enables TPSI projects to gain a better understanding of the needs within the local area both amongst young parents and service providers;
- Provides agencies with an opportunity to work (with others) towards meeting needs and filling gaps in service provision;
- Reduces duplication or replication amongst service providers;
- Enables contact with a larger population of young parents;
- Increases the probability of matching a young parent's ability or need with an appropriate service; and
- Enables young parents to link in with existing services within their local area for example, FÁS training schemes, which they may not previously have been aware of.

### Case Study 1. TPSI joint working initiatives in education

#### Case Study 1. Working with other agencies

In Galway, TPSI Project Workers held a number of meetings with FÁS to discuss the possibility of young parents participating in a computer course organised by FÁS. TPSI project workers facilitated young parents participation by assisting with crèche and transport facilities and advocating for the course to be held at an appropriate time for young parents. TPSI were able to support a number of the young parents in meeting childcare costs. In addition, the project workers also consulted with FÁS personnel to determine level of training allowances (if any) available for young parents. The course commenced in September 2001. Two young mothers began the course in September/October 2001 and several young parents currently have their names on a waiting list to attend.

I knew that I kind of wanted to go back to school but I wasn't too sure about that as well – I really just wanted to go back and do some kind of a course. So when she (TPSI project worker) called around and I told her this, she said that there was this computer training course on in FAS and they'd help you with childcare and you'd get a bit of money for going there too. So this really appealed to me .... The best thing that I got out of the project was getting a place in the FAS course definitely. Its' given me something really good to do and I hope I can do something else after this. (Young mother, aged 17 years).

#### 6.3.2. Financial support

The TPSI pilot projects have sought to address financial barriers to participation in a number of ways. Each TPSI project received funding from the Department of Education and Science through the 'Grant Fund for Certain Children at Risk' in 2001. Each project used this to support their work with young parents in education. Three main areas in which this funding has proved particularly useful are:

##### *a. Assisting with financial support needs of young parents in education*

- Meeting childcare expenses for young parents who wish to return or continue in education/training;
- Meet the costs of grinds; and
- Meet the costs of course tuition and equipment including books, uniforms et cetera.

This funding was seen as essential by TPSI workers as it allowed them to respond in a practical way to some of the key barriers to participation in education or training identified by young parents.

Its' really important to get the money for the childcare. Its great cos it makes me feel that I'm not using her (mother) cos she's getting some money cos she could go out and get a job and get paid for it rather than just sitting at home and minding my child. So it takes some of the pressure off (Young mother, aged 17 years).

Table 2 provides an overview of the number of young parents engaging with TPSI who have benefited from the additional funding provided by the Department of Education and Science to assist young parents in education.

Table 2. Number of recipients of DES funding by project site and type of financial support given

No. assisted by project site / Type of assistance	Dublin	Limerick	Galway
Childcare fees	7	12	17
Grinds	4	5	2
Course fees	7	-	-
Materials (e.g. books, uniforms)	5	-	-
Total:	23	17	19

Well money wise really when I went back to do my Leaving Cert it was this crowd here (the TPSI project) who helped financially. I got a one-off payment of like £80 or something (from social welfare) and I got this big lecture about how she wasn't supposed to do it and it was just a once off and we don't normally do it (Young mother, aged 18 years).

#### *b. Liasing with statutory agencies on behalf of young parents*

Each TPSI pilot project noted that an element of their work was liasing with statutory agencies and other organisations on behalf of the young parents, particularly to discuss issues such as financial entitlements. While this may not appear to be directly related to supporting young parents in education, the certainty of receiving a guaranteed amount of funding or allowances is vital to enable young parents return or continue in education.

She (TPSI project worker) got me on the course and I love it. The content of the course is great.....and as a well you get paid a few extra pounds for taking part in the course so I get a bit more money and I can give that directly to my Mam for our keep at home. Plus she minds the baby while I'm at the course in the morning and gets some money from FAS for doing that too. The course can last for up to 2 years and I think I'll probably stay on it alright (Young mother, aged 18 years).

