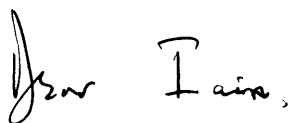


The Right Honourable Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department of Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

2 June 2010



We are delighted that the Government is committed to 'a root and branch reform of Britain's welfare system'. In National Family Week your recognition that family breakdown remains 'a pathway to poverty', your commitment to 'reduce the couple penalty in the tax credit system', and your analysis of the link between family relationships and disadvantage in your 'State of the Nation' report are all extremely welcome.

However, the ability of your department to play its part in reducing the fiscal deficit and protect the public will also depend on the actions of other departments with regard to families. The reality is that much of the heavy lifting in enabling improved social outcomes will fall to families. In National Family Week we are writing to a number of government departments highlighting the fact that without a champion at the heart of government, the family-friendly agenda is unlikely to succeed.

There needs to be clear top-level leadership on the family and family policy should have a central role in government, based perhaps at the Cabinet Office. Becoming family-friendly requires a co-ordinated plan as there are implications for every government department. The Government has recognised this is true of the Big Society – it has Cabinet level responsibility and a clear strategy. In light of this I hope you will recognise the role of families in improving outcomes by ensuring that your department commits to fully support an integrated government-wide approach to strengthening families.

The decisions of many government departments impact on the family – intentionally or otherwise. As the biggest public service delivery department in the UK, serving over 20 million customers, decisions in your department affect the family more than most. Our report, *Counting the Cost of Family Failure*, notes that family breakdown will cost almost £42bn this year, or £1,350 per taxpayer. £12.38bn of those costs fall under your department in the form of benefits paid out to those with fractured or broken families. We would be

interested to know what proportion of benefit spending reduction you see as being dependent on strengthening family relationships and how the department will monitor progress in this area.

Family relationships are shaped by decisions in many policy areas. The ability of your Department to reduce poverty and welfare dependency may therefore depend as much on the actions of other departments in strengthening families, as on your important reforms of the welfare system. Other department's outcomes, also dependent on family relationships, will in turn be influenced by your success or failure.

The coalition programme for government has promised to shun 'the bureaucratic levers of the past' and find 'intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves.' The wide range of influencing factors means that family should not be seen as a narrow policy agenda.

We hope that you will take the opportunity of National Family Week to signal a clear commitment to support a government-wide strategy for the family. We were very encouraged to see in the *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain* the assurance that 'Britain's families will get our full backing across all our policies.' This commitment must, surely, be built into the heart of the policymaking process. Stronger, more stable families could over time save your Department billions of pounds each year – satisfying continuing demands for progress while reducing the fiscal deficit.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael'.

Michael Trend CBE
Executive Director
Relationships Foundation