

A Department for Education and Skills

Quality Protects

Research Initiative

Research Programme

Bulletin One



THE QUALITY PROTECTS PROGRAMME was launched by the Department of Health in September 1998 to support local authorities in transforming the management and delivery of children's social services. Its purpose is to produce better outcomes for children and young people who are in need or looked after - by improving the quality of services they receive, as well as the day to day decision making by social workers. Decisions, for example, about when care is the best option, or when and how young people should be supported when living with their families.

THE PROGRAMME'S KEY ELEMENTS are: eleven defined objectives, with linked sub-objectives, and related performance objectives for children's services; a key role for local councillors acting as corporate parents; the presentation of Management Action Plans by councils (a requirement that ended in 2002/03); and a children's service grant of £885 million payable to councils over the course of the programme (now extended to 2004).

Quality Protects is also part of a wider set of initiatives which includes Sure Start to help children and their families get off to a better start in life, the Children's Fund to help them overcome problems as they grow up, and Connexions, to support them during their transition to adulthood and working life.

Although the overall Quality Protects programme is due to end in 2004, both the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and an influential group of change agents known as Regional Development Workers (RDWs) will continue to use the Quality Protects' brand. The RDWs in particular will play a major role in disseminating the findings from the research programme in their regions.

The overall aim of the research initiative is to examine the impact of Quality Protects on the quality of services for children and young people who are looked after by local authorities, those in the child protection system and other children in need requiring the support of social services. More specifically, the initiative will examine how the objectives of the programme are being translated into practice. It will evaluate some of the changes in policy, procedure and practice introduced in response to the Quality Protects programme, and will include an assessment of outcomes for children, young people and their families in relation to their welfare and quality of life. The initiative will complement the many recently reported and on-going studies, funded by the Department of Health/DfES and other bodies, which have informed the development of Quality Protects and will contribute to its on-going evaluation (summaries of over 200 related studies are given in a 'QP database' that can be accessed in the website for this research initiative (www.york.ac.uk/res/qualityprotects)).

The eight studies in the research initiative, whose detailed descriptions are provided below, are related to four of the main objectives of the overall Quality Protects programme that seek to ensure that children:

- *are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood - by providing more stability*
- *are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect*
- *gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care*

• *with specific social needs arising out of a disability or a health condition are living in families or other appropriate settings in the community where their assessed needs are adequately met and reviewed.*

In addition, the studies will address three overarching issues: the needs of black and minority ethnic children and their families; user and carer involvement; and inter-agency working - between statutory services, voluntary organisations, including health, education and social services.

Other government sponsored research will also contribute to the development of the Quality Protects objectives - for example, all the studies within a parallel research initiative COSTS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED have special relevance to Objective 11 *making best use of resources*. In addition, many of the studies within the COSTS AND EFFECTIVENESS initiative have relevance to at least one other Quality Protects objective - for example, an evaluation of the 'Assessment Framework' has relevance to both Objective 11 and to Objective 7 *better assessment leading to better services*.

The timetable for the eight studies in the research initiative is set out on the back page.

Disseminating the findings

This first bulletin introduces the research programme. Two more are planned to report on progress, identify ongoing issues and present preliminary findings. There will be summaries of the projects on the research initiative website (www.york.ac.uk/res/qualityprotects). In addition, if you wish to find out more about the research projects you can contact the studies' research teams. Contact details are provided at the end of each project summary.

Co-ordinating and managing the research initiative

Professor Mike Stein (University of York) and Caroline Thomas (University of Stirling) are the academic co-ordinators for the research initiative. They work closely with Dr Carolyn Davies who is responsible at the DfES for the overall management of the research initiative and is the link person with the Department of Health. Annual seminars will bring together all the research teams, policy makers and service users involved in the initiative to exchange ideas about the research. Dr Ian Gibbs and Helen Jacobs at the University of York are responsible for organising the seminars, managing the website and producing the bulletins.

ensuring children are securely attached to carers Quality Protects Objective 1 capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood - by providing more stability

Study 1 **Patterns and explanations of placement stability and change**

Professor Ian Sinclair, Dr Ian Gibbs, Claire Baker, Jenny Lee
Social Work Research and Development Unit, University of York

relevance The study is related to the Quality Protects policy objectives of promoting secure attachments to safe and effective carers and promoting stability. The study builds on and largely replicates the classic study Child Care Now.¹

aims

- to describe key features of the current care system and, in particular, to look at patterns of stability and change for different groups
- to understand the way professionals at different levels are seeking to achieve more permanence for looked after children
- to use statistical and qualitative methods to explain variations in performance measures concerned with permanence at the level of team, area, division and local authority.