## Case Study 2. Advocating for change

### Case Study 2. Influencing changes in administration of SWA allowances

At one TPSI project site, it was noted that a number of young parents were returning to training schemes such as Youthreach within a very short period after giving birth. Young parents explained that this early return was due to the fact that they were significantly better off on their training grants compared to depending on discretionary payments from the CWO. TPSI project workers met with the Senior Community Welfare Officer for the relevant Health Board region to discuss this and facilitated the Senior CWO in meeting with young parents from the region to discuss this issue. Partly as a result of these discussions, SWA payments for young parents in this region awaiting receipt of the OFP were increased.

### 6.3.3. Protocol guidelines for best practice development within schools

A key element of the work of the Limerick TPSI pilot project was the development of guidelines for mainstream post-primary schools to assist them in drawing up individual school guidelines on the care of pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents. The guidelines seek to support those in management or pastoral care roles within schools to support teenage parents to stay in full-time education.

The TPSI project site in Limerick hosted a seminar 'Teen Pregnancy and Parenthood in Schools – how do we respond?' in April 2000 to consult with schools from Limerick City and County on the issue of teen pregnancy and parenthood in schools and to identify ways of responding to the issues raised by this. The seminar identified a clear need for the development of guidelines of good practice for schools that would enable them to offer optimum support to young parents and pregnant teenagers to remain in education.

They (the school) were very good. The only thing was, they had to tell the other teachers because of the fainting, in case something happened in class. But none of the teachers said it to me then, so it was grand. Even the year head was saying, "if you ever have a craving for a McDonalds, I'll drive you down and get it." They were really nice. It's probably unfortunate, but it's not an unusual thing up there. There's lots of girls that have babies, so it wasn't nothing unusual. .... the career guidance counsellor was very good with college and stuff and with putting things off. He's the one that organised all the Trinity stuff and helped me to get a place for this year and not take it for last year. He was very good at everything like that (Young mother, aged 17 years).

Following from the seminar, a working group consisting of eleven representatives from schools in Limerick City and County and a representative each from the Health Promotion Unit, Adult Education Limerick County V.E.C., the Limerick TPSI project and the Midwest Parenting Initiative were responsible for developing the protocol. This group began work in September 2000.

It is anticipated that the guidelines will be launched in late 2002. The guidelines are structured to provide advice and guidance to schools in the following three areas:

- (i) Schools supporting the student in disclosing the pregnancy;
- (ii) Schools supporting the student for the duration of the pregnancy; and
- (iii) Schools supporting the student on their return to school following the birth of their child.

Following the launch of these guidelines, the Limerick TPSI project hopes to offer training and information to schools to assist them in the development and implementation of guidelines for each specific school.

#### **6.3.4. Support and information**

After talking to the project (that is, TPSI) she gave me all the right information? So it completely changed things for me. That was useful. She told me I could go back to school – the fellow in the other office told me that I couldn't go back to school, that I'd have to work (Young mother, aged 17 years).

A great deal of the projects work consisted of supporting young parents in making the decision to continue or return to education or training. This support took a range of forms ranging from meeting with young parents to discuss the various options available to them, referring them to other agencies and organisations, making contact with these agencies on behalf of the young parent, gathering information for young parents and bringing young parents to meet course tutors, teachers et cetera.

I was half thinking about doing some kind of a course but I probably wouldn't have done anything without her (TPSI project worker). I'd still be sitting at home without her. She told me about the programme and got me to think about going there. I hadn't made up my mind or anything but she called around one day to my house and brought me down here! She introduced me to the tutor who told me more about the course and stuff. I would never have got involved in this if it wasn't for her (TPSI project worker) (Young mother, aged 17 years).

The Teen Parents Support Initiative recognised the importance of support programmes providing flexible responses to the diverse educational needs and abilities represented in the teenage parent population.

