

The Adoption Research Initiative Briefing Paper

1. Introduction

The Government is mounting a new research initiative to contribute to the monitoring of its adoption project and evaluation of the implementation of the *Adoption and Children Act 2002* and related policy initiatives. The research and dissemination budget for the initiative will be £1.5m over a period of 3 years.

Background

In 2000 the Prime Minister announced a governmental review of adoption policy and practice. The Cabinet Office's *Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU)* undertook the review and the results were published in July 2000¹ in the form of a consultation document. A White Paper on adoption reform² quickly followed, with a commitment by the government to legislate. The *Adoption and Children Act 2002* received Royal Assent in November 2002. The phased implementation of the *Adoption and Children Act 2002* has already begun.

The *PIU's* report acknowledged that, "...adoption of children from care in the 21st century is less about providing homes for relinquished babies and more concerned with providing secure, permanent relationships for some of society's most vulnerable children". It identified a range of concerns about adoption policy and practice, the most significant of which were:

- The number of children adopted out of care was falling and the number of children being looked after for longer than two years was rising.
- There was a wide variation in adoption practice across authorities. The percentage of children placed for adoption from care ranged from 1% in some authorities to 10% in others. This was not due solely to the profile, needs, and complexity of needs of the children.
- There was also great variance across the country in the provision and use of adoption support, particularly in relation to the means testing and provision of adoption allowances.
- There were delays at all points in the process of planning for permanence for looked after children.

Challenging targets have been set to increase the number of children adopted from care. These targets were most recently set out in the DH's *Priorities and Planning Framework 2003-2006*. They are to:

Maintain current levels of adoption placement stability (as measured by the proportion of placements for adoption ending with the making of an adoption order) so that quality is not compromised whilst increasing the use of adoption as follows:

- *By 2004-05 increase by 40% the number of looked after children*

¹ *Prime Minister's Review: Adoption: issued for consultation*, a Performance and Innovation Unit Report, July 2000.

² *Adoption a new approach: A White Paper*, Cm 5017, Department of Health, December 2000.

who are adopted, and aim to exceed this by achieving, if possible, a 50% increase by 2006, up from 2700 in 1999-00. All councils will bring their practice up to the current levels of the best performers (band 4 or 5 on PSS indicator C23).

- *By 2004-05 increase to 95% the proportion of looked after children placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision that adoption is in the child's best interests, up from 81% in 2000-01, and maintain this level (95%), up to 2006, by locally applying the timescales in the National Adoption Standards, taking account of the child's needs.*

These targets are being supported not only through the measures in the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*, but also by a wider set of initiatives:

- The introduction of National Adoption Standards, published in August 2001, set out what all stakeholders should expect from an adoption service.
- Also the introduction of National Minimum Standards for adoption services provided by local authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies which were published earlier in 2003 to support the regulation of the adoption service by the National Care Standards Commission.
- The Government and the courts have established specialist adoption centres where those experienced in this area of work hear proceedings with the aim of reducing delay. Active case management and tracking of cases was introduced from January 2002.
- An Adoption Register for England and Wales was set up in August 2001 to hold information on children and adoptive parents, to help adoption agencies in making matches. It is now fully operational and the first annual report was published in May 2003.
- An *Adoption and Permanence Taskforce* was set up to support local Councils to improve their practice. It has: worked directly with a large number of councils to audit current practice and suggest service development improvements; pursued a programme of development work in relation to other aspects of the adoption system including working with the courts; published two annual reports (October 2001, October 2002); and published a range of best-practice materials. An advisory *Adoption and Permanence Partnership Council* supports the work of the *Taskforce* and the wider adoption project team.
- Following the implementation of the *Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act (1999)*, on 1 June 2003 the UK ratified the 1993 Hague Convention on the protection of children and co-operation in respect of intercountry adoption.

The main aims of the recent policy and legislative changes are to:

- Focus on planning for permanence for looked after children.
- Increase the number of children adopted from or otherwise placed permanently out of care.
- Reduce delay in the relevant social work and court processes.
- Improve adoption services, particularly support services.
- Put the needs and rights of the child at the centre of the adoption process.

Overall aim of the research initiative

The overall aim of the research initiative is to examine the impact of *the Government's adoption project, including the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and its underpinning suite of regulations and guidance* on the quality of services for children who are adopted or placed in other permanent placements. More specifically the initiative will examine how the objectives of the project are being translated into practice. It will evaluate some of the changes in policies, procedures and practice introduced in response to the changes. The initiative will include the assessment of *outcomes* for children and their families in relation to their welfare and quality of life.

The initiative will be part of an on-going evaluation strategy including inputs from statistical collection, performance management, surveys of workforce and consumer perceptions, and inspections. (see <http://www.doh.gov.uk/adoption/>). It will also complement other recently-reported and current Government-funded research on the full range of placements for looked after children including kinship care, foster care, residential care, private fostering and return home (see Annex 1 and 2).

2. Introduction to the Research Requirement

There are several recently reported and on-going studies, funded by the Government and other bodies such as the *Nuffield Foundation*, that have informed the recent adoption policy and legislative developments. However, the Government requires additional research to address particular issues related to the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*. This additional research is described below. The Government's research requirement, and the priorities within it, has been informed by:

- A *Review of recent legislative and policy documents relating to adoption and permanence*, commissioned by the Department of Health's Research and Development Division.³
- A *Scoping and scanning review of research on adoption of looked after children*⁴, commissioned by the Social Care Institute of Excellence.
- A mapping exercise of recently-published and ongoing studies⁵.
- *Adoption Now: Messages from Research*⁶, an overview of DH-funded studies on adoption undertaken in the mid- to late-1990's.

