The research summaries this month focus on care leavers and include:

A systematic review of the literature on young people's experiences of leaving care in the UK.

Young people's and professionals' views on the transition to independence in the UK, focusing on the importance of relationships to accessing support.

Insights from sociology into how care experienced children 'do' family and their changing relationships with their birth families.

The evidence in support of developing peer mentoring approaches to tackling teenage pregnancy amongst Looked After Children.

Related resources by Research in Practice include:

That Difficult Age: Developing a more effective response to risks in adolescence – an evidence scope and workshop looking at the risks facing some adolescents in the UK today to inform a distinctive adolescent-centred approach to working with adolescents.

Risk Taking Adolescents and Child Protection – a strategic briefing outlining recent research on adolescent development. Emerging practice examples are highlighted and links provided for relevant papers and other sources of information.

Contact: Making good decisions for children in public law – a briefing, chart and workshop summarising research relevant to those involved in making contact plans for children in adoption, fostering or kinship care. See co-author Polly Baynes’ accompanying blog here.


Care leavers and pathway plans – Our responses to two Research Queries posted on our Partner forum on this topic, including a downloadable spreadsheet containing abstracts of related research published 2012-15.

A number of blogs by RiP staff and guests:

- System redesign with young people’s voices centre stage – Louise Bazalgette and Jake Garber (NSPCC) discuss findings from their research into the emotional wellbeing of children in care and share tools for capturing the day-to-day experiences of care leavers.

- 16-17 year olds: a journey of vulnerability – Iryna Pona from The Children’s Society shares findings from their research into the lack of services and the issues faced by vulnerable 16-17 year olds, including care leavers.

- Harnessing community capacity to support children and families – Alison O’Sullivan, President of the Association of Directors of Children’s Services, blogs on this topic, including its importance to improving the support available to care leavers.

- Relationships: ‘the golden thread’ in children’s lives – Research Officer Ferdia Earle on the importance of relationship-based practice in work with children.
Other related resources:

*State of the Nation: Report 1 Children in Care and Care Leavers Survey 2015* – a regular report by the Children's Commissioner on the experiences of LAC and care leavers.

*Children and Young People’s Views on being in Care* (2015) by Coram Voice and the University of Bristol – A literature review highlighting the voices of Looked After Children (LAC) from existing research.

*Innovative approaches to support young people transitioning from care to adulthood* – A video of a seminar at which Mike Stein, University of York, discusses international research, policy and practice around supporting young people from care to adulthood.

*Corporate Parenting for young People in Care: Making the difference?* (2015) by the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU), the University of York – In this peer research study conducted with young people the authors report if, and how, corporate parents are caring for LAC and care leavers and doing their best for them.

*The costs of not caring: supporting English care leavers into independence* – An assessment by Barnardo’s (2014) of the impact of inadequate support, including a shortage of good quality, affordable accommodation for care leavers.

*Survival of the fittest? Improving life chances for care leavers* – This report by the Centre for Social Justice (2014) draws on a survey with 100 care leavers and consultation with those who work with them to identify where progress still needs to be made to improve outcomes.

*Someone to care: experiences of leaving care* – Qualitative research by Barnardo’s (2014) into the challenges faced by care leavers as they make the transition to independent living.

Recently published freely available resources:

*Leading change in supervision: messages for practice* - The Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) share learning and case studies from their project exploring challenges and enablers for effective supervision. An IRISS insight – *Achieving effective supervision* – has also been published.

*Adopters’ views on their children’s life story books* - This research, conducted jointly between the UK children’s charity Coram and the University of Bristol, aims to address the absence in the academic literature of adopters’ perspectives on their children’s life storybooks.


Policy and report headlines this month:

A leading charity has launched a review to investigate why children and young people who have been in care are more likely to get into trouble with the law - deadline today.

The government is consulting on a new set of standards for senior social workers.
The National Audit Office has published a new report on care leavers’ transition to adult life.

**Articles and Summaries**

“**Young people’s experiences of social support during the process of leaving care: A review of the literature**” Dominic Hiles, Duncan Moss, John Wright and Rudi Dallos (2013) *Children and Youth Services Review*

Experiences and outcomes of care leavers are often compared unfavourably to those of their peers in the general population. While we can and should aspire to support the highest attainment what may be buried by this discourse is that, despite the difficult circumstances surrounding their entry to care, around half of care leavers are engaged in education, employment or training by age 19 (DfE, 2012) and most feel that living in care made life better for them (Morgan, 2012). To find the best way to support young people in and leaving care, it is important to understand the pathways to successes as well as those that lead to difficulties.

This review synthesises research on young people’s experiences of social support during their transition from care. A systematic approach was used to identify relevant studies published since 2001. Forty-seven met the inclusion criteria and five key themes were identified.