### Case Study 3. Supporting and encouraging young parents to remain in or return to education

#### Case Study 3. General support to parents

Fiona is a 19 year old mother who became involved with the project shortly after she gave birth. Prior to this she had been working and says she found it very hard for the first few months to adjust to the changes in her life although her family and boyfriend were very supportive. Going back to full-time education was not a serious option as she didn't want to leave her child with a childminder for long periods but she still wanted to be involved in some form of activity. Through her contact with the project she learnt of a ECDL Computer Course being held at her local community centre one night a week from which she would gain a recognised qualification. The TPSI project paid the fees for the course and Fiona is now halfway through the course. She is really enjoying the course and feels much happier now that she has found a way to balance her wish to gain further qualifications and be a full-time mother as well. She notes that there was no way she could have done the course without firstly, the prompting and encouragement she got from the TPSI project worker, and secondly, the financial assistance she received from them.

#### 6.4. Conclusion

The Teen Parents Support Initiative recognised the importance of support programmes providing flexible responses to the diverse educational needs and abilities represented in the teenage parent population. The range of activities which TPSI pilot projects were involved in with young parents in the area of education reflects the different types and levels of need, support and interest that exist among teenage parents. Its recognition and support of the decisions young parents make, particularly with regard to combining education, training, employment and parenting, and its emphasis on devising individually tailored support plans for each young parent illustrates its understanding of the unique circumstances each young parent experiences.

Section seven

# Discussion and recommendations

Ensuring young parents continued engagement or re-engagement with education during pregnancy and after birth requires policies that not only support those still in education at time of conception or birth but also policies for those who, long before birth or pregnancy, are already detached from education.

## 7. Introduction

The recommendations in this paper are generated with consideration of the work of the Initiative and with consideration to current policy debate and discussion in the area of education and training for young people and lone parents.<sup>34</sup>

Increased attention needs to be given to the multi-dimensional nature of educational disadvantage and exclusion. Providing appropriate education and training opportunities is a key step but "this alone will not be sufficient in providing solutions to the associated complexities of poverty and disadvantage" (NESF, 2001:26). This paper concurs with the NESF's call for better access to local services and a more adequately resourced infrastructure of housing, health and welfare in order to focus in a more holistic way on the needs of children and young people.

Political and policy rhetoric in Ireland encourages young people to stay in school until they have gained some form of educational qualification. It is arguable that the limited options available for pregnant and parenting teenagers have been made virtually invisible:

by discourses on education, vocational training and employment framed in ideal notions of choice, equal opportunity and gender equity (Milne-Home et al., 1997:24).

It is suggested that appropriate, timely, efficient and equitable educational provisions for young parents can only arise from a commitment to the rights of young parents themselves. The broad principles outlined in the *Employment Equality Act 1998*,<sup>35</sup> the *Equal Status Act 2000*<sup>36</sup> and the *Partnership 2000 Report on Equality Proofing* have particular significance to the debate on young parents and education. Using an equality proofing approach to address the needs of young parents in education would place the emphasis on young parents entitlement to appropriate education and training rather than the concessionary approach largely prevalent at present.

Ensuring young parents continued engagement or re-engagement with education during pregnancy and after birth requires policies that not only support those still in education at time of conception or birth but also policies for those who, long before birth or pregnancy, are already detached from education. Research suggests that greater flexibility within the education system lessens the likelihood that teenage mothers will definitively disengage from the educational system as a result of early motherhood (Clarke *et al.*, 1996).

34 In formulating this paper's recommendations, due regard is given to the range of proposed strategies contained within policy documents such as the NESF Report on Lone Parents, the Report of the Joint Committee on Social, Community and Family Affairs, the National Children's Strategy and the NAPS. These are positive policies and initiatives working to meet the needs of families, parents and children in general.

35 The Employment Equality Act 1998 outlaws discrimination on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion, race and membership of the Traveller community.

36 The Equal Status Act 2000 addresses issues of inequality and discrimination in the provision of goods and services.



Since lack of qualifications will compound the barriers to employment resulting from difficulties of child care and of balancing responsibility for early motherhood and work, more flexible arrangements for the pursuit of educational qualifications need to be widespread to ensure that teenage birth does not lead to further diminution of life chances (Welling, 1999:25).

