

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Education (23)		
Title of case study: Enhancing educational experiences for care experienced children and young people in Wales		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 – 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dawn Mannay	Reader	01/09/2012 - present
Eleanor Staples	Research Associate	14/10/2013 – 07/12/2017
Sophie Hallett	Senior Lecturer	18/07/2013 – present
Louise Roberts	Lecturer	02/10/2014 – present
Alyson Rees	Reader	19/09/2000 – present
Rhiannon Evans	Senior Lecturer	08/04/2013 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 01/11/2015 – 31/12/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Children and young people in care in the UK, on average, achieve lower levels of educational attainment than their peers. Cardiff's work on the educational experiences of these children directly informed the Welsh Government's strategy, developed innovative methods to engage young people, and generated creative materials, training, workshops and online communities of practice, all of which improved the overall educational experiences of care experienced children and young people. Mannay's related work with cultural and arts institutions led to changes in their strategies and programming to better support marginalised children and young people, including those who are care experienced.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The complex and disrupted home circumstances of children and young people in care can prevent them from succeeding academically. This results in a pervasive gap in educational attainment between children in care and their peers. In Wales – where the number of children and young people in care is rising (6,845 recorded in 2019) – there is a gap of 19 percentage points at Key Stage 2, which increases to 37 percentage points at Key Stage 4.</p> <p>In January 2015, the Welsh Government commissioned Mannay and Cardiff University's CASCADE (Children's Social Care Research and Development Centre) to lead a multidisciplinary academic team undertaking the research project 'Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of Looked After Children and Young People in Wales' [G3.1].</p> <p>This was the UK's first study to report on the lived educational experiences and school transitions of care experienced children and young people. Existing literature and data on care and education were combined with a systematic review of randomised controlled trials evaluating interventions aimed at care experienced children and young people [3.1]. The researchers also engaged with 65 care experienced children and young people across Wales, through interviews and focus groups. Two care leavers were also trained as peer researchers to facilitate focus groups with young people no longer in compulsory education.</p> <p>Key findings included [3.2]:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people feel that foster carers should have a set of basic skills to support education; • Lack of funding for educational equipment, especially IT, is a key barrier; 		

- Care experienced young people suffer educationally and socially from disruption caused by placement moves, school transitions, and social work meetings during school hours.

Children and young people interviewed were aspirational but some struggled to realise their ambitions because of unresolved emotional issues, limited opportunities, and unsupportive relationships. The findings were developed into 17 recommendations [see 3.2]. These covered key themes including: support for school transitions; access to educational resources and additional support for children and young people; training for teachers, foster carers and social workers; and improving communications between key stakeholders.

2.1 Foregrounding the voices and lived experiences of children and young people

The Cardiff team used a range of participatory arts-based techniques to encourage children and young people to actively participate in the research process, generate data, and disseminate messages [3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6]. This innovative work was recognised with the 2017 Research Innovation Award from the Social Research Association Wales, the 2017 Health and Care Research Wales Public Involvement Achievement Award, and the 2018 Learned Society of Wales Dillwyn Medal. It also led to invitations to contribute to and lead on other research projects related to improving the lives of care experienced children and young people, including collaborations with The Fostering Network, Wales Millennium Centre, and the National Museum Wales [G3.2, G3.3].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Evans, R., Brown, R., Rees, G. and Smith, P. 2017. Systematic review of educational interventions for looked-after children and young people: Recommendations for intervention development and evaluation. *British Educational Research Journal* 43(1), pp. 68-94.

[3.2] Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., Evans, R. and Andrews, D. 2015. *Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government. <https://gov.wales/understanding-educational-experiences-and-opinions-attainment-achievement-and-aspirations-looked-0>

[3.3] Mannay, D., Evans, R., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A. and Andrews, D. 2017. The consequences of being labelled 'looked-after': Exploring the educational experiences of looked-after children and young people in Wales. *British Educational Research Journal* 43(4), pp. 683-699. (10.1002/berj.3283)

[3.4] Mannay, D., Staples, E. and Edwards, V. 2017. Visual methodologies, sand and psychoanalysis: Employing creative participatory techniques to explore the educational experiences of mature students and looked after children. *Visual Studies* 32(4), pp. 345-358. (10.1080/1472586X.2017.1363636)

[3.5] Mannay, D., Staples, E., Hallett, S., Roberts, L., Rees, A., Evans, R. and Andrews, D. 2018. Enabling talk and reframing messages: Working creatively with care experienced children and young people to recount and re-represent their everyday experiences. *Child Care in Practice* 25(1), pp. 51-63. (10.1080/13575279.2018.1521375)

[3.6] Mannay, D., Rees, A. and Roberts, L. 2019. *Children and young people 'looked after'? Education, intervention and the everyday culture of care in Wales*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Selected grants:

