

## **British Association for Neonatal Neurodevelopmental Follow-Up – Written evidence (PRT0070)**

### **Summary:**

1. Being born preterm (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) can adversely affect school performance and academic achievement throughout childhood. Children born even a few weeks too early are less likely to achieve expected levels of attainment at age 7 and 11, and are more likely to have Special Educational Needs provision than those born at 40 weeks of gestation. Many children born preterm require additional educational support throughout their education.
2. Most children start school in reception in September (although this varies as education is a devolved issue) but there is no legal requirement to start school until a child has reached compulsory school age. Although it is possible to start reception at the age of five rather than four years, many admission authorities do not allow this in practice and schools may be reluctant to support application to delay or defer school entry. There is variation in the process involved in applying for, and being granted delayed or deferred school entry between the nations and across admission authorities.
3. Some children who were born preterm may benefit from starting school in reception later than the usual year of entry.

### **Evidence:**

4. Children born preterm are less likely to achieve the expected standard in Maths and English at age 11. Alterman et al found that 17.7% of all children born preterm had not achieved the expected level in Key Stage 2 SATs (standardised assessments) in both English and Mathematics and this proportion increased with increasing prematurity (1). In a study including over 300,000

children in England 7.6% of full-term children failed to achieve the expected level in KS1 but this increased to 50% at 24 weeks gestation; a similar pattern was seen at KS2 (2).

5. Gestation at delivery is strongly linked with the need for additional educational provision (3). Children defined as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) at any time during primary school range from 29% at full term to 82.6% at 24 weeks (2,)
6. At the age of 16, children born preterm are less likely than those born at full term to achieve 5 GCSE passes (defined as a grade A\*-C or a grade 9-4), including English and Mathematics (1).
7. There is a clear pattern by month of birth, whereby summer-born children (irrespective of being born preterm or having SEN) are less likely to achieve expected levels of educational achievement (2). It is estimated that around 10,000 summer-born children each year do not achieve five A\*-C grades at GCSE - because they are the youngest in their year (4). This is exacerbated by being born preterm in summer months.
8. Preterm children are often enrolled in school a year earlier than would be expected if they had been born around their expected date of delivery (EDD or due date). This is because decisions regarding school starting age are usually based on actual date of birth rather than EDD. An extreme example is a baby born at 22 weeks' gestation on 31<sup>st</sup> August with an EDD of 1<sup>st</sup> January – this child would start school in September at the age of just 4 years of age which is only 3 years 8 months after their EDD. Had they been born around their EDD they would start the following school year at the age of 4 years 8 months.
9. Unsurprisingly, preterm, summer-born children have an increased likelihood of not achieving expected educational achievement (2, 5, 6, 7)

10. Children born preterm in summer months with an expected delivery month of August 2005 had an adjusted relative risk of 2.70 (95% CI 2.52, 2.89) for not achieving expected levels of attainment at Key Stage 1, compared with an expected delivery month of September 2004 (2)
11. A study based on the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) investigating low Key Stage 1 scores (KS1) or having special educational needs (SEN) at age 7 also looked at data pertaining to expected date of delivery (EDD) and year of school entry. Odd et al found that year of school entry appeared to modify the association between gestational age and the risk of a poor KS1 score. School year placement and assessment of ex-preterm infants based on their actual birthday (rather than their EDD) may increase their risk of learning difficulties with corresponding school failure (5).
12. Further data from ALSPAC showed lower scores at KS4 or higher likelihood of receiving SEN support at age 16 for children born preterm but this was attenuated in those who were enrolled in the same school year as term children matched for EDD (6); going to school a year earlier than predicted by due date has measurable consequences for children born preterm which lasts at least until adolescence and is likely to limit adult opportunities.
13. Using data from the Born in Bradford longitudinal birth cohort, Pettinger et al investigated the impact of gestational and school-entry age on the likelihood of failing to achieve a 'Good Level of Development' (GLD) on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile in 5-year-old children born moderate-to-late preterm. Children starting school a year earlier than anticipated during pregnancy were less likely to achieve a GLD compared with (i) other children born preterm (ii) term summer births and (iii) preterm summer births who remained within their anticipated school-entry year

(according to EDD). The odds of not attaining a GLD increased with each successive week born early and for each month younger within the year group. They concluded there is a “double disadvantage” created by starting school a year earlier than anticipated during pregnancy, due to being born preterm (7).

14. There is no standard process for starting school across the UK because education is a devolved issue, hence there is significant variation and consequent inequality in developmental and educational outcomes. Scotland gives parents and carers the legal right for deferred entry (meaning delaying to the following year) whereas processes for application for delayed entry are more complicated in England and Wales; in Northern Ireland, under current laws, children must start school at the age of 4, meaning that there is no way of delaying or deferring unless there is a statement of educational needs already in existence.
15. Application to delay starting school can be complicated and varies from one admission authority to another; the outcome depends on the admission authority. The support of headteachers and schools is also required. A successful application for delayed school starting also depends on the case put forward by parents and carers. Although there is guidance from both government sources and Bliss (8), evidence accompanying the application (reports from healthcare providers, nursery and preschools, together with the parent’s concerns) will often be influenced by ethnic and socioeconomic factors which frequently underlie preterm birth; thus potentially contributing further to inequality.

### **Recommendations:**

16. Change the school admissions code to allow parents of all preterm children to make the decision when their child starts school if their

date of birth and EDD fall in different school years, without having to collect evidence supporting their application (other than EDD). If it is their choice to delay starting in reception then the child will automatically be allowed to do so; only one application should be necessary.

17. Standardise admission procedures (and terminology) across admission authorities and work with devolved nations to ensure that policies are equitable and preterm children are not disadvantaged according to location.
18. Ensure the code states that if children start school in a year outside their 'normal' year group they will be guaranteed to start in reception and continue with that cohort throughout their entire education.

## **References:**

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