It is important to remember that leaving school early is a rational decision for some young people, including young parents. Bearing this in mind, it appears that assisting young parents particularly those who are early school leavers, to participate fully and equitably in education requires more than the provision of childcare or transport or financial allowances to allow them to participate in employment and education or training programmes. The further development of education and training support for young parents should not be based upon the assumption that involvement in education or training during pregnancy and the early years of a child's life is the preferred option for all teenage parents. Respecting young parents' decision not to participate in education or training and instead, to be a 'full-time, stay at home' parent, particularly during the early years of their child's life is important.

It is clear that education or training incentives provided for teenage parents need to adopt a holistic approach to meeting their support needs. Young parents are not a homogeneous group and policy and service provision needs to recognise and respond to this diversity.

### 7.1. Policy recommendations

The following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. **A commitment to "differentiated policy" (Davies et al., 1996<sup>37</sup>) in forming education support strategies and policies for young parents.** The approach would enable government departments and relevant agencies to acknowledge and respond to the full range of circumstances among the young parents to whom such strategies and policies are addressed.
2. **The automatic proofing of educational policies to assess the differential impact of such policies upon young parents.** This proofing should consider the diversity of needs evident amongst teenage parents. It is proposed that the Educational Equality Unit of the Department of Education and Science and the National Educational Welfare Board could play a key role in lobbying and monitoring progress on this issue.
3. **Develop a policy for school authorities on how best to support pregnant and parenting school going teenagers.** Such guidance should include issues such as maternity leave and home

<sup>37</sup> Davies et al. (1996) discussed the development of 'differentiated policy' to support access of school age mothers to education in Northern Ireland.

tuition. Each school would prepare its own specific guidelines for use following this policy. It is suggested that the Department of Education and Science take a lead role in producing these guidelines in consultation with the appropriate school bodies in consultation with the Department of Health and Children as appropriate. The work undertaken by the Limerick TPSI pilot project in this regard could serve as a starting point for the development of a national policy.

4. **It is proposed that schools participating in the *Whole School Evaluation* collect data on the number of pregnant and parenting teenagers** participating in second level education and the numbers dropping out due to teen pregnancy and/or parenthood. It is suggested that these data are reported to the Department of Education and Science for monitoring purposes.<sup>38</sup>
5. **To convene a National Co-ordinating Committee comprising representatives from all relevant national and regional agencies with responsibility for policy development and service provision in education and training.** This Committee would act as a key driver in the development of an agreed framework for the education sector on policy and support services for pregnant schoolgirls and teenage parents.

It is proposed that the Department of Education and Science would take a lead role in convening the Committee with representatives from local and regional authorities, Health Boards, relevant Government Departments, FAS, VECs, primary and secondary schools and other key bodies. Regular progress reports should be submitted by the Committee to the Department of Education and Science.

6. **An explicit commitment to consultation and participation by young parents in the policy process** in line with the emphasis within the National Children's Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on involving children within policy development.

## 7.2. Practice recommendations

The recommendations in the following section are chiefly concerned with identifying practice issues for consideration by key players in education and training for young parents. The following practice recommendations are proposed:

7. The current emphasis on local consultations by the Department of Education and Science with regard to policies on further education (the so called '**District Approach**'<sup>39</sup>) should not involve

38 The Whole School Evaluation process already collects data on the gender of students in mainstream second level education.

39 Under this approach, local consultations form a key element of proposed expansions of programmes such as Youthreach and the development of close links between VECs (in particular) and area partnerships in relation to childcare (DES, 2001:30).

duplication of efforts but emphasise the development of national, regional and local action plans. A key element of the approach in this context should be an emphasis on consultation and participation by young parents.