[G3.1] 'Understanding the educational experiences and opinions, attainment, achievement and aspirations of looked after children in Wales', Welsh Government, £59,852 (02/02/2015-30/11/2015)

[G3.2] 'Creation of an online community of practice developing the sharing of expertise for those working with children and young people who are looked after', Welsh Government, total of £76,453 in three grants between 16/01/2017-31/03/2020

[G3.3] 'Development and maintenance of an online community of practice to support practitioners who are working with families and children in the early years', Welsh Government, £59,410 (01/01/2019-31/03/2021)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

4.1 Informing and shaping policy

“Obviously if your life is unstable, your education is unstable, and then that’s your future ruined” – a female participant in one of Mannay’s 16+ focus groups when asked about being a looked after child in school [3.1; also quoted in 5.1].

The Cardiff team’s 17 recommendations [3.2] were all incorporated into the Welsh Government’s 2016 strategy *‘Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales’* [5.1]. Jonathan Jones, a Senior Policy Manager for the Welsh Government’s Education and Public Services Group, confirmed that *“the results of the study formed the bedrock for the strategy”* [5.2]. Three examples of how the recommendations fed into policy actions are outlined below:

- Research recommendation 1 centralised the importance of a rigorous evidence-base for educational interventions. This aligns with policy action 34, which prioritises capturing effective interventions which are proven to have the greatest impact.
 - Response: The Welsh Government and Adoption UK (Wales) provided information on effective interventions to better support adopted children in education, as well as children who are looked after by the local authority [5.1, 5.3].
- Research recommendation 2 on school transitions aligns with policy action 22, which emphasises information sharing prior to a child starting a new school.
 - Response: The Welsh Government examined current information sharing practices between schools and practitioners with responsibility for children who are looked after. A key theme of this work was improving transitional arrangements [5.3].
- Research recommendation 6 called for training for foster carers to better support the children in their care with their education. It aligns with policy action 9 which tasks regional education consortia with supporting foster carers with appropriate training which has a specific educational focus.
 - Response: The Welsh Government commissioned the Fostering Wellbeing programme which increases foster carers’ access to peer support, training, and information; supported the publication of *‘A foster carer’s Guide to Education in Wales’*; and allocated a portion of the Pupil Development Grant to provide training for foster carers [5.3].

The Welsh Government thanked the research team for *“constructive support in helping to make a difference to the lives of children who have experienced time in the care system”* [5.3]. The research’s foregrounding of lived experiences was also acknowledged, in particular: *“the views of these learners have been used to inform the actions in this strategy”* [5.1]. Jonathan Jones confirmed the research’s significant influence on the work of the Welsh Government, practitioners, teachers, and other stakeholders, helping to *“shape some incredible policies which are making a real difference to some of our most disadvantaged children and families in Wales”* [5.2].

A review of the strategy one year on reported examples of educational progress for care experienced young people [5.3]. For example, in 2016 23% of children who are looked after achieved the Level 2 GCSE threshold, an improvement of 6% on the 2015 attainment figure.

4.2 Changing practices

The 2015 study had an immediate impact on practice in Wales. Research recommendations were incorporated into the Welsh Government’s new guidance *‘Making a difference – A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools’* [5.4]. Jonathan Jones confirmed that *“the excellent research conducted by CASCADE through engaging with care experienced young people really helped to develop the guide”* [5.2]. For example, the guidance states that *“all meetings for looked after children (for reasons related to their care circumstances) should*

be held outside of lesson times” [5.4]. This draws directly from the research finding [3.1] that care experienced children and young people suffer educationally from the disruption of attending social care meetings during school hours.

The Welsh Government also commissioned Mannay and CASCADE to develop two online hubs providing resources for educators, social care practitioners, third sector workers, researchers, and carers with an interest in improving the educational outcomes of children in care and for supporting children and families more widely:

- Exchange: Care and Education [total funding of £76,453 from 2017-2020 [G3.2]] builds more effective communications between designated lead members of staff in schools, carers and social workers.
- Exchange: Family and Community [total funding of £59,410 from 2019-2021 [G3.3]] is a forum for members of Welsh Government initiatives aimed at i) services for children aged 0-3 and ii) improving outcomes for children, young people and families. It was a main repository for Government notices and practitioner guidance during coronavirus [5.2].

These communities of practice have had a combined engagement of 19,998 page views and their resources have been viewed by visitors from across the UK and globally.

