

# **Early childhood research and policy in the UK**

Edward Melhuish

## 2 key studies



- National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS)
- Effective Preschool & Primary Education (EPPE)

Sure Start started in 1999 following the government's interest in developing policies to improve the lives of poor children

Sure Start aims to enhance the functioning of children and families by improving services in deprived areas.

Sure Start programmes are area based, with all children under four and their families living in a specific disadvantaged area being “targets” of intervention.

## Sure Start programmes were to be:

- two generational: involve parents as well as children
- non-stigmatising: avoid labelling 'problem families'
- multifaceted: target a number of factors
- locally driven: involvement of parents and communities
- culturally appropriate and sensitive to clients needs

## Sure Start did not have a prescribed model

Each programme had autonomy to improve services, with general aims but without clear specification of services. But all programmes must deliver:

- outreach and home visiting,
- support for families and parents,
- support for good quality play,
- learning and childcare experiences for children,
- primary and community health care,
- advice for child health and development and family health
- support for people with special needs.

# Setting up Sure Start programmes



- It takes longer than anticipated to set up Sure Start programmes
- Most programmes did not approach their fully operational level of expenditure until after 3 years

# Impact study



## *Aim:*

- To evaluate impact of Sure Start programmes upon children and families

## *Three components*

- First phase – cross-sectional study
  - 9 and 36 month olds and their families
  - in Sure Start and Sure Start-to-be areas
- Longitudinal study
  - 9000 children seen at 9 months, 3 years, 5 years
  - comparison group from Millennium Cohort Study

# Independent variables



- **Child Characteristics:** age, gender, and ethnicity
- **Demographic, Socioeconomic and Parental Characteristics:**
  - maternal age,
  - maternal education,
  - work status, occupational status,
  - maternal cognitive difficulties,
  - father's involvement,
  - family language,
  - family income.
- **Area characteristics:**
  - 11 factors reflecting dimensions of the community.

# OUTCOMES



- *Supportive Parenting*
- *Negative Parenting*
- *Maternal Acceptance of child*
- *Home Learning Environment*
- *Child Language Development*
- *Child Non-verbal cognitive development*
- *Child Social Competence*
- *Child Emotion-Behaviour Difficulties*

## 2005: Sub-group findings (3-year-olds)



- Among non-teenage mothers (86% of total):
  - greater child social competence in SSLP areas
  - fewer child behaviour problems in SSLP areas
  - less negative parenting in SSLP areas
- Effects on children appeared to be mediated by effects on mother:
  - SSLP → less negative parenting → better child social functioning

## 2005: Sub-group findings (3-year-olds)



- Among teenage mothers (14% of total):
  - less child social competence in SSLP areas
  - more child behaviour problems in SSLP areas
  - poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas
- Among lone parent families (40% of total):
  - poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas
- Among children living in workless households (33% of total):
  - poorer child verbal ability in SSLP areas

## Evidence available by 2005 on Early Years

### *NESS evidence*

- mixed results

### *EPPE (longitudinal study of 3000 children)*

- preschool has benefits and
- Integrated Children's Centres particularly effective

# Changes in Sure Start from 2005



## Following evidence from the NESS and EPPE studies

- Sure Start programmes become Children's Centres
- Services are more clearly specified
- Clearer guidance given on service delivery
- Greater staff training

# The impact of well-established Sure Start programmes on 3-year-olds & their families



## Methodology

We compare –

- 5883 children / families in 93 Sure Start areas, and
- 1879 children / families in 72 non-Sure Start areas
  
- 14 outcomes at 3 years

# Results



- Controlling for child, family and area characteristics we test for Sure Start vs. non-Sure Start differences
- Of 14 outcomes 7 showed a significant difference, i.e. a Sure Start effect

# Results



- Of 14 outcomes 7 showed a significant Sure Start effect
- 5 outcomes clearly indicated beneficial effects for Sure Start. These were for:
  - child positive social behaviour (cooperation, sharing, empathy)
  - child independence / self-regulation (works things out for self, perseverance, self-control)
  - Parenting Risk Index (observer rating + parent-child relationship, harsh discipline, home chaos)
  - home learning environment
  - total service use
- In addition there were better results for Sure Start for:
  - child immunisations
  - child accidents
- But these 2 outcomes could have been influenced by timing effects

# Do SSLP effects vary by subgroups?



- We looked at subgroups by
  - gender
  - ethnic group
  - teen / not teen mother
  - lone parents
  - workless households
  - income (below poverty line or not)
- We conclude Sure Start effects do not vary for different sub-populations

# Reasons for differing results



## 1. Amount of exposure

It takes 3 years for a programme to be fully functional. Therefore

- in the first phase children / families were not exposed to fully functional programmes for much of the child's life
- Later children / families are exposed to fully functional programmes for all child's life

## 2. Quality of services

- Sure Start Programmes have been reorganised as Children's Centres with clearer focus to services following lessons from earlier years,
- early on staff had a lot to learn. As knowledge and experience have been acquired over 7 years, SSLPs have matured in functioning and staff skill shortages have reduced

Hence it is likely that children / families are currently exposed to more effective services than in the early years of Sure Start

# Conclusion



- The impact of Sure Start has improved, probably because of:
  1. increasing quality of service provision, greater attention to the hard to reach, the move to children's centres as well as
  2. the greater exposure of children and families
- These positive results are modest but are evidence that the impact of Sure Start programmes is improving

# Overarching messages



- Programmes have improved over the years and Children's Centres are in the right direction
- Many examples of good practice
- There is still great variation between best and worst
- Need to learn from most effective Children's Centres

## Overarching messages – cont.



- Inter-agency collaboration is essential for good services
- Active engagement of health services important for success of Sure Start. Health has contact with all families and children from pregnancy
- Trust is fundamental to parental engagement
- Staff capacity problems, many staff inadequately trained for the work to be done and staff turnover is very disruptive

# Overarching messages – cont.



- Trust is fundamental to parental engagement
- Staff capacity problems, many staff inadequately trained for the work to be done and staff turnover is very disruptive