**The influence of past experiences on social support in the present**

Some young people sought to protect themselves from repeated breakdowns in relationships by avoiding entering into trusting relationships, including with professionals. Being in care could also make building a network of friends challenging as it marked the young people out as ‘different’ to their peers. Those with a history of stable placement(s) fared better during transition and foster carers often played a vital role in this.

**Supportive relationships during the transition from care**

Trust is the bedrock of supportive relationships and there was evidence that developing even one trusting relationship provided the foundation for more. Most young people drew on support from:

- Professionals – seen as essential for practical and some emotional support.
- Mentors – provide more emotional and appraisal support.
- Peers – provide emotional support as well as an important link to other families.
- Partners – Dixon et al (2006) found 20 per cent of care leavers moved in with partners. However, these relationships may sometimes be abusive or reflect financial dependence.

**Relationships with birth families**

Most care leavers try to contact their birth family. It was acknowledged these relationships could be positive, providing emotional and practical support and promoting identity formation – particularly in the case of sibling relationships – but that they could also result in disappointment or rejection. The evidence suggests professionals are often poor at identifying key kin and meeting care leavers’ emotional needs when navigating these relationships.
The crucial role of practical support

An overwhelming need for practical support alongside emotional support when leaving care emerged. Finding accommodation is the most pressing issue – studies suggest that around a third of care leavers will experience homelessness in their first year after leaving (Barn et al, 2005, Dixon et al, 2006). Support to access education and employment was mixed with young people reporting being steered towards more vocational pathways. Many young people identified managing money as the biggest issue, with implications for their health and ability to develop a social network.

The lived experience of leaving care

Many young people want more control over the timing and speed of their transition from care. Care leavers often felt ill-prepared for the responsibilities associated with transitions and could harbour misperceptions that leaving care meant becoming independent from support. This could create a tension between needing support and not asking for it.

Care leavers often felt isolated and lonely at first and data suggests a contraction of their social networks during transition. Young people generally wanted to retain links to their past and maintain a sense of ‘belonging’. Those who went on to quickly become parents themselves mostly found this a positive experience though some felt ‘judged’ by professionals and the wider public.

This review demonstrates the crucial role of a range of social support for young people during their transition from care but demonstrates that access to social support varies greatly, perhaps having more to do with individual relationships between young people and professionals than policy. Implications for practice include the need to:

- Nurture a young person’s whole network of relationships including peers.
- Involve young people in identifying these relationships, particularly within extended family, and support them to manage these.
- Greater attend to the most vulnerable care leavers including young parents and those with emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties.
- Be aware of the challenges young people might face in engaging with support.
- Actively and consistently offer support.

References


“‘So what am I?’ – Multiple perspectives on young people’s experience of leaving care” Dominic Hiles, Duncan Moss, Lisa Thorne, John Wright and Rudi Dallos (2014) Children and Youth Services Review

Whilst Local Authorities (LAs) have a statutory obligation to support care leavers until at least age 21 and have developed ‘Staying Put’ policy allowing young people to remain in foster placements beyond their eighteenth birthday, the UK has simultaneously seen significant cuts in public service funding. This creates a tension between LAs’ obligations and their capacity to meet them.

This pilot study explores young people’s experiences of leaving care in the UK against this backdrop as well as investigating the authors’ previous finding that individual relationships with professionals may be more important to accessing support than policy. It draws on data obtained from two focus groups, one with young people (six) and another with professionals (four) from the same locality, alongside ethnography.

**Young people’s views**

Relationships with professionals were seen as essential but the young people received support from a number of other sources too. Dynamic social networks were described consisting of multiple groups of people, generally separate from each other eg friends and work colleagues, and performing different support roles.

Participants identified two kinds of support – “forced” support and supportive relationships that “leave you with a smile on your face”. The former reflects support that is given rather than negotiated according to young people’s wishes and expressed needs. The latter was thought to be highly individual and arise from relationships. Reliability, trust and feeling that someone is genuinely interested in you were described as key characteristics of successful relationships, and participants found honesty important to helpful support.

Participants also highlighted that they found the term ‘care leaver’ confusing as whilst they are told that they are leaving care they will sometimes remain in contact with transition services for up to eight years after the ‘label’ is introduced.

**Professionals’ views**

Young people were described as being in a state of limbo as they approached their eighteenth birthday, waiting for others to decide whether they could ‘stay put’ or move on. Managing the balance between autonomy and independence was also considered complicated – care leavers experience transitions earlier than their peers in the general population whilst often needing additional support due to their disrupted family experiences. In addition, professionals described them as often lacking the ‘safety net’ provided by parents or foster carers which supports them to take manageable risks and learn from mistakes.