Mannay used ESRC Impact Acceleration Account funding [total funding of £48,429 from 2016-2017] to generate additional outputs and workshops aimed at creating more effective relationships between individuals and agencies. Over 1,000 key stakeholders (including policymakers, practitioners, students, and young people) attended events (conferences, workshops and training) in Wales, England, Ireland and Northern Ireland to learn how to embed recommendations into their everyday practice. Attendees provided feedback on how the research findings will directly inform their future practice [5.5], for example:

- *‘I will... ensure that appointments for young people take place outside of education hours’* – Education Officer, Youth Offending Service - Wales;
- *‘I have already presented the main points from the event at a team meeting and interface meeting with social workers. I have requested a meeting with LAC education team to discuss the issues raised and will formulate an action plan’* – Independent Reviewing Officer – Wales;
- *‘Doing more visual and collaborative work with children and young people to disseminate findings’* – Third Sector Researcher – England.

4.3 Benefits of co-production and creative engagement for individuals and organisations

Educational research studies often do not reach the people who would benefit from hearing their key messages. To directly engage these key stakeholders, the Cardiff team developed creative and accessible materials, some of which were co-produced with children and young people. For example:

- The research findings [3.1] formed the basis for 7 films, 4 music videos, 6 graphic art pieces, 6 comic strips, a special edition of the magazine *Thrive* (delivered to all young people in foster care in Wales), and 2 magazines for foster carers (5,000 copies of each were delivered to foster families in Wales) [5.6a].
- The #messagestoschools campaign – developed with input from young people, foster carers and practitioners – which presented the ideas that young people wanted their teachers to think about. Campaign materials were posted and emailed to 1,600 schools in Wales, with designated teachers displaying them in workplace settings and using them in their practice.
- Film projects with the South West Wales Reaching Wider Partnership and the Roots Foundation Wales who support the education of children and young people in care.

Maria Boffey, Head of Operations for the Fostering Network, the UK's leading fostering charity, confirmed that *"foster carers have provided us with feedback about how the films, magazines and workshops have offered advice, ideas and information that has helped them to better support children and young people in their care"* [5.6b].

Emma Jones, Independent Living Coordinator, Roots Foundation commented: *"The young people tell us that they don't always get the chance to have their voices heard... the films have been shared amongst both student social workers and practicing social workers... many say it has changed their practice, for the better"* [5.7].

Due to the value demonstrated through these visual and creative research approaches, the Wales Millennium Centre (WMC) commissioned Mannay to evaluate an arts project supporting care experienced children and foster carers [5.8]. This informed the WMC's ten-year strategy. Graeme Farrow, Artistic Director, WMC confirmed: *"We witnessed a sustained impact on confidence and self-belief, with young people connecting to the value of their own voice and agency and building a significant social connection with their peers... The activity and project have also significantly impacted our own organisational development. Specifically, helping us to find a way to better integrate activities that combine personal, social and creative skills"* [5.9].

Amgueddfa Cymru/National Museum Wales (AC/NMW) invited Mannay to co-produce projects with marginalised young people and involve them in their Hands on Heritage programme (ESRC Secondment £12,815). Mannay's report is informing the Hands on Heritage Action Plan and the development of AC/NMW's 10-Year Strategy [5.10]. Owain Rhys, Head of Volunteering and Engagement, AC/NMW commented that the report was an *"impressive, comprehensive and invaluable contribution"* and that it *"will guide the expansion of Hands on Heritage, and contribute to better educational and developmental experiences for children and young people, in particular marginalised communities, including those who are care experienced, excluded from formal education and/or living in areas of multiple deprivation, who have not traditionally engaged with Amgueddfa Cymru"* [5.10].

In summary, Cardiff's work to improve the educational experiences of children and young people in care has had lasting impact on policy and practice in Wales, with the scale and reach extended through Mannay's related work with cultural and arts institutions. Throughout all of this, the team ensured that children and young people have *"an opportunity to be heard"*, a decision which will have *"lasting impact on themselves, the care experienced community and future generations to come"* [5.7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] Welsh Government. 2016. *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

[5.2] Testimonial from Jonathan Jones, Senior Policy Manager, Welsh Government (Children and Families Division, Education and Public Services Group)

[5.3] Welsh Government. 2017. *Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales: one year on*. Welsh Government: Cardiff

[5.4] Welsh Government. 2017. *Making a difference: A guide for the designated person for looked after children in schools*. Cardiff: Welsh Government

[5.5] Participant feedback

[5.6] a) Foster family tools and support b) Testimonial from Maria Boffey, Head of Operations, The Fostering Network in Wales

[5.7] Testimonial from Emma Jones, Independent Living Coordinator, Roots Foundation

[5.8] Mannay, D.et al. 2018. *The value of cultural and creative engagement: Understanding the experiences and opinions of care-experienced young people and foster carers in Wales*. Project Report. Cardiff: Wales Millennium Centre

[5.9] Testimonial from Graeme Farrow, Artistic Director, Wales Millennium Centre

[5.10] Testimonial from Owain Rhys, Head of Volunteering and Engagement, Amgueddfa Cymru / National Museum of Wales