

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Changing Policy and Practice on the Education of Children Looked After (CLA)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014 - 2020		
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:
Prof. Judy Sebba	Professor of Education	01/04/2012 - 31/07/2020
Dr. Nikki Luke	Senior Research Fellow	01/10/2012 - current
Prof Steve Strand	Professor of Education	01/01/2013 - current
Dr. John Fletcher	Research Fellow	01/08/2014 - 31/01/2015
Dr. A. O'Higgins	Research Associate	01/01/2018 - 31/03/2019
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 – 31 July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Rees Centre research on Children Looked After (CLA) in 2015 identified factors contributing to poor educational outcomes of those supported by children's services in the UK. The Department for Education (DfE) changed their Annual Statistical Release on outcomes for CLA in 2016 in response to the Rees Centre's CLA research recommendations. A year later, Ofsted's inspection framework for schools, and social care inspections, extended their focus on CLA and introduced education inspectors on social care inspections and vice versa. Informed by the Centre's research, some local authorities (LAs), including Barking and Dagenham, Salford, Staffordshire and Suffolk, changed their policies on CLA moving schools and increased resources to Pupil Referral Units. Internationally, Australia's largest fostering provider also changed its policies and practice in 2017 informed by this research.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>The Rees Centre in the Department of Education, University of Oxford, conducts research that aims to improve the education, well-being and life outcomes of those who are, or have been, supported by children's social care services. The Oxford-led "The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data" study [R1] (in collaboration with University of Bristol) was the first research to link education and care factors statistically and complement this with interviews of secondary-aged CLA in England. Oxford-led on the quantitative analysis of DfE datasets on CLA and the National Pupil Database (NPD) (Luke, Strand, Fletcher) and contributed to the qualitative interviews that complemented this work (Sebba, foster carers and care leaver interviews). The main findings and associated recommendations that underpinned impact were published in November 2015 and in a series of papers [R2, R3, R4, R5, R6]. Recommendations included:</p> <p>F1 Children in longer-term care do better than those 'in need' (children with a social worker but not in care), or those in short term care. Children in need provide an additional, and more suitable, comparison group than the general child population for children in care in official statistics and public debate [R6].</p> <p>F2 Some young people in care with lower prior attainment subsequently made very good progress academically. A focus on progress, rather than attainment only, gives a more realistic depiction of the achievements of CLA [R6].</p> <p>F3 Each change of care placement age 11+ is associated with one-third of a grade less at GCSE, and young people in care who changed school in Years 10 or 11 scored over five grades less than those who did not. Local authorities should ensure that school staff provide appropriate support (partly through the Virtual School who has responsibility for the progress of CLA), and limit placement and school changes, in KS4 [R5].</p> <p>F4 CLA's unauthorised absences and fixed-term exclusions are associated with poorer GCSEs. Initiatives to support pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties need to become more widely implemented to address the attendance and exclusions of CLA [R1].</p>		

F5 Young people in special schools or Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) at 16 scored 14 grades lower in GCSEs compared to those with the same characteristics in mainstream schools. Local authorities should admit CLA to high performing mainstream schools [the report implied rather than stated that there should be a preference for mainstream] where possible and better equip special schools/PRUs to support CLA's progress **[R1]**.

F6 Children whose final placement was in foster or kinship care scored six GCSE grades better than those in residential care. Local authorities should prioritise foster/kinship placements and address educational improvement across the workforce in residential settings **[R1]**.

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

R1. Sebba, J., Berridge, D., Luke, N., Fletcher, J., Bell, K., Strand, S., Thomas, S., Sinclair, I., O'Higgins, A., (2015), *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England*, The Rees Centre and the University of Bristol.