8. **The development of locally based integrated networks to develop strategic approaches to meet the education needs of young parents with a particular emphasis on countering educational disadvantage.** These networks could include formal and informal education providers, voluntary social services, local community organisations, youth organisations, parent associations and the community welfare service of health boards.
9. **It is suggested that Home School Liaison Officers and Educational Welfare Officers should work in tandem with other social services to provide support for young parents of compulsory school age** during and after pregnancy to return to full-time education either in school, college or an appropriate unit. It is proposed that regular reporting structures to the National Educational Welfare Board are implemented.
10. **To further expand the provision of subsidised childcare for 16 and 17 year olds to allow them to participate in further education and training.** This support may take the form of subsidising childcare provided by the family as carried out by the Teen Parents Support Projects or the provision of subsidised crèches within second and third level education.

# Conclusions

the emphasis within the Initiative on addressing all the support needs of a young parent's life places it in a unique position to identify and work towards meeting the myriad of obstacles that may combine to impact upon their educational attainment, and in the long-term, their life opportunities.

## 8. Conclusions

A key feature of the national programme of the Teen Parents Support Initiative (TPSI) is its emphasis on supporting and enabling young parents who wish to participate in education and training. In particular, the emphasis within the Initiative on addressing all the support needs of a young parent's life places it in a unique position to identify and work towards meeting the myriad of obstacles that may combine to impact upon their educational attainment, and in the long-term, their life opportunities.

Its recognition and support of the decisions young parents make, particularly with regard to combining education, training, employment and parenting, and its emphasis on devising individually tailored support plans for each young parent illustrates its understanding of the unique circumstances each young parent experiences.

It is envisaged that, following the completion of the external evaluation of the Initiative the programme will be expanded nationally as per Objective L of the National Children's Strategy. Under the heading 'Future Actions Proposed', the Strategy suggests that:

The teenage parenting initiatives currently being piloted will be expanded to all health boards (2000: 74).

The existing emphasis in the Initiative on networking with agencies with a pre-existing focus on working with young persons and young parents, illustrates its understanding of the value and potential inherent in inter-agency working. Therefore, this paper suggests that the Initiative is well placed to play an important role in the development of local and regional integrated networks to meet the education and training needs of young parents.

In conclusion, this paper recommends that the Initiative's projects should be supported and appropriately resourced to continue and expand their work in supporting young parents in education and training.

# Appendix I

## Initiatives to assist young parents' participation in education: selected examples from England and Northern Ireland

### United Kingdom

Recent research in the UK has acknowledged the difficulties facing young parents in education and highlighted how 'uncommon' it is for young parents to finish their education. As early as the 1970s, recommendations were made for the provision of home tuition and other supports, to facilitate young mothers return to school after the birth of their child.

In the 1980s, a survey into the educational needs of young mothers in England found home tuition to be an established procedure for the majority of education authorities in England, with growing numbers of special educational centres for this group. Dawson's (1994) survey of policy and procedure in this area, found an increasing awareness of young mothers as a special needs group, with responsibility for provision allocated most commonly to a hospital and Home Tuition service, or to a support, welfare or special needs unit.

During the 1990s, education authorities worked within policy guidelines set out by the Department of Education in 1993 and 1994. The majority of education authorities provided Home Tuition for both pregnant schoolgirls and young mothers with around 60% offering group tuition, mainly through a special centre, and 35% offering associated child care provision. Shortcomings and difficulties noted with provision included difficulties in offering particular subjects through special centres (especially Science and IT) and an absence of crèche facilities.

The 1999 Report of the Social Exclusion Unit (UK) on teenage pregnancy in the UK, identified a number of barriers facing teenage mothers in getting back into education. It found that many teenage mothers begin with a background of poor experience and attainment at school and exclusion during pregnancy. On top of this, the interruption of the birth, the stress of coping with a young child or children and the cost and availability of child care were often seen to be the final straw by teenage mothers. Difficulties in continuing formal education and in accessing relevant training opportunities are highlighted as a major difficulty faced by young parents and their children. It recommended the establishment of a ten year Action Plan for tackling teen pregnancy and supporting teen parents. A key element of the Action Plan is its focus on supporting teenage parents to return to education (with childcare provision to assist this). From this, the following requirements and supports were announced:

- Under 16 year old mothers will be required to finish full-time education and be given help with child care to ensure this happens; and
- 16 and 17 year old parents would be able to take part in the Education Maintenance Allowance Pilots from September 1999 (1999: 99 – 100).