My personal choice for top priority

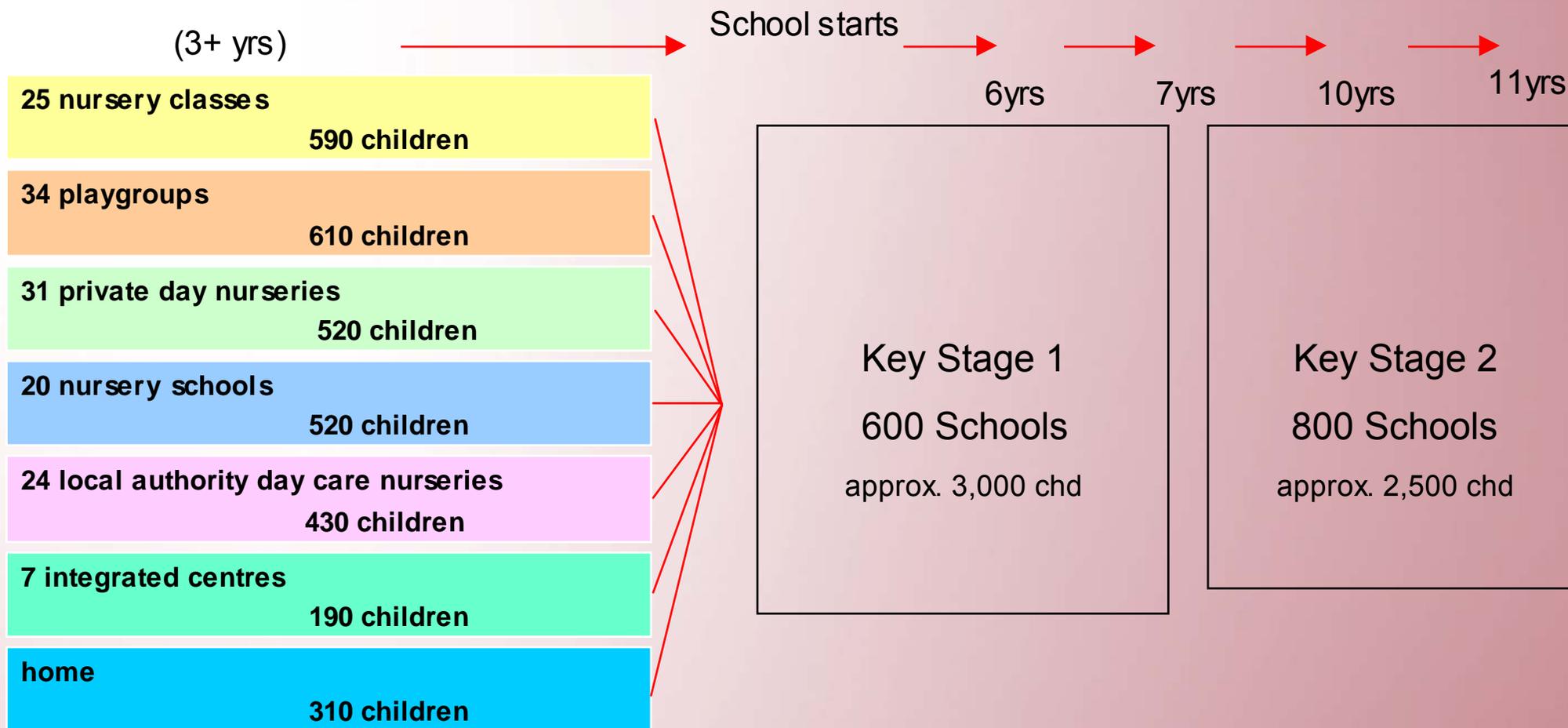


Need to increase focus on child  
language development

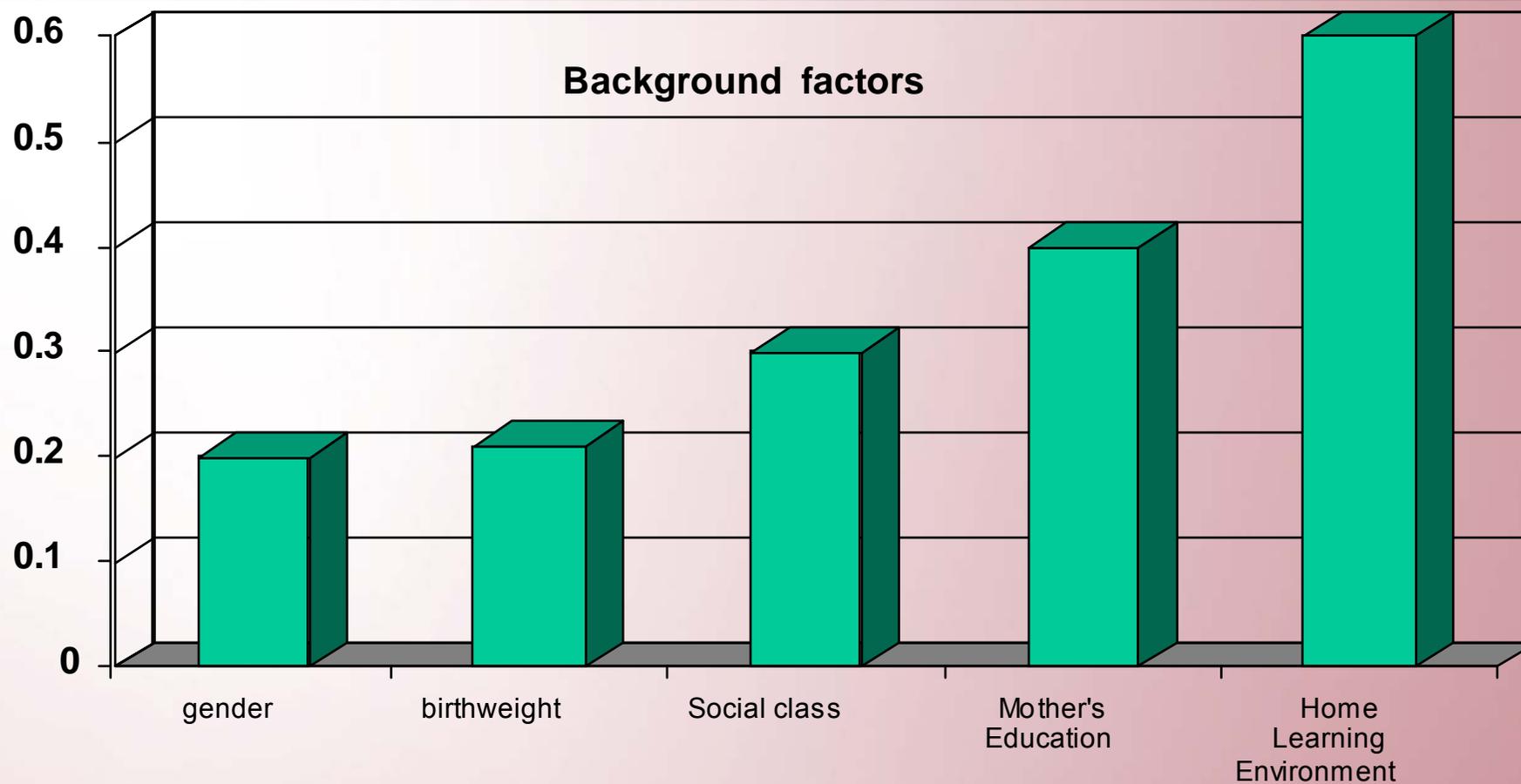
# Home, preschool, and school influences upon educational attainment and social development