taking part The study will involve up to 15 local authorities in England that vary in authority type, social and ethnic composition, service profile, star ratings, geographical location and other important dimensions. While it was not possible to have a truly random sample, the findings from the study will nonetheless offer important lessons for the wider population of local authorities.

methods This is a large retrospective study of the placements and moves over 12 months of looked after children in each authority. 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. More complex statistical techniques² will allow the researchers to assess the influence of placement, team and local authority on stability and turnover. This work will be complemented by qualitative interviews with young people, social workers and managers.

duration October 2002 - September 2005

contact clb10@york.ac.uk

Notes

1 Rowe, J., Hundleby, M. and Garnett, L. (1989) Child Care Now: A survey of placement patterns. London: British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering.

2 For example, multi-level modelling

Study 2 **The reunification of looked after children with their parents: Patterns, interventions and outcomes**

Professor Elaine Farmer, Dr Theresa O'Neill, Wendy Sturgess, Paula Morris,
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

relevance The study relates to the Quality Protects objectives of promoting secure attachments to safe and effective carers and promoting stability. Unsuccessful returns are responsible for some of the instability of looked after children.

aims

- to provide a picture of the circumstances in which reunification of children with their parent(s) occur and how concerns about risk or significant harm are managed.
- to examine the preparation, monitoring and interventions provided to support the child and/or parent(s)
- to investigate the key factors associated with successful and unsuccessful return outcomes, both in terms of breakdowns and the quality of the return for the child.
- to identify the circumstances when return would be ill advised.

taking part The research will be conducted in four or five local authorities, at least two of which will have a substantial black and minority ethnic population. In addition to an analysis of case files, the study will focus on a sub-sample of 100 children, divided between those who have had a successful and those who have experienced a failed return.

methods The first part of the study involves 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 period following the date of return.

From this sample two groups of 50 children will be identified for comparison in the second part of the study. The first group will have experienced successful returns, and the second group 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.

Statistical 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 their experience and understandings of reunification. Returns that repeatedly fail, and the forms of help that help reduce the negative effects of these, will also be of interest.

duration February 2003 - April 2005

contact **E.R.Farmer@bristol.ac.uk**
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/SPS/>

Study 3 **Children placed with relatives and friends:
Placement patterns and outcomes**

Professor Elaine Farmer and Sue Moyers
School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol

relevance The study is related to the objective within Quality Protects that seeks to provide secure attachment to safe and effective carers. The findings will provide detailed information about the benefits and disadvantages of placements with relative/friends from the perspective of the main participants and will examine which factors relate to the success or failure of these placements.

aims The aim of the study is to provide a clear picture of the current use of placements with relatives and friends; 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.

taking part The study is being conducted in four local authorities. In addition to an analysis of case files, the study will focus on a sub-sample of 50 children aged five or over who are in relative/friend placements.

methods An analysis of case files in the first part of the study 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.

Interviews will be conducted with the 50 children in the sub-sample and with their caregivers, parents and social workers. A number of standard measures will be used. The placements will be considered on a range of dimensions, including progress and 'outcomes', contact issues, support to the caregivers, placement duration and satisfaction and disruption rates.

duration April 2001 - March 2004

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<http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/SPS/>

urely attached to carers
and effective care for the
/ providing more stability

Study 4 Outcomes for children placed with family and friends as a result of care proceedings

Joan Hunt, Suzette Waterhouse and Eleanor Lutman
Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Oxford

relevance The study examines outcomes for children placed with members of their extended families or social networks, focussing on children placed as the result of court proceedings brought because of child protection concerns. The study is particularly relevant to the Quality Protects' objective of securing attachment to safe and effective carers.

aims To inform the development of Quality Protects, at both central and local government levels, in relation to the placement of children with members of their extended families or social networks. The overall purpose is to assess the extent to which such placements deliver secure attachment to safe and effective carers

taking part The project will follow-up an existing 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 Quality Protects and providing the largest sample of children placed with kin since the Children Act 1989. There will also be a small comparison group of children placed in non-related care.

methods 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.

duration July 2003 - November 2005

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<http://www.apsoc.ox.ac.uk/parenting/main.htm>

Study 5 **Enhancing placement stability: A randomised controlled trial of standard services compared with two specific interventions with adoptive parents**

Dr Alan Rushton, Health Services Research Department, Institute of Psychiatry
Dr Elizabeth Monck, Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London

relevance The study relates to the Quality Protects policy objectives of promoting secure attachments to safe and effective carers and stability of the placements.

aims The study is intended to evaluate two-parent support programmes. The main question to be tested is whether a cognitive behavioural parenting programme, or an educational programme about parenting special needs children, when added to the standard service, will be more effective at enhancing parenting and reducing the children's problems than the standard social work service alone.