The authors draw on different models of identity development to suggest that independence is perhaps inappropriately held aloft as a goal for young people, not reflecting the interdependent nature of most adults’ lives and perhaps setting young people up to fail. They also draw on Bridges (2009) three stages of successful transitions – ‘letting go’ (managing loss), a ‘neutral zone’ (psychologically adjusting to change) and ‘new beginning’ (developing a new identity) suggesting that whilst the last stage is well
attended to by professional support, we perhaps neglect the first two, causing care leavers sadness, anxiety and anger.

Participants emphasised their emotional connection to the young people they worked with and the moral obligation they felt to fight for the best support for them. The authors note that this results in highly subjective processes around gaining support and that the professionals’ powerlessness in relation to budgets and decision making reflects the seemingly overwhelmed ecosystem underpinning the leaving care process.

**Service design and development**

The system in which this small group of practitioners worked was described as chaotic and crisis driven leading to the inevitable risk that those not in crisis fall through the net. Participants believed a lack of funding underpinned many of these challenges, despite the potential long-term cost-savings to society of providing adequate support. Poor staff retention and temporary staff were described as impairing the continuity of relationships and knowledge of local services so critical to effective support.

Service problems were seen to be compounded by a lack of integration, insufficient joint working and a lack of a transitional service between children’s and adults’ services. Professionals also identified the need for preventative approaches (particularly greater investment in placement stability), reduced caseloads, a more systematic approach to offering support by skilled professionals for a sufficient length of time after leaving care, a guarantee for young people to remain in placement if they wish, and funding to be steered towards training of in-house carers rather than private placements.

These findings lead the authors to make the following policy and practice recommendations:

- A move towards assessing the cost of providing adequate support on a lifespan basis, consistent with a personalisation agenda (Department of Health, 2007).
- A more integrated approach to working with care leavers (eg Shaheen and Kersley 2011)
- Professional support for all young people’s important relationships (eg Hiles et al 2013).
- Interventions to address the risk of staff burnout (Awa et al 2010), linked to high turnover (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter 2001) (See our practice tool Supporting emotional resilience within social workers)

**References**


Sixteen care leavers aged 17 to 25 took part in this Welsh study into their experiences of living in care. The study used life-history techniques, enabling participants to reflect on critical moments in their lives over three interviews. Using insights from sociology, a number of themes important to social work practice emerged.

**Birth families, emotions and dynamic relationships**

In many cases it was clear that the participants’ birth families had formed an ‘emotional co-presence’ throughout their childhood and several of the young people expressed strong and conflicting emotions regarding their birth parents. Most felt their parents had failed them in some way but still felt an emotional connection; a smaller number expressed some empathy with their parents’ life circumstances. Other emotions included longing to be with parents – particularly when first in care – and abandonment, though reflecting on their experience as adults, many were glad they had not been returned to their birth parents.

Regular contact with birth parents had often petered out as participants entered adolescence then picked up again when leaving care (Stein 2009). Emotions towards birth parents also changed over time.

The findings emphasise the relational nature of family processes (Morgan 2011); participants’ experiences of family were developed and worked out with others, either during contact with their birth families or through their ideas about them, which changed over time. Here, the research usefully explores the importance of memories and imagination as an element of family and relational identity (Smart 2007), reminding us that young children are not ‘blank slates’ (Prout 2005) who can be transplanted into new families.

**Hidden family information**

Smart (2011) has written about how family secrets can be an attempt to manage shame, but also be disruptive or produce micro-power relations within families. Some young people were concerned about this, while others felt that finding out more about their origins would be healing. Both cases underline the importance of offering young people informed, professional support in negotiating potentially volatile family relationships.
Siblings

In this study, siblings represented the most positive birth family relationships discussed. Several participants’ loss of their siblings through adoption had caused them extreme unresolved loss. The positive potential of sibling relationships is sometimes overshadowed by the problems associated with finding carers for large sibling groups. Furthermore, post-adoption/care contact with birth families may risk overemphasising parent–child relationships over those of siblings and the study reveals a need to listen to children’s own understandings of their important relationships. It also highlights that due to the dynamic nature of relationships, an assessment of suitable contact arrangements should be regularly reviewed. (Polly Baynes, co-author of our recent resource Contact: Making good decisions for children in public law has written an interesting accompanying blog on this subject, here).

Nomadic childhoods

The authors explore Morgan’s (2011) delineation of three types of intimacy: embodied (including touch), emotional (disclosing) and intimate knowledge (“interweaving of personal biographies” (p35) over a long time). Care experienced childhoods are described as nomadic, often involving moves to join new care settings, so while many participants identified relationships where they had partly achieved the first two types of intimacy, none had sustained a positive relationship with an adult from infancy to adulthood. Some were able to identify how they had failed to learn how to ‘do’ family early on in their lives, and this became compounded by and intertwined with placement disruptions.