It also takes into account ongoing Government-funded studies relating to adoption and permanence within the *Costs and effectiveness of services for children in need* research initiative; the *Quality Protects* research initiative, and other Government-funded research at Loughborough University's *Centre for the child and family research* and the *Institute of Psychiatry* (see Annex 1 and 2). As noted above, the Government is keen that any new work should complement this recently- and currently-funded research on the full range of placements for looked after children and studies that concentrate on kinship care, foster care, residential care, private fostering or return home

3. The Research Requirement

The requirement set out below suggests topics and detailed research questions that are of particular interest. It is important that studies consider how these topics and questions relate to each other. Proposals that link one or more of the listed topics would be especially welcome. Studies that examine factors beyond those that are immediately apparent would also be particularly welcome. Proposals are sought that seek to cast these topics and questions into their wider contexts.

The Government will also consider proposals for studies on additional under-researched topics that will inform the development of adoption and permanence policy and practice and contribute to the evaluation of the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*. Such proposals should make a strong case for the need for the research in relation to the *Act* and the *Adoption Standards*. It is particularly important for these proposals to explain how their proposed research will make new contributions to policy and service developments.

Both formative and summative research is required (see Annex 3).

³ The review was undertaken by the Hadley Centre for Adoption and Foster Care Studies, University of Bristol.

⁴ *The Adoption of Looked After Children: A Scoping Review of Research*, Alan Rushton, 2003, Social Care Institute for Excellence, London.

⁵ The mapping exercise was undertaken by Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, London.

⁶ *Adoption Now: Messages from Research*, Roy Parker, 1999, Wiley.

Overarching issues

There are some overarching issues that all studies within the initiative should seek to address. These are:

- the needs of:
 - older children,
 - sibling groups,
 - black and ethnic minority children and their families, and
 - children with disabilities.

(It is important that studies are much more specific than hitherto about the *categories* that make up these general groups.)

- user and carer involvement, and
- inter-agency working between statutory services, including health, education and social services and between statutory and voluntary organisations.

Other key issues to be addressed, where appropriate, are corporate parenting, and assessment, planning, intervention and review processes.

Topic 1 Increasing the number of children adopted and in legally secure permanent placements

Local authority and court statistical returns show that the number of children being adopted out of care has risen rapidly since the introduction of targets⁷. 3,400 children were adopted from care in 2001/2, 25% more than in 1999/00 when the targets were introduced. This represents about 5% of the total looked-after population. The majority (60%) of adopted children were aged 1-4 years and 29% aged 5-9 years. The average age at adoption is currently 4.5 years.

The Government is interested in how this increase in the number of children adopted from care is being achieved and, more particularly, how local social work policies and practices are changing to contribute to this increase⁸. The Government is also interested in local authorities' assessments of the impact of the changes on disruption rates.

More particularly, the Government has identified groups of research questions relating to local authorities, children and adopters. These detailed and suggested questions are set out below. In addressing such questions the research should focus on the period since the beginning of the adoption and permanence project and the introduction of the targets:

⁷ <http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0224.htm>.

⁸ New research should build upon and update Nigel Lowe and Mervyn Murch *et al's* DH-funded study *The Plan for the Child: Adoption or long-term fostering*, BAAF, 2002.

Local authorities

- Has the variation in the use of adoption between local authorities diminished? If so, what factors have contributed to this reduction in variation? If not, what factors are hindering more consistent practice?
- What distinguishes particularly high from low scoring authorities in their approach to delivering adoption services?
- What arrangements have been introduced to promote placement choice, including consortia arrangements? How effective are such arrangements? What impact do they have on day-to-day practice?
- What has been done differently in local authorities that have increased rates of adoption from care? For instance, have targeted recruitment, different approaches to preparation and assessment of adopters, and the availability of more or better adoption support had a role to play in this? Have other factors been more important? Are new practices being sustained?
- How are local authorities ensuring that adoption is being considered as a placement option when it is appropriate to do so?
- Has the existence of adoption targets and the focus on planning for permanence influenced and changed social work attitudes in relation to adoption?
- Have other key professionals' attitudes to adoption changed, such as those of children's guardians?

The children

- Have there been changes in the needs, complexity of needs or profile of the children who are considered by adoption panels?
- Is there any evidence of an upper limit in terms of the numbers of children in any one year for whom adoption from care will be in their best interests? If so, what is upper limit and what factors might influence this limit in the future?
- Why do some children who have a 'best interest' decision for adoption wait for more than 12 months after the 'best interest' decision has been made?
- What proportion of looked after children with a 'best interest' decision for adoption have never been placed? Why have they never been placed? What are the consequences for those children?
- What are the needs, profiles, and characteristics of those children who wait the longest for adoptive families?
- What are the most effective strategies for placing "harder to place" children
- What were the needs, profiles and characteristics of those who are never placed?

The adopters

- What is the size and what are the characteristics of the 'pool' of potential adopters?
- What factors, such as household mobility and the state of local labour markets, have an impact on the 'pool' of potential adopters?