<https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/sites/default/files/files/EducationalProgressLookedAfterChildrenOverviewReportNov2015.pdf> [output type N]

R2. Sebba, J., Luke, N. & Berridge, D. (2017), 'The educational progress of young people in out-of-home care', *Developing Practice, The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 47, 18-35 [Based on keynote from Australian Conference which led to changes in policy and practice there – see 4.4] [https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/208716641/Full text PDF accepted author manuscript .pdf](https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/208716641/Full_text_PDF_accepted_author_manuscript.pdf) [output type D]

R3. O'Higgins, A., Sebba, J., & Gardner, F. (2017), 'What are the factors associated with educational achievement for children in kinship or foster care: A systematic review', *Children and Youth Services Review*, 79, 198-220. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.004> [output type D]

R4. Luke, N., & O'Higgins, A. (2018), 'Is the care system to blame for the poor educational outcomes of children looked after? Evidence from a systematic review and national database analysis', *Children Australia*, 43(2), 135-151. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cha.2018.22> [output type D]

R5. Sebba, J. and Berridge, D. (2019), 'The role of the Virtual School in supporting improved educational outcomes for children in care', *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(4), 538-555. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600489> [output type D]

R6. Sinclair, I., Luke, N., and Berridge, D. (2019), 'Children in care of in need: educational progress at home and in care', *Oxford Review of Education*, 45(4), 443-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2019.1600488> [output type D]

Funding includes: GBP159,409 Nuffield Foundation grant, 2014-15; GBP314,000, Nuffield Foundation, 2017-20; and a further study on care leavers' transition into the labour market GBP142,483, Nuffield Foundation, 2019 – 21.

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

The findings and recommendations were disseminated through distribution of over 3,000 copies of the report **[R1]** to policy makers, Local Authorities (LAs), children's services managers and practitioners, and internationally (in particular in Japan and Australia). Multiple face-to-face briefings were given to DfE senior officials and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS), and workshop sessions were held in 2016 with over 1,500 Ofsted inspectors and over 100 Virtual School Heads (VSH, 120 in total in England tasked with enhancing/supporting the education of CLA) across the nine local government regions. Impact from the research won 1st Prize in the University of Bristol Vice Chancellor's impact award November 2016 and was Highly Commended in the Excellence in Impact Awards, University of Oxford, 2018.

Impact on National Policy

Changes were made to the DfE Statistical First Release of Outcomes of CLA, published March 2016, which for the first time compared CLA to children in need in response to **F1 in R1 [S2]**,

pp.4-9] and increased the reporting of progress in line with the report's recommendations **[R1]**. The then Government Children's Minister urged every LA to implement the recommendations: *'...this research **[R1]** helps us in thinking about how we can make progress...: DfE officials have already ...[started] exploring how we can use data better to help us drive and measure the attainment of children in care in the future, and identify collective action that will promote their achievements at school. ...it may be more useful to use the progress of looked-after children, relative to those with the same prior attainment **[F1, which led to S2]**, as a measure of the effectiveness of care rather than solely using absolute attainment' **[S1]**.*

Parliament debated the report **[R1]** findings in January 2016. Giving preference to foster care over residential care because of the better associated educational outcomes **[R1]** was raised by The Education Select Committee in a debate on CLA in the Commons. Alan Johnson cited the report in his arguments on the need to give preference to foster care: *'...the latest piece of research, from last November, states that those children [in kinship/foster care] also do better in educational attainment than those in residential care' **[F6], [S3a]**.*

Reducing school changes was highlighted in The Education Select Committee Fostering Inquiry, to which Sebba gave oral evidence in April 2017 **[S3b, Q157-167]**. The inquiry report references the research and the subsequent debate on the inquiry stated: *'Research on the educational progress of looked-after children has found that educational placement changes are a significant risk factor **[F3]** for the educational outcomes for children in care...'* **[S3c]**. In response to this report, the government stressed the importance of stability for CLA: *the number of moves of placement, social worker or school must be kept to an absolute minimum' **[S3d, p.21]**.*