EPPE study

# EPPE STUDY - 3000 children



# Effect sizes on literacy, age 5

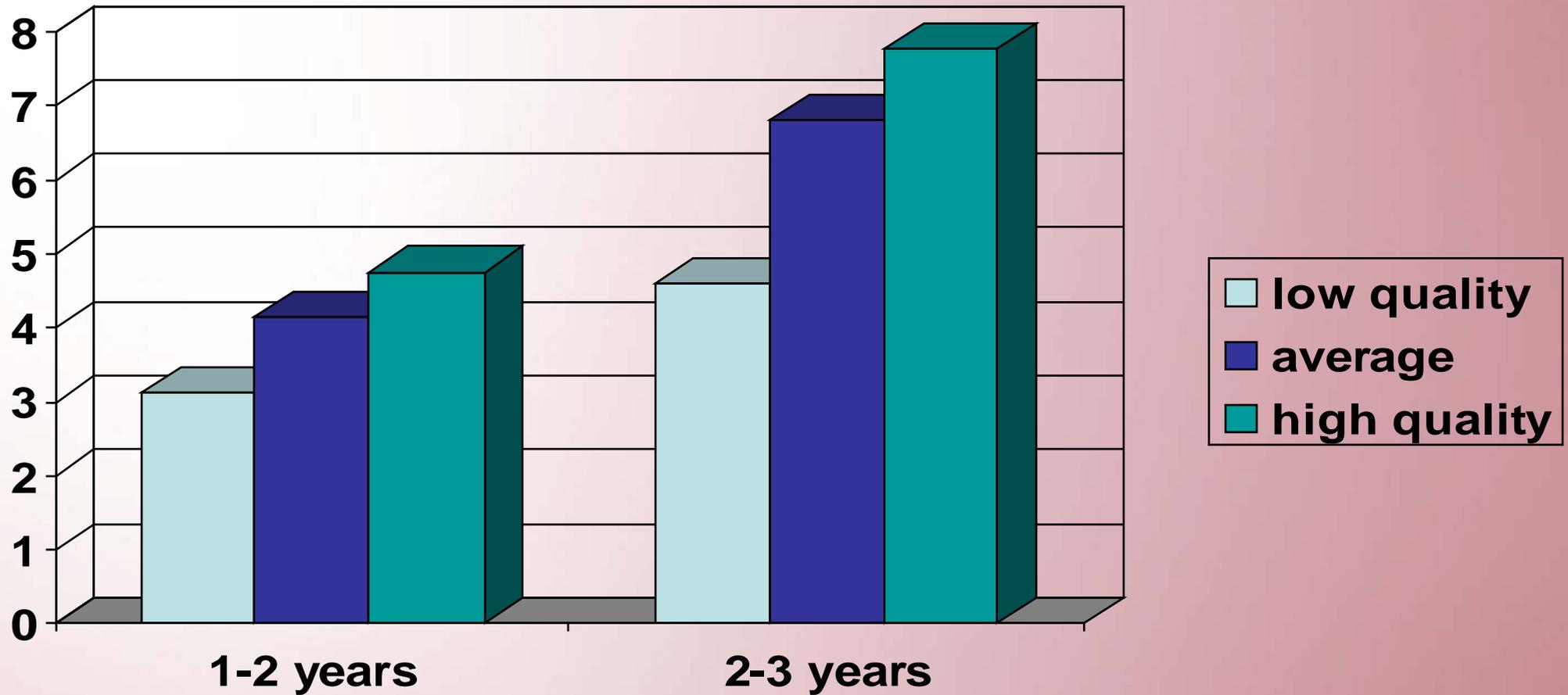


What difference does pre-school  
make

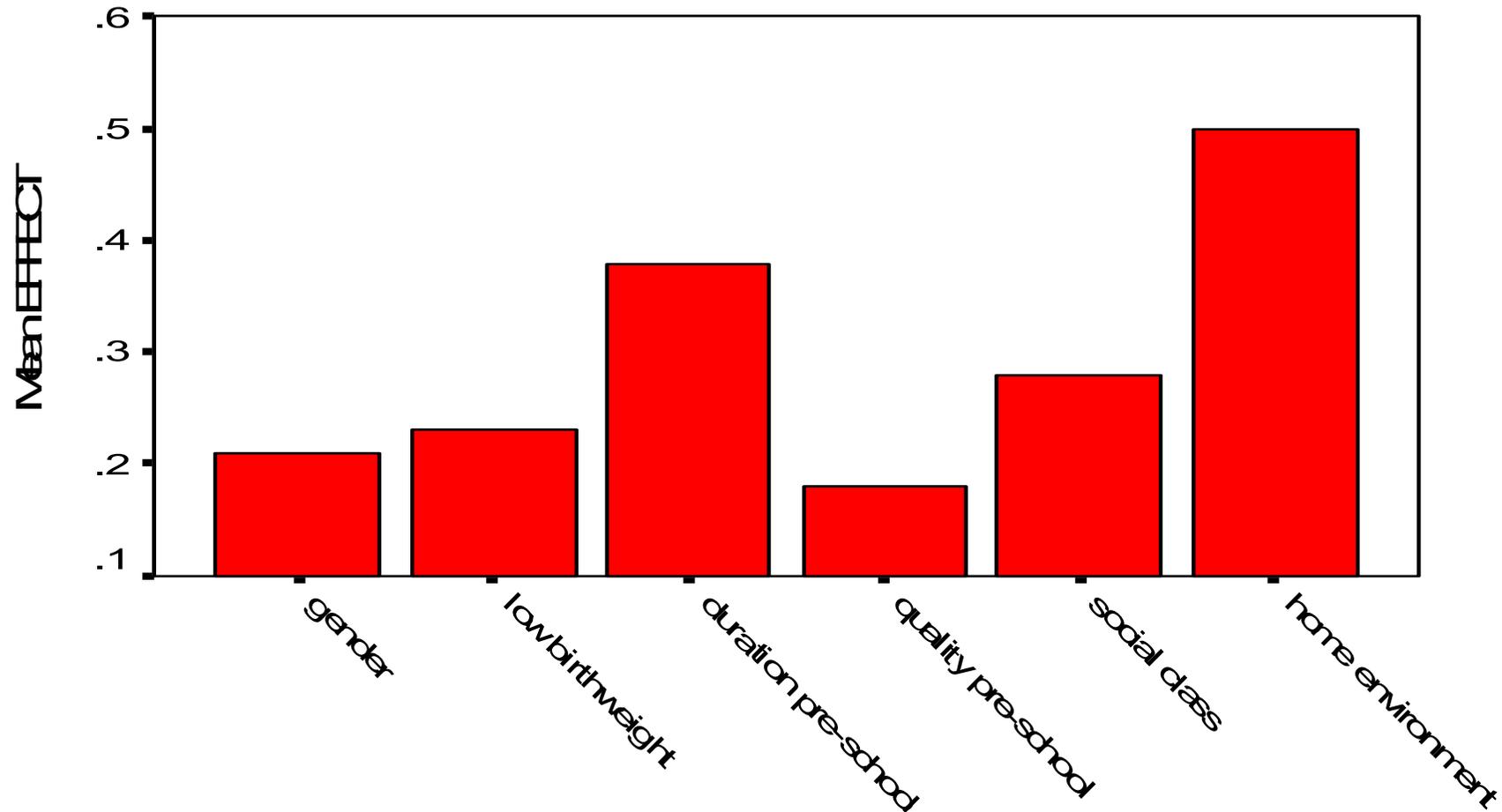
- allowing for previous experience, and  
background factors?

# Quality and Duration matter

(months of developmental advantage on literacy)



