

Education and poverty

Investigations
Work in progress

Start date: Summer 2010

How do attitudes, aspirations and behaviour affect educational attainment and what can be done about it?

Children growing up in low-income families tend to leave school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment than their better-off peers. This is a major factor contributing to poverty later in life. The attitudes, aspirations and behaviour of children and parents may play an important part in explaining this.

This programme:

- Will assess how far policy and practice solutions that address attitudes and aspirations can reduce the educational attainment gap between richer and poorer children.

We aim to:

- find out whether a specific set of interventions addressing attitudes and aspirations would have a good chance of reducing the attainment gap between richer and poorer children; and
- if so, build support for trialling and implementing these.

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For the latest information, visit:

www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/education-and-poverty

At a glance

Programme title: Education and poverty

Aim: To assess how far policy and practice solutions that address attitudes, aspirations and behaviour can reduce the educational attainment gap between richer and poorer children

Timescale: 2010

Budget: £90,000

Contact: Helen Barnard (Programme manager)

During 2010, JRF will explore how attitudes, aspirations and behaviour affect educational attainment and what can be done about it. This paper outlines what we are doing, why, and what we hope to achieve through this work.

This information is correct at the start of the programme. However, our programmes of work develop throughout their course. For the most up-to-date information, visit: www.jrf.org.uk/work/workarea/education-and-poverty

What is the issue?

Children growing up in low-income families tend to leave school with substantially lower levels of educational attainment than their more advantaged peers. This is a major factor contributing to poverty later in life, which restricts social mobility and feeds inter-generational poverty. Whilst considerable attention has been paid to this problem, it has proved extremely difficult to significantly reduce the attainment gap between richer and poorer children. JRF research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and Bristol University published in 2010 showed that attitudes, aspirations and behaviour of children and parents may play an important part in explaining this. However, the precise part such factors play is not well understood.

There have been some attempts to address the attainment gap through interventions focusing on a number of the factors we have identified, such as aspirations for higher education. However, there has not been a detailed and comprehensive look at the evidence across the range of interventions which try to raise attainment by affecting attitudes and aspirations among both children and parents. It is also not yet clear which interventions are worthy of being trialled on a larger scale and potentially used more widely across the UK.

What do we want to achieve?

We aim to:

- find out whether a specific set of interventions addressing attitudes, aspirations and behaviour could reduce the attainment gap between richer and poorer children; and
- if so, build support for trialling and implementing these.

This programme will be relevant to:

- All those working to improve the educational attainment of children and young people from low-income backgrounds.
- Communities, families and practitioners such as teachers, youth workers and children's services.
- Public, private and charity providers of education and related services.
- Government and opposition politicians in all parties and regions.
- Civil servants in the Department for Education.
- Quangos such as Ofsted.
- Lobby groups on poverty and education.
- Think-tanks on education.
- Social policy and education researchers and academics.

What are we doing?

The programme aims to find out whether a set of interventions which changed children and parents' attitudes, aspirations and behaviour could reduce the attainment gap between richer and poorer children. If so, we aim to build support for trialling and implementing these. The project will produce:

1. A review of evidence about the causal links between a range of the factors and educational attainment.
2. A report about interventions addressing attitudes and aspirations and how effective these are in raising attainment for low-income children.
3. A summary of recommendations to communities, those working with children and families, government and others about specific ways of reducing the attainment gap.

Why is this topic a priority for the JRF?

Children growing up in poverty and disadvantage are less likely to do well at school, feeding into disadvantage in later life. This work is core to JRF's focus on reducing poverty and disadvantage.

What has informed our thinking?

This programme builds on previous work in our education and poverty programme. This highlighted strong links between children and parents' attitudes, aspirations and behaviour and suggested that these could help to explain a large part of the educational attainment gap between richer and poorer children.

About the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust are two independent charities that work together to understand the root causes of social problems, identify ways of overcoming them, and show how social needs can be met in practice.

Our purpose is to influence policy and practice by searching for evidence and demonstrating solutions to improve:

- The circumstances of people experiencing poverty and disadvantages;
- The quality of their homes and communities;
- The nature of the services and support that foster their well-being and citizenship.

Most of our work centres on the interconnected themes of poverty, place and empowerment.

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