

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 4 - Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience		
Title of case study: The HeadStart Learning Programme: evidencing changes to policy and practice for young people's mental health and wellbeing		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: June 2016 - 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:
Jess Deighton	Professor in Child Mental Health and Wellbeing Department of Clinical, Educational and Health Psychology	2015-current
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2017 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>The HeadStart Learning Programme led by the Evidence Based Practice Unit at UCL was the first large-scale, longitudinal investigation of resilience-based approaches to support the mental health and wellbeing of young people in England. The programme created a detailed, nuanced and evolving national resource that has informed policy documents from Public Health England and the Departments for Education and Health & Social Care. Deighton's research has changed how six local authorities and 300 schools (75,000 pupils) across England identify and support young people experiencing mental health difficulties. It has increased awareness and understanding of these issues among young people, their parents and carers, educational professionals and the general public through extensive media coverage and public engagement.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>This case study presents the impact of research conducted by UCL's Evidence Based Practice Unit as part of HeadStart - a GBP67,400,000 National Lottery Community Fund programme to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged ten to sixteen and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.</p> <p>In 2014, the Unit (led by Professor Deighton) began collecting and analysing information and indicators to evaluate a pilot involving 12 local-authority-led partners [R1]. The findings of this evaluation informed The National Lottery Community Fund's launch (in June 2016) of a full-scale five-year programme that funded six local-authority-led HeadStart partnerships (Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton) to work with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to design and trial a wide range of interventions aimed at building capacity in staff working with young people, improving wellbeing, preventing mental health problems and supporting at-risk groups. In parallel The National Lottery Community Fund launched the HeadStart Learning Programme, a seven-year programme of data collection, analysis and evaluation led by UCL to support, inform and assess these interventions.</p> <p>The team worked closely with schools, young people and local authorities to design the Wellbeing Measurement Framework (WMF), a set of rigorous, balanced and validated questionnaires designed to elicit complete and accurate information on positive wellbeing, behavioural and emotional difficulties, ability to deal with stress and manage emotions, and the presence and strength of protective factors such as perceived support at school, home and in the community. The questionnaires are used in participating schools across the six partnership areas to collect data through surveys of over 60,000 pupils in more than 210 secondary schools in England, of which 15,000 pupils are followed longitudinally from Year 7 onwards and the rest as an annual snapshot of Year 9. Completion rates are exceptionally high for a survey of this type, at 85%. The surveys have been complemented by a series of ongoing in-depth interviews with a targeted cohort of some 87 children and young people.</p>		

The UCL team then carried out extensive longitudinal analysis of the data, mapping how the mental health of young people evolves over the course of the programme to assess the effectiveness of the HeadStart approach. This represents the first ever large-scale longitudinal and snapshot study of young people's resilience and mental health directly from young people themselves. This quantitative research, alongside longitudinal qualitative interviews [R2] has led to a clearer understanding of how young people themselves perceive factors that challenge their mental health and wellbeing and what mechanisms they use to cope; and generated evidence to support four key novel findings:

- Children's experiences of psychological distress are more widespread than previously expected [R3].
- There are emerging gender differences in mental health and wellbeing through adolescence. From the period of early to mid-adolescence, girls' internalising symptoms escalate while boys remain constant. In the same period, girls' subjective wellbeing decreases significantly, whereas boys' does not. Findings suggest early adolescence as an important period for prevention and early intervention for girls [R4].
- Certain identified groups experience disproportionately high rates of psychological distress [R3, R5].
- The interplay between mental health problems and positive wellbeing is complex [R6].

The HeadStart Learning Programme also developed and refined feasible feedback systems for schools to review and monitor whole-school mental health and wellbeing and trialled them in over 300 schools (210 secondary schools and 90 primary schools), creating an online platform (in collaboration with the University of Manchester, who built and run the system) to present the findings to partnerships and individual schools, including breakdown of results within certain populations (by gender, Special Educational Needs, free school meals, ethnicity) and comparison of a school/partnership's own results against the programme average.