More particularly:

- Are the profiles and characteristics changing of those coming forward to adopt? If so, are those coming forward more representative of wider society than they have been in the past? Are there, for instance, more single parents, unmarried couples, gay or lesbian adopters, people with disabilities, younger or older adopters, and experienced parents?
- Have the targets had an effect on how Councils with Social Services Responsibilities (CSSRs) and voluntary agencies view different 'types' of prospective adopters?
- Have new methods to recruit adopters been introduced? If so, how successful are they, particularly in reaching groups of under-represented potential adopters? Has the Government's *Adopter Recruitment Toolkit* been used and, if so, to what effect?
- To what extent is the increase in adoptions due to foster carers legally confirming established placements by means of adoption? Are foster carers being encouraged to adopt? How does this relate to the supply of foster carers?
- To what extent are adopters showing a willingness to adopt children who may be 'harder to place'?

Topic 2 Special guardianship

The Standards, the targets and the *Act* all promote other ways, in addition to adoption, to secure placements and improve outcomes for looked after children who cannot return home, including the introduction of the new special guardianship order. The Government is interested in funding a small piece of work to explore how CSSRs are preparing for the introduction of the new special guardianship order. The work should also explore which young people are most likely to benefit from the new order. (It is suggested that reference be made to Emma Bullard, Ellen Malos and Roy Parker's study of Custodianship and work being funded by the Nuffield Foundation.)⁹

Topic 3 Preparation of adopters

The Government is aware of the development of new pre-placement preparation programmes for groups of prospective adopters provided by CSSRs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies. The Government is keen to evaluate such programmes using a research design that will explore whether particular preparation programmes are more effective in achieving secure placements than others. It is particularly keen to receive proposals for studies on this topic with experimental or quasi-experimental designs.

⁹ *Custodianship: Caring for other people's children*, Emma Bullard, Ellen Malos and Roy Parker, 1991, The Stationery Office.

Topic 4 Assessment of adopters

The recent consultation paper *Adopter Preparation and Assessment: A Fundamental Review* suggests that throughout the country the process of assessment should be made more consistent by setting out the range of issues that should be explored by social workers in the assessment of prospective adopters. The *Adoption Standards* require CSSRs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies to be open and transparent about the purpose and content of the assessment and to provide information both about the children waiting and, when a match is made, about the child's history and needs. Draft regulations and guidance setting out the principles of adopter assessment under the new Act have recently been published¹⁰.

Work is required to examine the fairness, consistency and transparency of prospective adopter assessments, with a view to identifying the best assessment models in terms of placement outcomes. The Government is also interested in funding research to examine how CSSRs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies are preparing to bring their systems of assessment up to the level of the best.

Topic 5 Reducing delays in the adoption process

Delays in social work and court adoption processes influence the possibility of adoptive families being found for children and placements remaining intact. Delays in the provision of other services, such as health and education, also have an impact. Research has suggested that for every year of delay the chances of being adopted are reduced by 20%¹¹. Furthermore, the older the child is at placement the more likely it is that the placement will disrupt. The *Adoption and permanence project* has introduced a raft of interventions aimed at tackling delay in the process. The Government is interested in funding research to examine the effectiveness of these interventions, particularly the introduction of timescales, different working practices and a strengthened focus on planning for permanence. The research should examine the impact of these interventions on outcomes for children. The Government would be particularly interested proposals on this topic that suggest an experimental or quasi-experimental design.

Topic 6 Improving adoption support services

Rushton and Dance¹² in their recent review of adoption support research found that adoption support has been inconsistently and inadequately provided for many families. It has also been unevenly available geographically. Access to specialist psychological services and short-break care has been difficult to obtain.

¹⁰ See <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/consultation2/29/>

¹¹ *The Plan for the Child: Adoption or long-term fostering*, Nigel Lowe, Mervyn Murch *et al*, BAAF, 2002.

¹² *Adoption support services for families in difficulty: A literature review and UK survey*, Alan Rushton and Cherilyn Dance, BAAF, 2002.

The Government views adoption support services as key to the new approach to adoption and permanence planning. It recognises that to increase the number of children adopted from care there needs to be a substantial increase in the quality and extent of adoption support services. From April 2003 adoption support services will be backed up by £70 million in ring-fenced funding over three years. Detailed regulations and guidance setting out the component parts of the first phase of a new national framework for adoption support were published in May 2003 and will come into effect from October 2003. In phase one, adoptive families will be able to request an assessment of their need for adoption support services and there will be a new requirement for CSSRs to provide an adoption support services adviser for adoptive families. The new regulations also specify a set of services that CSSRs must provide as part of their adoption support service. These policy changes will add momentum to the substantial changes, identified by Rushton and Dance, already taking place within agencies.

The Government is currently jointly funding with the *Nuffield Foundation* a randomised-controlled trial of routine adoption support services compared with two specific interventions with adoptive placements. The Government is keen to complement this with a study that will identify and compare areas where adoption support services are organised differently. The study should compare levels of user satisfaction, service effectiveness and costs. It should also explore the following questions:

- How well are the new regulations and guidance understood by agencies? How comprehensively and effectively are the new regulations and guidance being implemented?
- How is the adoption support grant being used? How are the new rules relating to financial support being implemented? Are more adoptive families receiving lump sums than in the past? Are more adoptive families being advised of applicable benefits and tax-breaks than in the past?
- How are assessments of need for adoption support services being approached? Are they being followed by appropriate services?
- How are existing services being changed or supplemented as a result of the new requirements?
- How are other agencies, e.g. health and education, participating in arranging packages of adoption support?
- How is the adoption support services adviser role being developed? Is the role having an impact on the way that all those involved in adoption communicate with each other?
- What services are being provided to those who experience the disruption of a placement?