A commitment not to place children far from home and to review the education of children in need was made in the 2017 Conservative Party manifesto in which two references are made to the findings (while not mentioning the research explicitly, **R1** was the only research on these two issues at that time): *'We will ensure that councils provide consistency of care **[F3]** and cannot relocate vulnerable children far from their home when it is not in their best interests to do so. We will review support for Children in Need **[F1]** to understand why their outcomes are so poor and what more support they might require, in and out of school.'* **[S4, p.73]**. The Conservative Party review team met with the research team five times (a small invited workshop, an online seminar and three briefings, as well as numerous email exchanges), and published its report in June 2019 **[S4, p.8]** which, it stated: *'...take[s] account of academic evidence and research, including...joint work with the University of Oxford's Rees Centre **[R5, R6]**'*. In 2020, this led to a proposal by the DfE in its 2019 Children in Need review, which cites **R1** as key to its research underpinning in its introduction, that Virtual Schools take responsibility for supporting the education of children in need **[S5, pp.8 & 37]**.

Impact on Ofsted inspection

Changes to the Ofsted inspection framework guidance for children's services (published in 2017, amended in 2019 and 2020) **[S7a]** were made that reflected the research recommendations **[R1, R2, R3]**. The 2016 Chief Inspector's Annual Report on Children's Social Care **[S6, pp. 8 & 53]**, had referenced the research, noting the specific findings on children doing better in care than in need, the use of the latter as a comparator **[F1]** and the high proportion not in mainstream schools and thereby at risk of poorer outcomes **[F5]**. The Ofsted National Director for Social Care published a blog summarising Ofsted's changing approach in response to the research **[S7c]**, while the lead Ofsted manager for children in care commented **[S7b]**: *'We have taken the research findings into careful account during the development of our new frameworks for inspections of local authority children's services (ILACS) and regulated services under the SCCIF (Social Care Common Inspection Framework). ...an educational inspector alongside social care colleagues during local authority inspections **[introduced in response to overall findings, S7a]** will help us to look more closely and accurately at educational progress children make and how this is affected by their care **[F1]**. ...The criteria and methodology ... place a greater emphasis on evaluating the educational progress of individual children from their starting points **[F1]** and less on the overall gap between the children in care cohort and their peers. The framework's strong emphasis on the importance of good decision-making and achievement of*

timely permanence reflect the [research] findings related to the age of entry into care and overall stability for children...[F3]'

National Bodies and Local Authorities

A new national dataset [S9] for LAs to better monitor the progress of looked after children [F1, F2], linking education and social care data has led to improved decision-making and potentially improved educational outcomes for CLA (a causal link cannot be proved). This was commissioned in late 2015 by the ADCS and National Association of VSHs (NAVSH). Their published response stated [S8]: *'Building on evidence from recent research carried out by the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford and the University of Bristol [R1], ...ADCS working with the Virtual School Heads Network and the National Consortium for Examination Results [NCER], wants to stimulate a national debate about improving support and ambition for children in care, and, through that, to improve educational outcomes and life chances for all children in care.'*

Three actions were proposed: developing a new dataset to help LAs [S9], informing the new Ofsted framework [S7a] and challenging national policy so LAs can ensure that CLA have access to the best educational placements [F3, F5, S12]. From April 2019 to March 2020, 30,769 reports were run using the dataset by 150 (all but two) LAs. In 2020, Suffolk VSH stated [S10a]: *'The NCER dataset and toolkit has helped us to understand the specific context of CLA outcomes ...through monitoring much more robustly what is actually happening. This has informed important decisions about priorities in allocation of scarce resources. Analysis of our results compared to national data, identified three problems: poor performance of CLA with special educational needs and disabilities, high scores (indicators of high levels of behaviour problems) on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ, collected nationally) correlating with poor outcomes, and too many CLA leaving school without qualifications. We targeted better support in each of these areas and have been able to monitor the following: an increase in CLA who gain any qualification, though cannot claim causation due to small cohorts; The capture and sharing of best practice where schools are achieving good outcomes for children with concerning SDQ scores; and better progress in children identified as having SEND support than non-looked after children in Suffolk schools.'*

Minimising school moves in line with the research recommendations [R1] has been reported by individual LAs. For example, the VSH in Staffordshire stated: *'The social worker requested for pupil to move to school closer to his current placement...Pupil's current school is 20-minute drive from the foster placement, he is making excellent progress at his current school... Research [R1] clearly evidences the impact of school moves upon a child's educational progress and attainment [F3], there is a commitment [now] to minimising school moves. Decision: A school move is not agreed...'* [S10b].