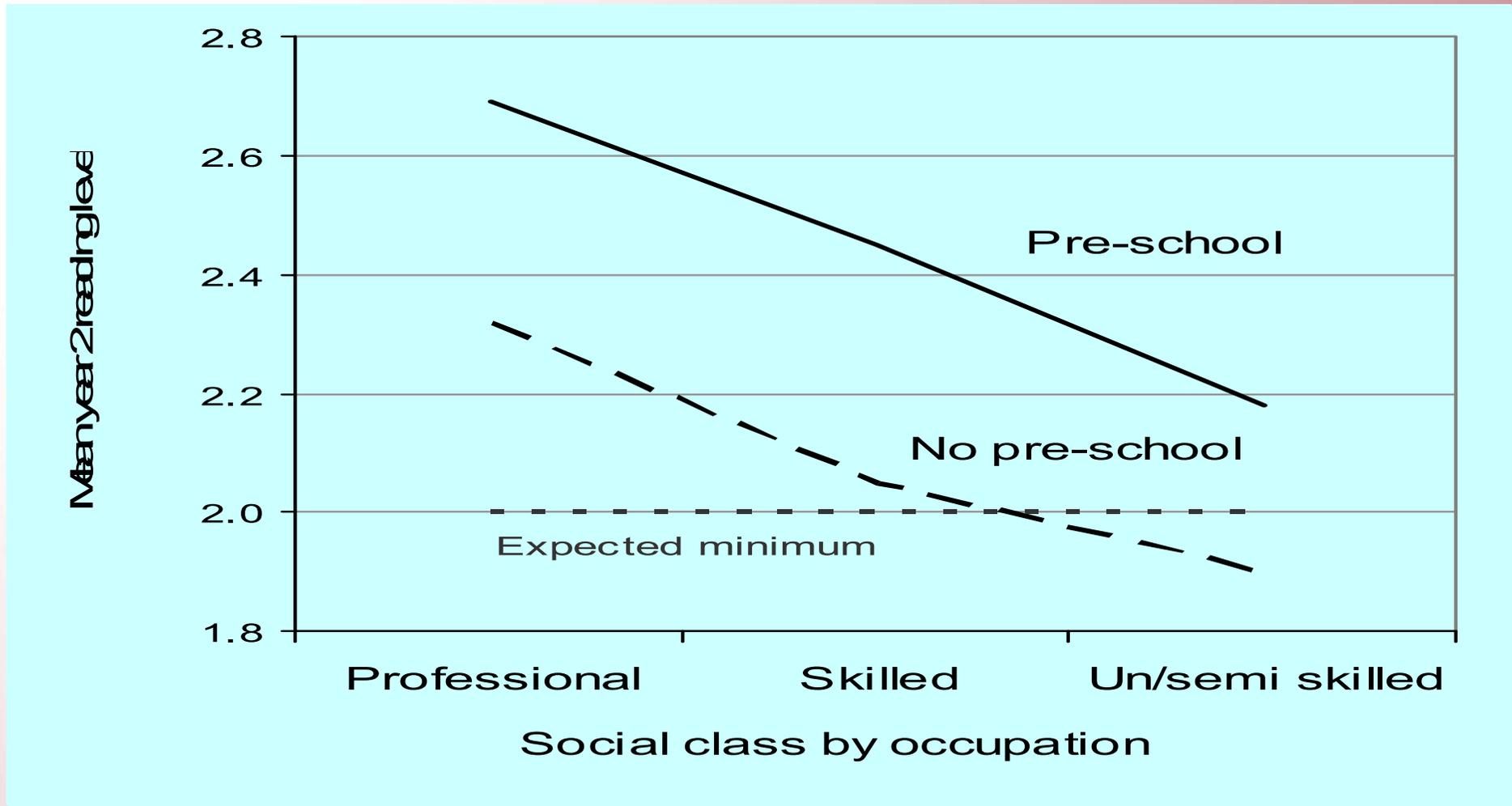
## EFFECTS UPON LITERACY



## Key Findings: Pre-school Attendance

- Earlier start (between 2 and 3) related to better intellectual development and improved independence, cooperation and sociability.
- Full time no better than part-time.
- Disadvantaged children benefit from good quality pre-school.
- Pre-school benefits **all** children's development.

# Social class and pre-school on literacy (age 7)

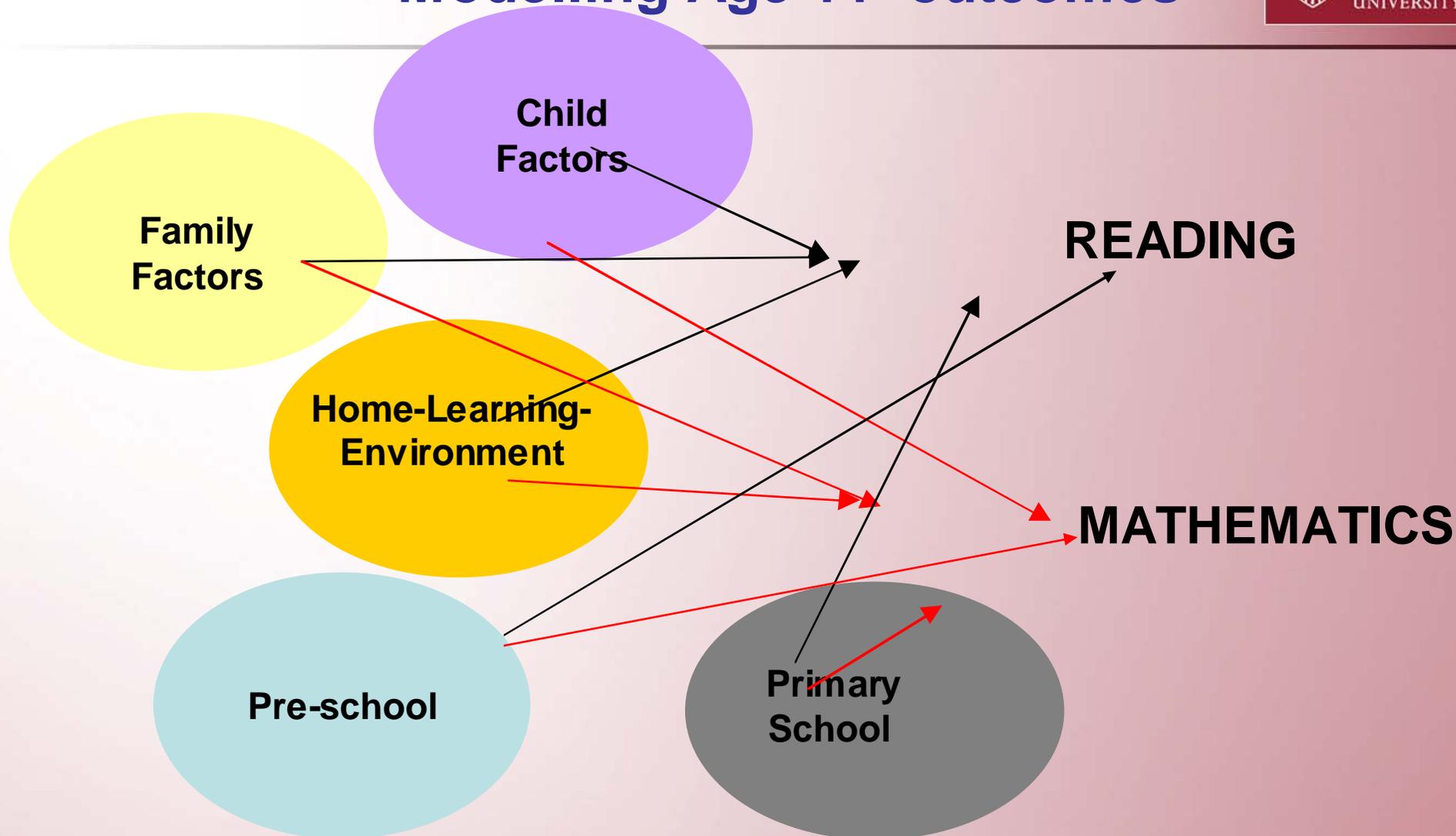


- **Data on every primary school child for 3 years (2001/2, 2002/3, 2003/4).**
- **N = 600k+ pupils in each year,  
N = 15,771 primary schools**