Topic 7 Birth parents

The National Adoption Standards also outline entitlement for birth families to support services. In addition they state that birth parents should have their own support worker who is not their child or children's social worker.

To help inform the development of future services, a cross-agency evaluation of existing specialist support services to birth parents is needed. The Government is keen to find out 'what works?' and 'why does it work?' The evaluation should consider the impact of the services on the outcomes for birth parents, but also seek to consider whether support services for birth parents can impact upon outcomes for their adopted children. The evaluation should particularly consider the effectiveness of services provided for birth parents whose children are adopted against their wishes.

Topic 8 Children's wishes and feelings

The Adoption Standards state that, "... every child shall have his or her wishes and feelings listened to, recorded and taken into account. When they are not acted upon, the reason for doing so will be explained to the child and properly recorded"¹³. This is reiterated in relation to decisions over contact arrangements and in relation to proper preparation of the child for adoption. The Government is keen to fund research into professional practice in seeking children's wishes and feelings. The study will need to have a clear conceptual framework and explore the differences between wishes and feelings, interests, cognitive evaluations, and children's assessments of the differences between these.

The study should explore whether all children's wishes and feelings are being sought, recorded and taken into consideration in permanency planning, relevant court hearings and decision-making around contact arrangements for children placed for adoption. It should seek to answer the following questions:

- How and to what extent are children's wishes and feelings sought?
- How and to what extent are they listened to? Are their views recorded?
- How and to what extent are they taken into account in decision making?

The Government is also interested in whether children's wishes change over time and, if they do, how the changing wishes can be taken into account in decision making.

Topic 9 Ethnicity

It is estimated that 17% of the looked-after population are from ethnic minorities¹⁴ with a significant proportion of them having black mixed parentage. Evidence suggests that these children are less likely to be successfully matched and they wait longer for placements than white children¹⁵.

The *Adoption and Children Act 2002* states that in placing a child for adoption the agency must consider the child's religious, cultural and linguistic background. In addition, the National Adoption Standards state that every effort must be made to recruit sufficient adopters from diverse backgrounds, but children should not be left waiting indefinitely for a 'perfect family'.

¹³ See <http://www.doh.gov.uk/adoption/standards.htm>

¹⁴ *Prime Minister's Review: Adoption: issued for consultation*, a Performance and Innovation Unit Report, July 2000.

¹⁵ *Surveying Adoption*, Gilles Ivaldi, 2000, BAAF.

The Government is interested in how in practice CSSRs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies are balancing the requirement that due consideration be given to the child's race and culture in family finding, but not at the expense of delay. More particularly, there is interest in:

- How long CSSRs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies are waiting before they decide that children can be placed with families that do not match their cultural or racial characteristics? What sort of 'matching' tends to be associated with longer delays? Is there more scope for 'matching' *and* reducing delays?
- Whether the numbers of trans-racial placements are increasing.
- Are children from ethnic minorities still less likely than white children to be placed?
- What are children's, adopters' and birth families' views on this issue?

Topic 10 Matching

The quality of the assessment of a child's needs is crucial to placement stability. Children with different profiles and characteristics are assumed to imply different placement needs. To date, however, there has been little research about what has been taken into account in reaching particular 'matching' decisions¹⁶. A study of matching is needed which addresses the following questions:

- Who does 'matching' and how do they go about it?
- Do agencies 'match' in different ways?
- Has the *Assessment Framework*¹⁷ had an impact on 'matching'?
- What impact do the timescales have on the 'matching' process?
- To what extent do social workers have a choice of adopter for 'matching'?

The Government is also interested in the relative importance to the stability of placements of 'matching' and the availability of adoption support.

Topic 11 The management of contact

There is a dearth of research evidence on the *management and support* of contact between looked after and adopted children and their birth families. There is very little empirical research that focuses on the effectiveness of services to support contact in particularly complex situations. Situations, for instance, where there may be concerns about child protection; domestic violence; or a breakdown in a relationship between a birth family and CSSR, Voluntary Adoption Agency, carers or adoptive parents. A study is therefore needed to:

¹⁶ *Adoption Now: Messages from Research*, Roy Parker, 1999, Wiley.

¹⁷ *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*, Department of Health, 2000, The Stationery Office.

- Map CSSR and Voluntary Adoption Agency provision of support services to establish and maintain contact after adoption between children and their birth families in complex situations.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of such services, particularly in terms of the ways in which they impact on disruption rates, address child welfare and child protection issues, and deal with the termination of contact.
- Cost the provision of such services.

4. Guidance for preparing proposals

The commissioning process

The commissioning process will be in one stage. Full proposals are requested, together with three-page summaries.

A team of external referees including academic advisors, policy makers, and service and voluntary sector representatives will appraise proposals. Final decisions will be made by the Government in consultation with members of a commissioning group. Final decisions about funded projects will be made in the late spring of 2004 with the expectation that work, in most cases, will begin in the summer of 2004.