Decisions about budget allocations, managed moves and exclusions [F3, F4] have been influenced by the research in other LAs. For example, the VSH in Salford stated: *'...in allocating the 2016-17 centrally retained PPP budget of c.£350,000 we have given greater priority to the 'segregated' 40%. The report brought home the need to devote even further energy and resources to those in children's homes [F6], in non-mainstream schools [F5]... we continue to challenge managed moves [F3] and fixed term exclusions [F4] but with greater vigour' [S10d]* A Virtual School Advisory Teacher, Barking and Dagenham reported: *'I have used the report ...to inform Social Workers and IROs [Independent Reviewing Officers] about the importance of keeping a LAC [Looked After Child] in the same school [F3] when placement move becomes an issue. Also, findings have informed ...LAC at risk of exclusion [F4]. In particular, [the finding that] mainstream schools reporting higher GCSE results compared with those LAC who were educated in Alternative Provision [F5]... provides evidence to encourage mainstream schools to keep the excluded LAC at the school with a support package...research has been helpful in working out how best to use the Pupil Premium grant [relevant findings reported in R5].'* [S10c]

International Impact: Australia

Extending the research into an international context, Sebba gave a keynote speech in 2016, which drew heavily on R1, at the Association of Child Welfare Agencies Annual Conference. Following this she had meetings with a number of officials including the New South Wales Minister for Family and Community Services, The Association of Child Welfare Agencies and

Life Without Barriers, a major fostering provider for 3000 young people, reviewed their education policies for children in out-of-home care in 2017-18. The Director of Life Without Barriers, who commissioned Sebba to run workshops for staff, stated [S11]: *'Research on the educational progress [R2, R4] influenced our work as we re-designed our foster care approach... in particular the findings related to time in care (that care is a protective factor in education) [F1] and school absence [F4].'* Sebba also briefed South Australia's Minister for Child Protection and her delegation in May 2019 in London, which has been used in their evolving policy for out-of-home care.

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

S1: Edward Timpson's speech 30 Nov 2015 at the launch of the Research Report: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/children-in-care-can-achieve-and-succeed>

S2: Department of Education Statistical First Releases:

- 2014 - p.4 states that this is the first time data from children in need have been included for comparative purposes – as suggested in **F1**
- 2016 - the previous Statistical First Release showing that no comparison with children in need was included

S3: House of Commons:

- a) Hansard – debate on 7 January 2016, para 521:
- b) Education Select Committee Inquiry on Fostering (April 2017), Sebba's oral evidence:
- c) The Education Committee 2017 report on Fostering (21 December 2017). Extract paragraph 17, referenced footnote 28:
- d) The Government Response to the Education Select Committee's report into Fostering and Foster care (July 2018):

S4: 2017 Conservative Manifesto.

S5: Department of Education: 'Help, Protection, Education: Concluding the Children in Need Review' (June 2019)

S6: HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2016 social care report [p.8, p.53]

S7: Ofsted:

- a) Ofsted (2020 update) Inspecting local authority children's services (Section heading: Evaluating the educational progress of children in care and care leavers)
- b) Email from HM Inspector and Specialist Adviser at Ofsted outlining changes made to the Ofsted inspection framework informed by the research findings. Corroboration details also submitted.
- c) Ofsted National Director of Social Care blog, 'The Education of Children in Care':

S8: ADCS/NCER report, 'The Educational Achievement of Children in Care' (Dec 2015). pp4-6 for REES research findings

S9: The new Management Information System linked to the national data collection and informed by the report - <https://www.ncer.org/PublicResources/Projects.aspx>

S10: Emails from Virtual School Heads:

- a) Email from the VSH of Suffolk on the use of the NCER dataset
- b) VSH Staffordshire on change in policy regarding minimising school moves
- c) VSH Barking and Dagenham re practice and data use
- d) VSH Salford

S11: Email from the National Director Practice and Quality, Life Without Barriers, Sydney