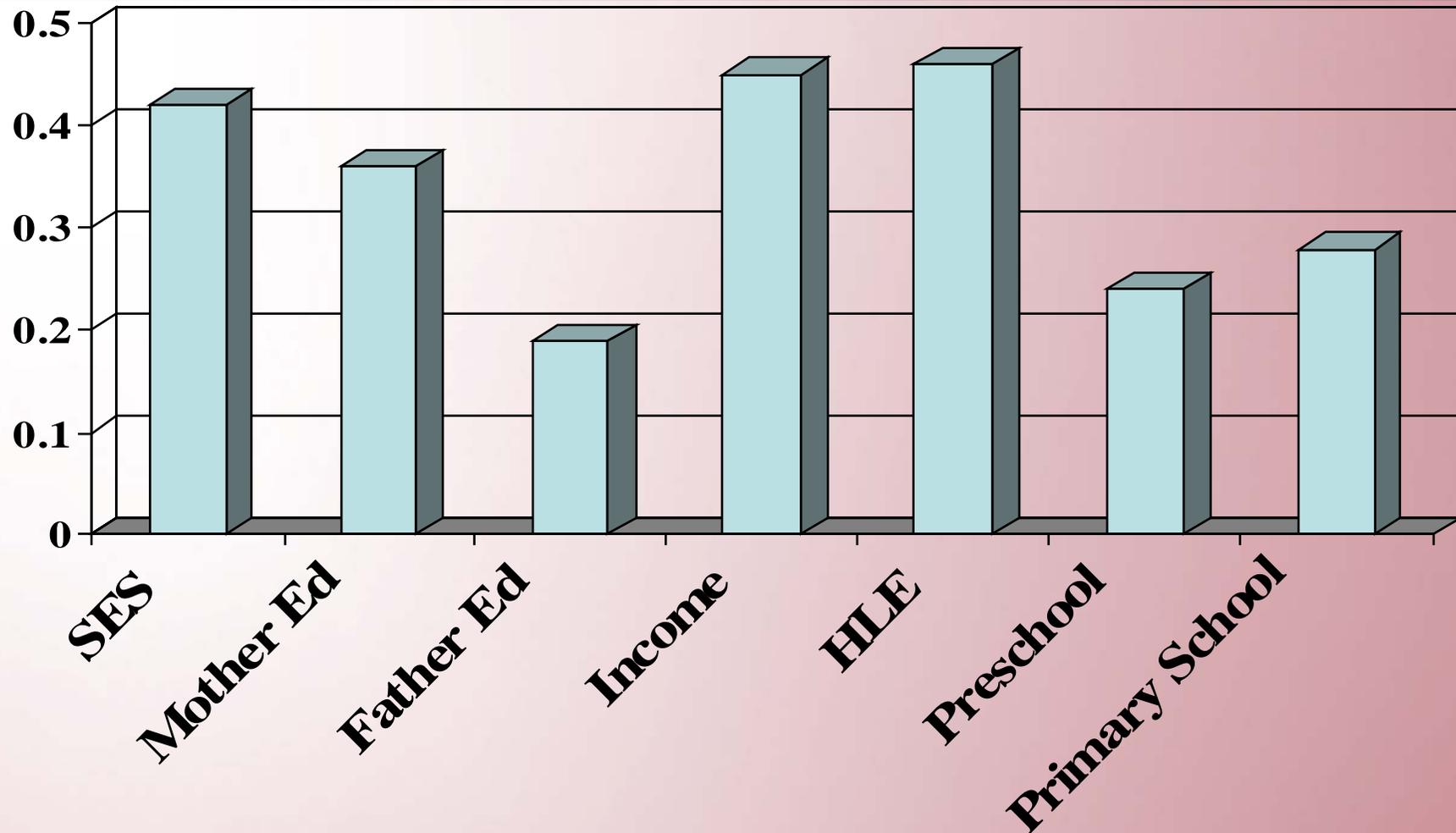
**Produce measure of school effectiveness for every school**

- **Schools where children make greater progress than predicted are *more effective*.**
- **Schools where children make less progress than predicted are *less effective*.**