The following criteria will be used in assessing proposals:

- The scientific merit of the proposed research (including the appropriateness and innovation of the methods, sampling and plans for analysis in relation to the aims and objectives of the research and the research questions).
- The 'deliverability' of the research. The relevance of the research to the development of policy and practice.
- Plans for dissemination.
- The balance of project topics in the initiative.
- The extent to which the research will yield new knowledge.
- The extent to which the research will involve partnerships with users and service providers.
- The clarity of the proposal.

Applications

Full proposals and summaries should be submitted, on the application form provided, by 2 p.m. on 2nd March 2004, to the **Adoption research initiative, c/o Department of Health, Research and Development Division, Room 40IA Skipton House, 80 London Road, London SE1 6LH**. *Twelve copies of each proposal and outline proposal are required.* Applicants should provide 5 or 6 keywords to identify the focus of their application to be used in the selection process.

Involvement of service users and providers

Applicants need to detail the nature of their proposed collaboration with service providers and describe how they will involve service users (children and young people and their families) in and during the research process. It is acknowledged that this can be time-consuming so some allowance for this has been made in the commissioning timetable.

Dissemination

The Government attaches particular importance to effective dissemination of high quality research. It will feed emerging research findings into the development of the *Adoption and permanence project*. The Government's own dissemination strategy is likely to include the development of a web-site, the production of a regular newsletter, an annual seminar, and possibly a final overview report. Applicants are required to specify how their research team will contribute to the dissemination and implementation of research results, beyond their contribution of articles in academic journals and participation in conferences.

Annex 1

Summary of ongoing and recently-published Government-funded research relevant to the development of the specification for the Adoption Research Initiative

November 2003

RESEARCHER	TITLE	Research Initiative	Status
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Studies of different types of childcare provision			
Professor I Sinclair University of York	Patterns and explanations of placement stability and change	Quality Protects	Ongoing
Dr. H Ward University of Loughborough	Consequences of different types of child care provision	Unit Programme	Ongoing
Professor I Sinclair University of York	What happened to foster children?	Supporting parents	Reported
Dr H Ward Loughborough University	Looking After Children: Using Aggregated Data For Management Purposes	Unit Programme	Ongoing
Dr. J Statham Thomas Coram Research Unit	Trends in care: An exploration of reasons for the increase in numbers of children being looked after by local authorities	Unit Programme	Reported
Professors N Lowe & M Murch Cardiff University	The Plan For The Child: Adoption Or Long-term Care	Stand Alone	Reported

Studies of family and friends' care			
Mrs J Hunt University of Oxford	Outcomes for children placed with family and friends as a result of care proceedings	Quality Protects	Ongoing
Professor E Farmer University of Bristol	Children Placed with Relatives and Friends: Placement Patterns and Outcomes	Quality Protects	Ongoing

Studies of reunification with parents			
Professor E Farmer University of Bristol	The reunification of looked after children with their parents: patterns, interventions and outcomes.	Quality Protects	Ongoing

Studies of fostering			
Professor I Sinclair University of York	Supporting Foster Placements	Supporting Parents	Reported
Professor E Farmer University of Bristol	The Fostering Task with Difficult Adolescents: A One Year Prospective Study	Supporting Parents	Reported
Dr D Kirton University of Kent	Remuneration and Performance in Foster Care	Costs and Effectiveness	Reported

Studies of adoption			
Ms J Selwyn University of Bristol	Costs and Outcomes in Non-Infant Adoptions	Costs and Effectiveness	Reported
Dr A Rushton Institute of Psychiatry	Enhancing placement stability: A randomised controlled trial of routine services compared with two specific interventions with adoptive placements.	Quality Protects	Ongoing
Professor M Rutter Institute of Psychiatry	Research on Inter-Country Adoption	Stand Alone	Ongoing

Studies of residential care			
<i>Dr. L Hicks</i> University of York	Leadership in children's homes	Costs and Effectiveness	Reported

Studies of private fostering			
Mr. C Owen <i>Thomas Coram Research Unit</i>	A study of private foster care	Unit Programme	Ongoing

Annex 2

*Summary of ongoing and recently-published Government-funded research
relevant to the development of the specification for the
Adoption Research Initiative*

November 2003

Studies of different types of child care provision

RESEARCHER	ABSTRACT	STATUS
<p>Professor Ian Sinclair Dr Ian Gibbs</p> <p>Social Work Research and Development Unit University of York</p>	<p>Patterns and explanations of placement stability and change</p> <p>The proposed research will build on and largely replicate the classic study 'Child Care Now' (Rowe et al. 1989). It aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe key features of the current care system and, in particular, its ability to provide 'permanence' • Understand the way professionals at different levels are seeking to achieve more permanence for looked after children • Use qualitative and statistical methods to explain variations in performance measures concerned with permanence at the level of team, area, division and local authority. <p>The study will be based in 15 authorities. Intensive qualitative work, involving interviews with managers and social workers will complement a large retrospective study of the placements and moves over the past 12 months. Brief information will be gathered on the nature and quality of the placements/moves, and on the characteristics of operating units, social work teams and local authorities. Simple statistics will be used to describe the system. Multi-level modelling will allow the researchers to assess the influence on placement quality of unit, team and local authority.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Professor Ian Sinclair Dr Ian Gibbs</p> <p>Social Work Research and Development Unit University of York</p>	<p>What happens to foster children?</p> <p>This study focuses on the 'three-year careers' of a group of 596 foster children. They were first studied in 1999. This study follows their story until January 2001. It arises from concerns about the outcomes of these careers, about the explanations for these outcomes and about the feasibility of changing them.</p> <p>It considers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of placements (e.g. adoption, kinship care) do these children have in 2001? How far do these provide a 'permanent' home in which they settle and thrive? Allowing for the fact that placements take different, but overlapping, kinds of children, do some kinds of placements have better outcomes than others? What are the initial differences between children who go to different kinds of placement? What explains this distribution? Does there appear to be scope for modifying it? Within specific kinds of placement are there differences in the quality of the placement process, the security of the placement or the outcomes achieved? What explains these differences? Does there seem to be scope for improvement in these respects? 	<p>Reported</p>