Two contrasting parent support programmes will be provided in addition to the standard social work service and the effects will be compared with standard service alone. The support programmes are both directed at helping the new parents to manage the difficulties of children placed for adoption in the previous 3-12 months. Manuals will be developed for each support programme and the delivery by specially trained parent support advisors will be monitored. The content, quantity and quality of ongoing standard services received by all the groups will also be documented.

taking part The sample will comprise of 180 selected cases where a given level of difficulty in the child is present in the course of the first year of placement. With adoptive parents' agreement, these cases will be randomly allocated to receive one of the two parent support programmes or continue with the standard social work service only. The latter group will be offered one of the additional programmes after the end of the initial trial. The study will include boys and girls between 3-7 years at placement.

methods Research interviews will be held with the parents before, immediately following and 6 months after the support programmes. Similar interviews will be held with the adoptive parents receiving the standard services when they enter the study, and three and nine months later. Measures will be derived from assessments of the stability of the placement, parent's self-reported competence and confidence, the children's and parents' psychological well-being, children's behaviour and pro-social skills at home and in school or nursery setting, and parental satisfaction with services. Comparative costs will be calculated and related to outcome.

duration October 2002 - September 2005

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<http://www.ioe.ac.uk/tcru>

ensuring children are protected from emotional, Quality Protects Objective 2 physical and sexual abuse and neglect

Study 6 **What works? The response of child protection practices and procedures to children exposed to domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse within their families**

Professor Hedy Cleaver, Don Nicholson and Sukey Tarr

Department of Health and Social Care, Royal Holloway, University of London

relevance The study is linked to the Quality Protects objective that children are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Domestic violence and parental problem drug and alcohol use is associated with increased risk of children suffering significant harm. These issues impact directly on parenting capacity and impede the ability of agencies to intervene successfully.

aims This study explores the response of child protection practices and procedures to children exposed to domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol abuse within their families. Based on the results of the study, a practice guide will be produced aimed at supporting practitioners working with families whose needs involve the assistance of both children's and adult service providers.

taking part The study is taking place in six local authorities in England representing a wide geographical spread and involving those responsible for small and large child populations. Identification of the six authorities was carried out in partnership with Social Services Inspectors from three regions. The primary criterion for selection has been contrasting patterns of working practices between children's social services and agencies responsible for domestic violence or adult substance misuse.

methods Within the six authorities, a total of 360 cases will be identified where these parenting issues have been noted in the reason for referral. The case file study will be used to explore the relationship between information gained at referral, assessment, planning and intervention. Finally, 42 cases, identified from the case file study, will form the qualitative sample. Interviews with children, parents and service providers will identify 'what works' from the perspective of all parties involved.

duration September 2002 - August 2004

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ensuring children gain maximum life chance Quality Protects Objectives 3,4 & 5 benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care

Study 7 **Educating difficult adolescents: An evaluation of the impact of Quality Protects**

Professor David Berridge and Cheryl Dance, Department of Applied Social Studies, University of Luton; Dr Jeni Beecham, PSSRU, University of Kent

relevance The study evaluates the implementation of the education objectives within Quality Protects (i.e. improving educational achievements, and reducing both permanent exclusions and unauthorised absences).

aims The main aims of the study are to investigate at a local level the development of policy and practice to meet QP education objectives; analyse statistics concerning the educational progress of looked after children; evaluate the educational and wider experiences of samples of 'difficult' adolescents; analyse the overall cost of care and education services delivered and compare these to outcomes; and relate findings on services, outcomes and costs to authorities' implementation of QP objectives.

The study builds on nine months' pilot work funded by the Department of Health and combines research expertise in child welfare, special education and social care economics. Collaboration with Family Rights Group and young people in the looked after system enhances service-user involvement.

taking part Based in three contrasting social services and education departments, the study includes all age groups of pupils, but has a particular focus on adolescents.

methods The study includes both quantitative and qualitative methods. Initially, a thematic analysis will take place of authorities' QP Management Action Plans. Local statistical information concerning the educational progress of looked after children will be analysed. Semi-structured interviews with key managers will focus on the implementation process of QP, local context and problems, budgetary decisions, perceived effectiveness and future plans. In addition, there will be a detailed evaluation over nine months of the educational and overall progress of comparable groups of 'difficult' adolescents - 150 in total - living in foster care, children's homes and residential special schools for pupils 'with emotional and behavioural difficulties' ('EBD'). This will involve semi-structured interviews with young people, teachers and carers.