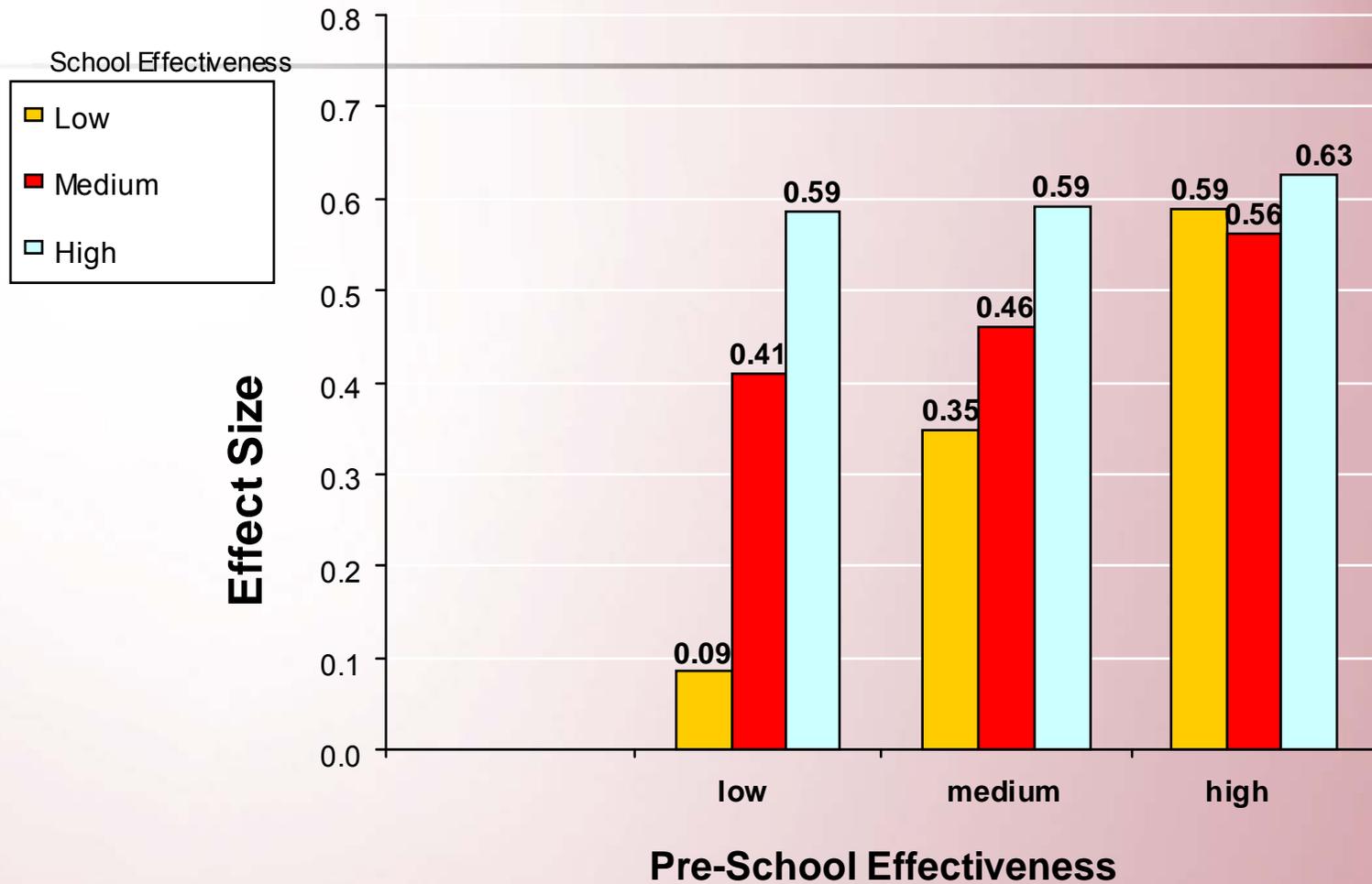
# Modelling Age 11 outcomes



# Effects upon child achievement -age 11

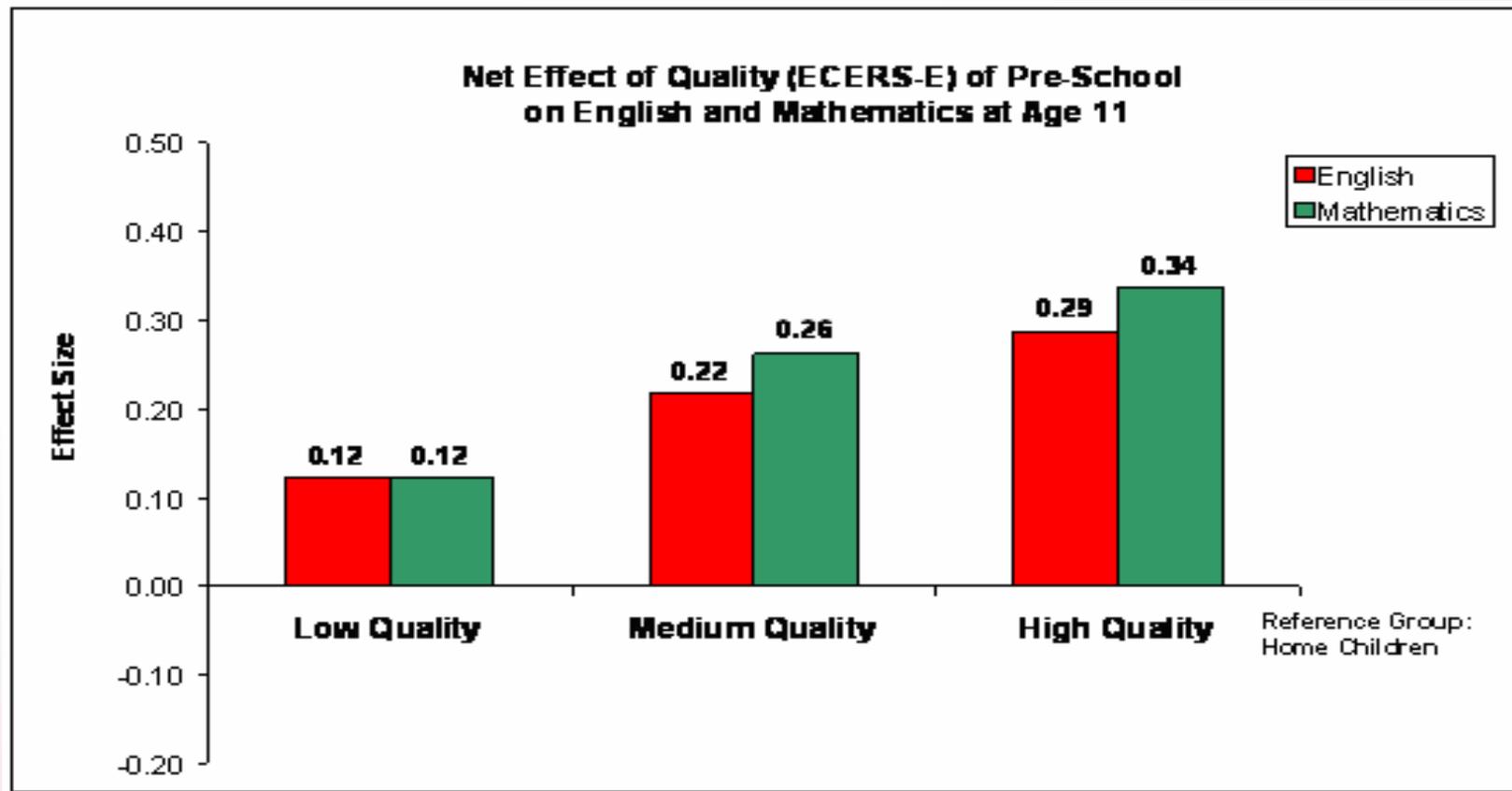


# Combined Impact of Pre- and Primary School - Maths

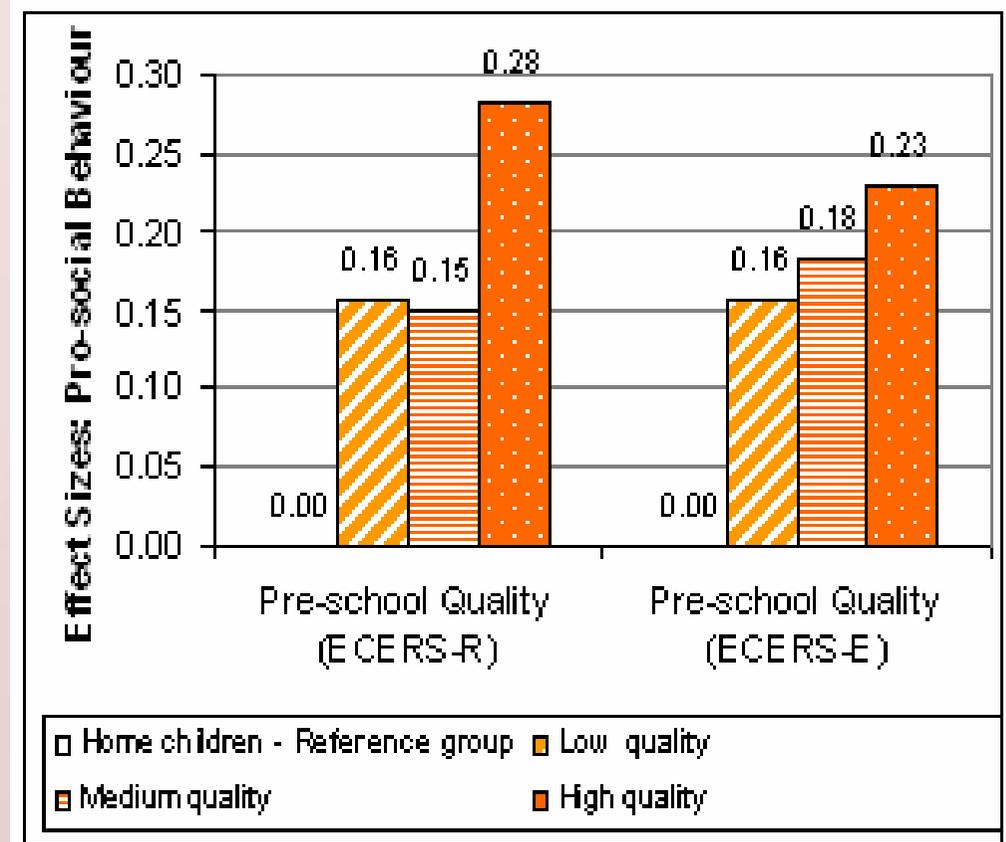
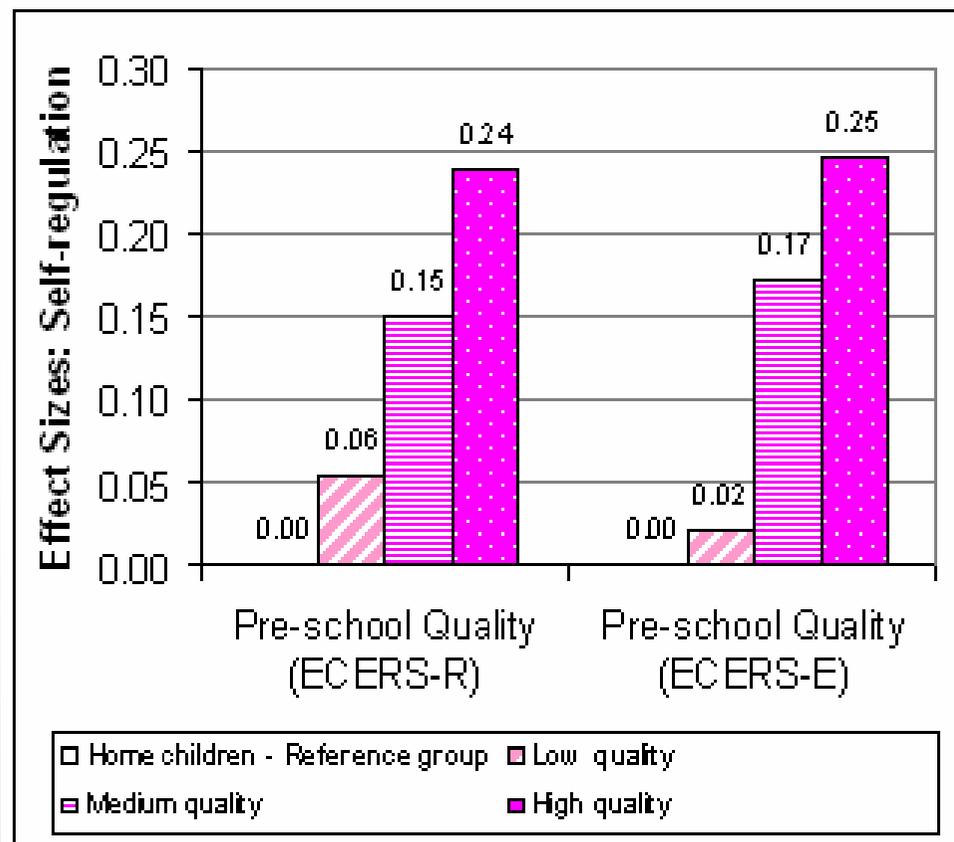


Reference Group: No Pre-School and low Primary School Effectiveness

# The impact of **Pre-school Quality** on English and Maths At age 11



# The impact of Pre-school Quality on Self-regulation and Pro-social behaviour at age 11



# What matters

3 elements that can lead to educational success

**Good Home Learning Environment** (pp. pre-school)

**Good Pre-schools** for longer duration

**Good Primary schools**

Those children with all 3 will out-perform those with 2  
who will out-perform those with 1  
who will out-perform those with 0  
All other things being equal

# Conclusions



- From age 2 all children benefit from pre-school.
- The quality of preschool matters.
- The duration of preschool matters in the early school years.
- Part-time preschool equal benefit to full-time.
- Quality of quality preschool effects persist until age 11 on.
- High quality preschool can protect a child from consequences of attending low effective school.

## EPPE results have influenced policy.



- Retention of nursery schools
- Free part-time pre-school for all 3 & 4 year-olds (2004)
- Extension of parental leave (2004)
- 10-year Childcare Strategy (2004)
- Guidance for Children's Centres (2005)
- Childcare Bill (2006)
- Acceptance that money spent on pre-school produces savings later

# UK Policy Developments since 1997



- Importance of early years recognised by politicians
- Separate services in education childcare and social services now under Minister for Children
- Sure Start has been welcomed
- Children's centres are developing  
3500 by 2010
- Free part-time pre-school for 3 and 4 year olds
- More childcare provision
- Parental leave to be 12 months

For more information see



[www.ness.bk.ac.uk](http://www.ness.bk.ac.uk)

[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)

[www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/projects/eppe)