<p>Dr. Harriet Ward Lisa Elson</p> <p>University of Loughborough</p> <p>Jean Soper University of Leicester</p>	<p>Consequences of different types of child care provision</p> <p>The research aims to assess how far variations in the costs of different provision for children looked after away from home is reflected in the quality of their care and developmental progress. A prospective longitudinal study is being undertaken in six local authorities, matched for similarities in the extent of deprivation and differences in the costs of placement. Six hundred looked after children aged ten and over, are being followed for two years.</p> <p>The study assesses how far placements of different cost meet the needs of subsets of children who display evidence of educational difficulty, behavioural problems, health concerns and / or significant disability, as demonstrated both by the quality of care experienced and their developmental progress. Qualitative interviews with disabled children and children not registered as disabled further inform the analysis. A decision analysis model is used to estimate the likely outcomes for children with different needs and histories whose placements vary in cost and quality.</p> <p>Outputs include a fully developed computer application for estimating the probably costs and consequences of various types of provision.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Dr Harriet Ward</p> <p>University of Loughborough</p>	<p>Looking After Children: Using Aggregated Data For Management Purposes</p> <p>The project demonstrates how the <i>Looking After Children</i> materials can provide data about the characteristics, experiences and progress of looked after children and how this can be used to monitor the effectiveness of child-care interventions, identify where improvements can be made and inform the planning of services.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Dr. June Statham</p> <p>Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London</p>	<p>Trends in care: An exploration of reasons for the increase in numbers of children being looked after by local authorities</p> <p>This study used a combination of secondary analysis of national statistics and fieldwork in selected authorities, to explore why there has been an increase in the volume of care provided by local authorities since 1996. It was commissioned by the DH in collaboration with the LGA and ADSS because of concerns about the pressure this increase was putting on children's services budgets. The key variable for the secondary analysis was the rate of increase in the number of days care provided between 1996 and 2000 for each authority. This was related to aspects of local authorities' current activity (in 2000). Visits were made to interview staff in 12 selected authorities (8 with a large increase in days care provided over this period, half of these from a high baseline in 1996 and half from a low baseline, plus 4 LAs apparently showing a decrease).</p>	<p>Reported & published</p>
<p>Professors Lowe & Murch</p> <p>Cardiff Law School Cardiff University</p>	<p>The Plan For The Child: Adoption Or Long-Term Care (Extension Of Supporting Adoption Study.)</p> <p>The project aims to examine decision making which determines whether a looked after child, who is in need of a permanent family, is fostered or adopted. The project will investigate the reasons for the apparently wide variation in local authorities' use of adoption. It will also examine the issue of delay in the adoption process. This study is particularly relevant to <i>Quality Protects</i> objectives relating to stability of placement.</p>	<p>Reported & published</p>

Studies of family and friends' care

<p>Mrs Joan Hunt</p> <p>Department of Social Policy and Social Work University of Oxford</p>	<p>Outcomes for children placed with family and friends as a result of care proceedings</p> <p>This study will examine outcomes for children placed with members of their extended families or social networks, focusing on children placed as the result of court proceedings brought because of child protection concerns. The overall purpose is to assess the extent to which such placements deliver Objective 1 of the QP – secure attachment to safe and effective carers – to inform the development of QP, at both central and local government levels, in relation to this placement option.</p> <p>The project will follow-up an existing cohort sample of 77 children, from two local authorities, placed with kin at the end of care proceedings completing between 1995 and 1999. This will be supplemented by a new fifth year sample of around 23 cases, from the same authorities, from proceedings ending in 1999-2000. Outcome data will therefore be available for between three and seven years post-proceedings, spanning the introduction of QP and providing the largest post-Children Act sample of children placed with kin.</p> <p>Data will be collected from Social Services records, interviews with carers, children and parents in continuing and terminated placements, interviews with social workers and the application of standardised tests.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Professor Elaine Farmer</p> <p>School for Policy Studies University of Bristol</p>	<p>Children Placed with Relatives and Friends: Placement Patterns and Outcomes</p> <p>The aim of the study is to provide a clear picture of the current use of placements with relatives and friends in a range of local authorities in the UK, to examine the issues for the placed children, their birth parents, the caregivers and social workers and to compare the characteristics and outcomes of children placed with relatives/friends with those placed with unrelated carers.</p> <p>The first part of the study is being conducted in four local authorities through an analysis of case files and will provide a clear picture of the current use of relative/friend placements in these local authorities, the administrative and legal categories used and their relationship with payment and support for caregivers. In addition, relative/friend placements will be compared with those with unrelated carers for children of all ages on a number of dimensions.</p> <p>In the second part of the study a sub-sample of 50 children aged five or over who are in relative/friend placements will be selected. Interviews will be conducted with the children, their caregivers, parents and social workers and a number of standardised measures will be used. The findings will provide detailed information about the benefits and disadvantages of placements with relatives/friends from the perspectives of the main participants and will examine which factors relate to the success or failure of these placements. In addition, the placements with relative/friends will be considered on a range of dimensions, in particular the progress and 'outcomes' of placements, contact issues, support to the caregivers, placement duration and satisfaction and disruption rates.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Studies of reunification with parents