3. References to the research

- [R1] Lereya, S.T., Humphrey, N., Patalay, P. *et al.* (2016). The student resilience survey: psychometric validation and associations with mental health. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 10(44). doi: [10.1186/s13034-016-0132-5](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-016-0132-5)
- [R2] Stapley E, Demkowicz O, Eisenstadt M, Wolpert M, Deighton J. (2020). Coping with the stresses of daily life in England: a qualitative study of self-care strategies and social and professional support in early adolescence. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 40(5), 605-632. doi:[10.1177/0272431619858420](https://doi.org/10.1177/0272431619858420)
- [R3] Deighton, J., Lereya, T. L., Casey, P., Patalay, P., Humphrey, N., & Wolpert, M. (2019). Prevalence of mental health problems in schools: poverty and other risk factors amongst 28,000 adolescents in England. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 215(3), 565-567. doi: [10.1192/bjp.2019.19](https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2019.19)
- [R4] HeadStart Evidence Briefings 1-9, UCL Evidence Based Practice Unit. (2018-2020) <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/headstart-learning-team/headstart-reports-publications>
- [R5] Lereya, S. T., Patel, M., dos Santos, J.P.G.A., & Deighton, J. (2019). Mental health difficulties, attainment and attendance: a cross-sectional study. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 28(8), 1147-1152. doi: [10.1007/s00787-018-01273-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-018-01273-6)
- [R6] Black, L., Panayiotou, M., & Humphrey, N. (2019). The dimensionality and latent structure of mental health difficulties and wellbeing in early adolescence. *PLOS One*, 14(2), e0213018. [10.1371/journal.pone.0213018](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0213018).

4. Details of the impact

The unprecedented, evidence-based understanding of the current mental health of young people across England produced by the research has impacted on practice, policy and public awareness within the participating HeadStart areas and beyond.

Impact on schools and pupils

Members of the research team have worked with HeadStart and other schools to help them understand the data and provided workshops and materials to share learning with school leaders, parents and pupils. The WMF enables schools to better understand and manage the mental health and wellbeing of their students, as demonstrated by requests from schools outside the programme to be involved, and from participating schools to extend the exercise to an additional cohort of pupils. In addition to 120 secondary and 90 primary HeadStart schools, a further 90 secondary schools outside the programme (and an additional 15,000 participating pupils) have also been able to experience the benefits described below.

The schools describe four key advantages to using the WMF **[S1]**:

1. Its scope makes it statistically and scientifically robust.
2. The standardised questions allow schools to benchmark themselves, giving them a picture of their strengths and weaknesses within the specific context of their student demographic.
3. The questions designed and validated by independent experts at UCL elicit unbiased, relevant and useful information.
4. It covers a range of different aspects of pupil wellbeing (including 'softer' measures such as feelings) in a single, user-friendly data source.

According to users, the WMF reports have pushed pupil mental health and wellbeing higher up the agenda of school senior management **[S2, S3]**. Participating schools used the results in several ways **[S1]**, including as evidence of performance in external assessments (Ofsted/faith bodies) and to open meaningful dialogue with their pupils, encouraging key conversations around mental health. These conversations were used to identify subgroups of students most likely to benefit from specific support and interventions, for example, where the data showed Year 9 girls were struggling with anxiety, one school planned to run a 12-week course on self-esteem and anxiety with Year 8 girls, in preparation for transition into Year 9. Schools also used the results to raise awareness among staff of issues likely to be experienced within their classrooms and of how young people are feeling generally; and as a starting point for discussions with CAMHS when making student referrals:

*"The WMF has helped to create an awareness with staff of our pupil mental health and wellbeing. It has helped to inform and educate them on how our pupils are feeling right now, the struggles they are dealing with, that way they can have a better understanding helping them to support and deal with the pupils better" **[S1]**.*

*"The provided Online Tool allows the schools to contextualise wellbeing scores alongside data such as gender, year group and special needs, and is thus exceptionally useful to schools." **[S2]**.*

WMF is a major channel for youth voice in schools, which ensures that the interventions chosen correspond more closely to the real needs and preference of young people. The framework plays a major role in supporting the implementation of the Whole-School approach to mental health endorsed by the Department for Education **[S2]**. For example, HeadStart Kernow has invested a significant amount of money to support school-based interventions **[S4]**. The local authority produces hard-copy reports for schools (as well as a young people's version) and provides funding to support student-led initiatives that have proved highly effective and directly beneficial to students. Examples of these initiatives include a group of Year 9 girls on the edge of exclusion who identified issues of anxiety in the survey and requested and received funding to set up a yoga group, which has helped them to remain in school **[S2]**.

Impact on local government strategy and planning

Local data from the pupil mental health and wellbeing surveys have been used by Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton to inform system and cultural change in emotional and mental health beyond the HeadStart programme itself.

In Cornwall, they “found the WMF exceptionally useful in driving systems and cultural change across the board, moving towards more integrated services. It provides insight for our One Vision plan (launched in 2017) for the closer integration of education, health and social care services for children, young people and their families, and as such we adopted the WMF data right from the first year of the programme as a strategic tool and Key Performance Indicator in our business plan. Public Health use the WMF to inform its Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), which is a legal requirement and informs strategy. We have used it to help design services, to evidence funding bids (e.g. NHS England’s Mental Health Trailblazer pilots), to identify and evidence areas of need and design measures to meet those needs” [S2].

