

media release

12th February 2010

Joined up Government with a Purpose

Putting family at the heart of policy

In the final of our Marriage Week press releases, the Relationships Foundation, a Cambridge-based think tank, is calling on the parties to recognise the driving role of family relationships in achieving better outcomes in health, education, community safety and welfare. Rather than having a Prime Minister's Delivery Unit which set the tone for a target-driven culture trying to buy progress, the staff costs of over £2m would be better used to ensure that all policy is capable of meeting a Triple Test of economic, environmental and *social* outcomes.

Executive Director Michael Trend commented, 'You can deliver babies and letters, but social progress and stronger families require nurturing.'

Family policy is set to be one of the major themes of the election campaign. Rightly so, given both the public and private consequences of family life, but the thinking to date has been too small. The debate about marriage tax policy should not detract from the fact that the long-term sustained cumulative impact of government policy as a whole will matter more for families than any one individual policy.

'The Relationships Foundation wants to put a "Big Idea" into the political process: that policy development, proposals for legislation and government action should all be subject to a triple test of economic, environmental and *social* outcomes – the Triple Test. (1) The next administration must ensure that all policy is relationally as well as economically and environmentally literate. This will lead to "joined up" government with a purpose.'

The Foundation's analysis provides a sound starting point to ensure that social considerations play a full part in integrated public policy. In our recent publication, *The Penumbra Effect – Family-centred Public Policy*, we demonstrated that family is the key factor in integrated social policy.(2) The strength and effectiveness of family and community relationships influence, and are influenced by, a wide range of policy areas. This penumbra effect includes education, health and social care, housing, employment, criminal justice, finance and debt, and tax and welfare payments. While stronger family relationships cannot simply be legislated into existence, policy must create an environment that supports rather than undermines them.

Michael Trend continued, 'It is great to see the parties debating family policy, but they are in danger of missing the bigger picture. Ensuring that policies support rather than undermine family relationships is an essential element of any strategy to satisfy continuing demands for progress *and* reduce the fiscal deficit. Greater relational literacy in policy-making, an understanding of the variety of mechanisms by which policy influences relationships, as well as a clear commitment to strengthening families' contribution to social progress must be the hallmarks of a new policy agenda.'

ENDS

For more information please contact: Peter Lynas –

p.lynas@relationshipsfoundation.org

01223 341286

07899 898066

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The Triple Test, Relationships Foundation, 2009. Available at <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=240>
2. The Penumbra, Relationships Foundation, 2008. Available at <http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/download.php?id=255>

Marriage Week runs from 8th -14th February 2010. Marriage is one of a number of key family relationships which can increase wellbeing and reduce long term public spending. Despite the continual flow of family policy announcements, the political parties' thinking on the family remains too small. The Relationships Foundation will be issuing a series of press releases for Marriage Week ultimately calling on all politicians to commit to 'family proofing' **all** policy.

The Relationships Foundation, established in 1993, is a Cambridge-based independent think tank seeking a better connected society. It studies the effect that culture, business and government have on relationships. It proposes new ideas for strengthening social connections, campaigns on issues where relationships are being undermined, and trains and equips people to think relationally for themselves.