<p>Professor Elaine Farmer Dr Theresa O'Neill</p> <p>School for Policy Studies University of Bristol</p>	<p>The reunification of looked after children with their parents: patterns, interventions and outcomes.</p> <p>Part 1 will be conducted in four local authorities through an analysis of the case files of 300 children returned to a parent from care during a one-year period. A range of data will be recorded over a two-year follow-up period from the index return.</p> <p>In Part 11, from this sample two groups of 50 children will be identified for comparison (100 in all), the first will have experienced successful and the second failed returns on the study's outcome measures. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with the children, their parents and social workers on the decisions, management, support and progress of the returns and their endings.</p> <p>Multivariate analysis of these data will provide detailed information about reunification outcomes, patterns of return within children's care histories and the key factors that distinguish successful from unsuccessful reunification. They will also show which factors lead to some children oscillating in and out of care and the characteristics of children and families for whom return is highly problematic. The interviews with children and parents will explore the impacts of reunification experiences including repeated failed return, the understandings formed about these and which interventions help to reduce any negatives effects.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
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Studies of fostering

<p>Professor Ian Sinclair Dr. Ian Gibbs</p> <p>Social Work Research and Development Unit University of York</p>	<p>Supporting Foster Placements</p> <p>The three year study has followed-up 596 children and young people who were in foster care in January 1998 when they and their carers first took part in an earlier study ('Supporting Foster Placements' - funded under the 'Parenting' initiative). The present study aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * trace where the children and young people are now * establish how they are getting on in terms of different outcomes (e.g. 'permanency', what the different parties want, schooling etc) * determine what explains these outcomes. 	<p>Reported</p>
<p>Professor Elaine Farmer</p> <p>School for Policy Studies University of Bristol</p>	<p>The Fostering Task with Difficult Adolescents: A One Year Prospective Study</p> <p>Aims are: to analyse the caretaking task for foster carers looking after difficult adolescents; to examine the relationship between foster carers' caretaking approaches and skills, and the stability and effectiveness of placements; and to determine the formal and informal supports that foster carers actually use and those that they require. The findings of the study will provide evidence about the key requirements for training, support services and the selection of foster carers who look after difficult adolescents.</p>	<p>Reported</p>

<p>Dr Derek Kirton</p> <p>Darwin College University of Kent</p>	<p>Remuneration and Performance in Foster Care</p> <p>The principal aim of the project is to explore in-depth the relationship between remuneration and other resources available to foster carers and the performance of fostering services. The context is set by the very wide variations in levels and systems of payment for foster carers, and differences of philosophy (i.e. whether foster care should be seen as an essentially voluntary activity or a job). Equally important is the perceived crisis in foster care, of recruitment and retention, placement breakdowns, and failure to meet children’s needs, in education or preparation for leaving care.</p> <p>The proposed research seeks to explore different patterns of resource allocation (with particular reference to remuneration) from the perspectives of carers, workers and managers and their relationship to key performance indicators for fostering services.</p> <p>The research will take place over two stages as follows: Stage 1: analysis of remuneration and performance data on foster care from all local authorities in England to identify at the ‘macro’ level.</p> <p>Stage 2: detailed investigation to take place in 20 agencies (to include 3-4 independent fostering agencies), comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data on agency performance indicators • semi-structured interviews with service managers <p>focus group discussion with family placement workers and foster carers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • questionnaire for foster carers (sample c.2,000) 	<p>Reported</p>
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Studies of adoption