The Report also identified specialist pupil referral units for teenage mothers as a possible suitable response to their support needs, as these can offer both child care and the personal attention that can motivate and engage young parents to return to education (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999).

#### Box 6. The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Initiative, UK

##### The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Initiative, Leeds, England

The Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Initiative (TPPI), established in Leeds as part of the Excellence in Cities Initiative, is developing a flexible and inclusive model of education for young women who get pregnant while still at school. It works with schools, colleges, city learning centres and creative arts organisations to provide a range of educational opportunities. A key success factor identified within this model is the appointment of Specialist Learning Mentors. These Mentors work to ensure that young women can access an appropriate education package at each stage of their pregnancy and after the baby is born, and who develop preventative work with schools (Midwinter, 2001).

In 2000, the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) prepared a draft guidance entitled *Pupil Inclusion* which clearly established that pregnancy was not a reason for exclusion from school. The guide stressed the importance of consultation with parents and highlighted the need for clarification of the principles of good practice for content and delivery (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999, 115 – 117). The DfEE (with assistance from the Department of Health) is also in the process of developing more detailed guidance on how to support parents or pregnant girls of school age. The principle guiding these is that a period of 18 weeks authorised absence before and after the birth should be allowed, after which any absence will be counted as unauthorised.

#### Northern Ireland

Dawson's (1995) survey of policy and procedure in the local educational authorities of Northern Ireland with regard to provision for young school age mothers in the 1990s found that responsibility for provision lay with Special Education. On average, more hours of Home Tuition were available in Northern Ireland than in England and Wales. There did not appear to be any

group provision devoted solely to school age mothers at this time. However, Dawson noted that Northern Ireland's small size and lack of urbanisation may reduce the practicality of group provision, particularly where there is more family support. Concerns with providing a full curriculum and comments about adverse attitudes at school were observed.

Young parents in Barnardos Young Parents Network in Northern Ireland, cited difficulties ranging from negative staff attitudes, to a lack of home tuition. The study found that less than half of those mothers surveyed received any home tuition before their baby was born, whilst 75% received no home tuition after the birth of their child (Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood, 2000).

#### Box 7. The Next Steps Project, Northern Ireland

##### Next Steps Project, Northern Ireland

A Gingerbread based project called Next Steps offers home based support to teenage mothers who are referred to the project, currently available in two HSS Trust areas, by their Health Visitor.

The programme aims to empower participants to reach personal goals. A wide range of support and information is offered, including access to welfare advice, training and help with childcare. It also provides opportunities to meet with other young mothers (Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood, 2000:70).

In 1998, a framework was agreed on the development of policy and support services for pregnant schoolgirls and school age mothers in Northern Ireland. This framework emerged from a Save the Children research study called 'Pregnant Schoolgirls and School Age Mothers: Access to Education' (Davies et al., 1996). The starting point of the framework is that every pregnant schoolgirl or school age mother should be supported:

To complete full-time mainstream education and to continue in education beyond the age of 16, if they wish to (Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood, NI, 2000: 16).



### Box 8. The School Aged Mothers Project, Northern Ireland

#### The School Aged Mothers Project, Northern Ireland

The School Aged Mothers Project (SAM) in Northern Ireland offers what the Working Group on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood described as an "innovative response to the needs of school age mothers" (2000: 33).

The purpose of SAM is to support young women who are pregnant or who have had a baby while still of compulsory school going age, to continue their formal education and to address personal development, antenatal and health issues in a supportive environment. The initial pilot of SAM was ran by Barnardo's in partnership with the North Eastern Education and Library Board, Causeway Health & Social Services Trust and Ballysally Youth and Community Centre. Of those who participated in the pilot, 75% sat their exams. This is a very significant outcome when compared to the findings of Davies et al's (1996) study which showed that two-thirds of young mothers felt they missed out on opportunities to sit exams.

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# Notes