Newham also used the evidence to support a successful Mental Health Trailblazer pilot bid. Their Public Health and Policy teams have used the data to guide strategic planning for the Borough. “The WMF is a valued and useful tool which has contributed to understanding about the prevalence rates of mental health and wellbeing of CYP [Children and Young People] in Newham. Working with schools to implement and use the WMF findings has led to meaningful changes at the whole-school level to improve awareness of CYP mental health and development of effective provision in schools” [S3].

Impact on National Policy

In October 2018, shortly after publication of the first HeadStart findings highlighting the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing issues in England’s children and young people, the then-Prime Minister Theresa May commissioned an annual State of the Nation research report on Children and Young People’s Mental Health and Wellbeing from the Department for Education (DofE). The 2019 report [S6] cites the HeadStart results [R2] and associated policy and evidence briefings [S5] as evidence for the scale and implications of the problem. Prof Deighton acted as external reviewer on the report’s 2020 edition, using experience from the HeadStart Learning Programme to inform her comments and suggestions. Deighton was a member of Public Health England’s special interest group on Universal Interventions to Support Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing (whose report she co-authored [S7] citing her wider body of work) and the Department for Health and Social Care use HeadStart prevalence data [R2] as part of the evidence base to support implementing changes to young people’s mental health provision [S8].

In February 2019, the Department for Education invited the team to deliver a mental health and wellbeing workshop for over 70 policy makers, and to participate in a roundtable chaired by the Permanent Secretary on how to develop character and resilience in education. This roundtable informed the ‘5 Foundations to Build Character’ subsequently announced by the Education Secretary. One policy colleague at the DfE commented that, “the work of the HeadStart team, including the evaluation and evidence reviews, is helping to inform the work of DfE’s mental health policy team, in terms of better understanding prevalence, risk and protective factors, and informing how we can work effectively with schools and communities to help improve the mental resilience and wellbeing of children and young people” [S9].

Impact on public awareness

Programme findings have been translated into nine Evidence Briefings and five Heads Up policy briefings [S5], on subjects such as: risk and protection factors, gender differences, key questions raised by young people, the types of interventions schools use, and how to support young people at home. The briefings have been circulated to some 60 targeted stakeholders including policy makers from NHS England, local authorities, Public Health England, Department for Education and the Office for National Statistics as well as practitioners from the NHS, schools/education, mental health and the third sector.

Findings have received wide media coverage, in particular around prevalence and gender differences [R2]. These findings were highlighted in national (The Telegraph, Radio 4 Woman’s Hour, Radio 5 Live, LBC, The Daily Mail, The Express, Sky News), online (Mail, Mirror, Express, Huffington Post – combined estimated reach of over 3,500,000 people) and local media (over 237 outlets including Radio London, Radio Cornwall, West Midlands Express, Star, Southern Daily, The Argus), as well as in trade press (e.g. Medical Xpress, Children & Young People Now, Mental

Health Today) [S10]. The findings have been disseminated at two conferences (in 2018 and 2020) attended by HRH the Duchess of Cambridge and policy makers from the Department for Education, Public Health England and NHS England, researchers, school staff, young people, clinicians and other professionals.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [S1] Responses from schools to Child Outcomes Research Consortium survey on use of WMF data.
- [S2] Supporting statement from Cornwall Headstart Partnership
- [S3] Supporting statement from HeadStart and Children's Health Services Manager, Newham CYPS
- [S4] Resources from Kernow HeadStart for schools based on EBPU research.
<https://www.headstartkernow.org.uk/sec-sch-support/wmf--yp/>
- [S5] Heads Up policy briefings, HeadStart UK. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/evidence-based-practice-unit/headstart-learning-team/headstart-reports-publications>
- [S6] State of the Nation 2019: children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. Report from Department of Education (Refs 3, 9 and 16).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/906693/State_of_the_Nation_2019_young_people_children_wellbeing.pdf
- [S7] Universal Approaches to improving children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: Report on the findings of a Special Interest Group. Public Health England, 2019 (p. 21).
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/842176/SIG_report.pdf
- [S8] Impact assessment for Transforming Children and Young People's mental health provision, Department of Health July 2018.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728894/impact-assessment-for-tranforming-cy-mental-health-provision-green-paper.pdf
- [S9] Email from a policy team leader at the Department for Education
- [S10] Summary of media coverage of 2018 EBPU report (compiled by Anna Freud Centre)