duration September 2003 - February 2006

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ensuring children with specific social needs arising Quality Protects Objective 6 out of a disability or a health condition are living in settings where their assessed needs can be met

Study 8 **Participation of disabled children and young people under Quality Protects**

Professor Patricia Sloper, Ms Anita Franklin
Social Policy Research Unit, University of York

relevance The study is linked to the Quality Protects' objective that seeks to have a positive impact on the lives of disabled children and their families as well as the objective that promotes the involvement of children and their carers in planning services and making decisions about their own care.

aims The overall aim is to improve knowledge about the effective participation of disabled children and young people under Quality Protects. The research investigates the process of disabled children's participation in decision making, and outcomes, in respect of the impact of disabled children's views on service development and / or tailoring individual packages of care. The findings from the study will be used to develop Guidelines to support Social Services Departments in promoting disabled children and young people's participation.

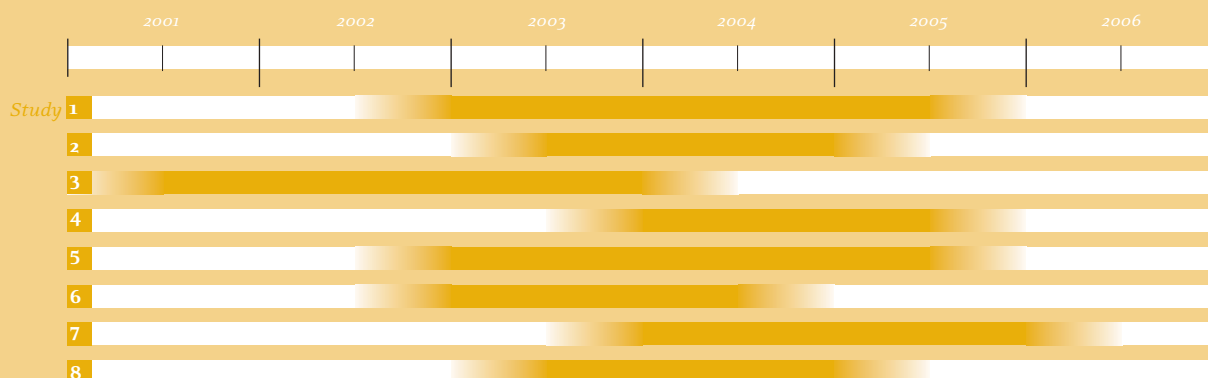
taking part A questionnaire about participation of disabled children is being sent to all social services departments in England. A sample of six local authorities identified as involving disabled children in decision making will be selected for case studies. There will be a focus on participation work including children in four groups identified in previous years' Management Action Plans as causing concerns for service providers and / or who are especially 'difficult to reach': children and young people with complex health needs; autistic spectrum disorders; communication impairments; and degenerative conditions.

methods Research methods include an analysis of Year 4 Management Action Plans and a survey of all social services departments to obtain information on participation work with disabled children. Qualitative research will obtain the views of approximately 48 disabled children and young people and their parents, and 12 staff on 'what works' in respect of the processes and outcomes of participation. Children and staff will be invited to a workshop to draw up guidelines based on the findings from the research.

duration April 2003 - May 2005

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Programme timetable



QP objective 1 *promoting secure attachments to safe and effective carers*

STUDY 1 Patterns and explanations of placement stability and change

2 The reunification of looked after children with their parents: patterns, interventions and outcomes

3 Children placed with relatives and friends: placement patterns and outcomes

4 Outcomes for children placed with family and friends as a result of care proceedings

5 Enhancing placement stability: A randomised controlled trial of standard services compared with two specific interventions with adoptive parents

QP Objective 2 *protection from significant harm*

6 What works? The response of child protection practices and procedures to children exposed to domestic violence or drug and alcohol abuse within their families

QP Objectives 3,4 & 5 *life chances of looked after children*

7 Educating difficult adolescents: An evaluation of the impact of Quality Protects

QP Objective 6 *services to disabled children and their families*

8 Participation of disabled children and young people under Quality Protects

The web page for this initiative, which gives updates, papers and details of seminars, can be found at: www.york.ac.uk/res/qualityprotects. This bulletin is also available via the website.

If you wish to receive a hard copy version, contact the initiative team via e-mail at swrdu@york.ac.uk or by writing to The Unit Administrator, SWRDU, University of York, YORK YO10 5DD.

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