<p>Ms Julie Selwyn</p> <p>School for Policy Studies University of Bristol</p>	<p>Costs and Outcomes in Non-Infant Adoptions</p> <p>This study will employ a catch-up prospective design to examine the care costs and psychosocial outcomes of a complete epidemiologically-based sample of children who underwent medical assessment prior to adoption between the ages of 3 and 8 inclusive, and who will be between the ages of 12 & 17 at the time of follow-up. Carers will be traced and interviewed to establish the type and length of all contracts with agencies (including health, mental health education and criminal justice) since the medical. Estimates of sample size yield approximately 90 adoptive placements and 45 assessed but not finally adopted. This group will be used to determine why some children are adopted and some are not as well as providing some comparison with the adopted group for children taking other routes through the care system. In addition, estimates of the costs of the children's family service involvement in the period from birth to the medical, as identified from social service records, will be calculated to assess the economic and psychosocial costs of placement delays.</p> <p>Questionnaire measures of psychosocial adjustment following the 7 dimensions in the Looking After Children system will be taken. Psychosocial costs and benefits for the adoptive parents will also be measured.</p> <p>The use of post-adoption support services and their contribution to placement stability and psychosocial outcomes for children and adoptive parents will be a central feature of the study.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
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<p>Dr .Alan Rushton</p> <p>Institute of Psychiatry</p> <p>Dr. Elizabeth Monck</p> <p>Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London</p>	<p>Enhancing placement stability: A randomised controlled trial of routine services compared with two specific interventions with adoptive placements</p> <p>The study is intended to evaluate two intervention programmes. The primary hypothesis to be tested is that either a cognitive behavioural parenting programme, or an educational programme about parenting special needs children, when added to the routine service, will be more effective at enhancing parenting and reducing the children’s problems than the routine service alone.</p> <p>Two contrasting interventions to help with parenting will be provided in addition to the routine social work service and the effects will be compared with routine service alone. The interventions are both directed at helping the new parents to manage difficulties in the newly-placed children. Manuals will be developed for each intervention and the delivery will be monitored for fidelity to the programme aims. The content, quantity and quality of ongoing routine service in all the groups will also be documented.</p> <p>The sample will comprise 150 selected cases where a given level of difficulty in the child is present in the course of the first year of placement. With prior agreement, these cases will be randomly allocated to one of two intervention conditions or a routine service group. The latter will be offered one of the additional interventions after the end of the initial trial. Data on the new intervention groups will be collected prior to, immediately following and 6 months after the intervention. The sample will be as homogenous as possible, offering the maximum opportunity to estimate treatment effects. Placements of both boys and girls will be included with an age range of between 3-7 at placement and at entry to the study. Measures will be derived from assessments of the stability of the placement, parenting skill, the children’s and adopter’s psychological well-being, children’s behaviour and pro-social skills, satisfaction with service and the comparative costs. Effects will be made to describe the diversity in the children’s backgrounds and variations in the characteristics of the new families and the analysis of outcomes will take account of factors the have the potential to confound the findings. Qualitative data will be used to gain a better understanding of the relation between the interventions and outcome. Costs will be calculated and related to outcome.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Professor Michael Rutter</p> <p>Institute of Psychiatry</p>	<p>Research on Inter-Country Adoption</p> <p>This study will investigate the social and intellectual development of 157 children adopted into England from Romania under the age of 42 months together with the factors associated with developmental recovery. In order to assess the possible importance of age at placement, the sample has been stratified according to age at entry to the UK; also it has been balanced for gender. The assessment methods will include interviews with mothers concerning the placement history, the child’s history and adjustment/parenting strategies and behaviours and the impact of placement in family life.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>

Studies of residential care

<p>Dr Leslie Hicks</p> <p>Social Work Research Unit University of York</p>	<p>Leadership Resources and Efficiency in Children's Homes</p> <p>The study will involve 30 local authority and 15 independent homes in 5 local authorities. It will describe and, where appropriate, measure the practice of heads of homes, the use of resources and costs, and assess the impact of these variables on (a) the morale and unity of the staff group (b) the quality of the residential environment (c) changes in the residents over one year. It will assess the conclusions against their applicability to practice and the experience of staff and heads.</p> <p>The study seeks to exploit the variety which exists among homes and draws on hypotheses derived from the recent Department of Health research initiative in residential child care. Short questionnaires to staff, social workers and young people will provide measures of the home environment and residents at two points in time a year apart. Telephone interviews with all heads will provide descriptions and measures of their practice. Observation together with group and individual interviews in a sub-sample of eight homes will assess the conclusions against their relevance to practice and staff experience. The conclusions themselves will be based on multivariate analysis, checked against and deepened by the qualitative work.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
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Studies of private fostering

<p>Charlie Owen</p> <p>Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London</p>	<p>A study of private foster care</p> <p>This study of private fostering aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a systematic evaluation of the motivations and experiences of those who foster privately. • Conduct a systematic evaluation of the motivations and experiences of parents who place their children for private fostering. The Private Fostering Practice Issues Group run by The British Association for Adoption and Fostering has expressed a specific interest in this particular topic of research. • Document and evaluate the experiences of young adults who have been privately fostered. • Estimate the number of children privately fostered. <p>The study will conduct interviews with private 50 foster carers, 50 parents and 20 young adults who have been privately fostered. The interviews will focus on the motivations and experiences of those involved. Interviewees will be contacted via trusted intermediaries. Interviews will be transcribed and analysed qualitatively using the framework method.</p> <p>The number of children privately fostered will be estimated from a secondary analysis of the Labour Force Survey. From this survey an estimate of the total number of foster children aged 16 and under will be made. The number fostered in by local authorities is known, and the difference will give an estimate of the number of privately fostered children.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
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Annex 3

Formative research

The formative research should be designed to feedback into the on-going development of the *Adoption and permanence project*. Typically it would ask questions such as:

- What action has been taken in terms of local policy and practice to meet the aims of recent policy and legislative changes?
- How have changes in local policies been translated into practice?
- How effective have changes in local policy and practice been in the short term?

Such research would need to be conducted quickly, and may therefore need to draw on secondary sources of data. It is suggested that formative studies could consist of a review of research combined with one or more of the following:

- Mapping of services.
- A survey of monitored and/or evaluated practice. (It may be easy to identify good descriptions of practice, but not good examples of *evaluated practice*.)
- Secondary analysis of existing quantitative and qualitative data.
- Secondary analysis of statistical returns.
- A small-scale, in-depth exploration of key issues.

Projects involving surveys or some secondary analysis of data should include some analysis of the generalisability of findings and their policy and practice implications.

Formative studies may also provide a foundation for summative research.

Summative Research

Summative research should pose similar questions, but answer them in more depth. It should also consider longer-term questions such as,

- Has the *Adoption and permanency project* made any difference in terms of service delivery?
- Has the *Adoption and permanency project* made any difference in terms of outcomes for children and their families?

It should help to address the 'what works?', 'why does it work?' and 'why does it not work?' agenda.