The problem of unstable and multiple placements is well documented (Unrau et al 2008, Samuels 2009). A need for secure and long-term relationships to enable recovery from trauma along with the opportunity to develop ‘intimate knowledge relationships’ would increase Looked After Children’s ability to fulfil their potential.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that a holistic theoretical approach that embraces psychological and sociological understandings of families and relationships will be most productive for researchers, practitioners and families. It calls for an increased use of the sociologies of intimacy, the family and childhood in social work research and practice. In particular, an understanding that there is not necessarily a right or wrong way to be a family, that it can be self-defined, negotiated and have potential to change is a helpful framework for both practitioners and young people.

Sociology’s emphasis on children as agents fits well with social work practices that emphasise direct engagement with children in order to understand their perceptions and needs but additionally, the participants’ keenness to reflect on their lives indicates the importance of practitioners enabling young people to do this.

References


This article considers why decreased teenage pregnancy rates in the universal population of the UK are not evident among Looked After Children (LAC). The authors advocate peer mentoring as an intervention, involving a previously looked after child whose post-care life experiences have been positive.

The teenage pregnancy unit (TPU), established by the government in 1999, aimed to halve the conception rate for under 18s over ten years. Strategies included improved sex and relationship education (SRE) in schools, and increased access to contraception and health services. It did not achieve its overall target but the conception rate fell by 13.3 per cent in 1998, the lowest level for 20 years. In some areas a reduction of up to 25 per cent was seen. In 2012, the TPU was disbanded and its work subsumed within the Department for Education (DfE).

LAC and care leavers are significantly more likely than other teenagers to become pregnant and continue with the pregnancy. Between 20 and 50 per cent of 16 to 19 year old LAC become parents compared with approximately five per cent of the general population (Brodie et al 1997).

Significant evidence supports the association between socio-economic deprivation and teenage pregnancy in the UK (McLeod 2001, Swann et al 2003). Contributors include: educational disadvantage and low employment expectations, limited accurate information regarding contraception and sexually transmitted infections, sexualised images in the media, and a lack of openness about sex (Social Exclusion Unit 1999). LAC children are more likely to have experienced more of these factors. In addition to these demographic
factors, emerging findings from the work of Broadhurst and colleagues highlights the complex relationship between childhood experience of the loss of birth family relationships and subsequent teenage pregnancies.

Universal approaches may not reach looked after young people. For example, providing SRE has had some impact (DCSF 2010) but LAC tend to miss curriculum-based SRE due to frequent moves, exclusions, and poor attendance (Knight et al 2006). Open discussion between parents and children impacts positively (DCSF, 2010) but LAC may not have relationships with their parents. More nuanced and tailored approaches are needed and the authors advocate peer mentoring. The ‘peer’ aspect reflects the suggestion the mentor be a similar age or have had similar life experiences to the mentee.

The use of adult mentors for care leavers has increased self-confidence and self-esteem (Clayden and Stein 2005) and peer mentoring for LAC has had a beneficial impact on factors linked to teenage pregnancy including self-esteem, loneliness, mistrust, lack of assertiveness, and lack of perceived choices (Knight et al 2006). Resilience is also protective in the context of teenage pregnancy and the presence of one strong attachment, such as a mentor, can enhance resilience (Gilligan 1999).

There are challenges, including recruiting and retaining mentors. These are complicated by the possibility the mentor may have unresolved issues - they may over-identify with their mentee and relive past trauma or, without good training, may begin to mirror the mentee’s behaviour. Building the mentoring relationship may be a challenge in itself since many LAC may experience difficulties in trusting due to previously disrupted attachments (Knight et al 2006). These difficulties are not insurmountable and emphasise the need for careful recruitment of mentors who are resilient and empathic, with high self-esteem. Rhodes and DuBois (2008) found mentoring relationships that lasted more than a year to be of most benefit, highlighting the importance of managing the intervention well, and carefully planning the end of any mentoring relationship. Additionally, there are insufficient evaluations of current mentoring schemes to conclude which is the most effective model.

If these challenges are managed, the authors argue there is sufficient evidence to develop and evaluate peer mentoring as a strategy to address LAC teenage pregnancy.

References


Parliamentary Business

The House of Commons and House of Lords are in recess until 7 September. For a full list of Bills currently before Parliament, click here.

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

This government Bill is a Bill of three parts. Firstly, it will introduce a duty on the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to report to Parliament on:

- progress made under the Troubled Families programme
- progress towards achieving full employment
- and progress towards achieving 3 million apprenticeships in England.

Second, it will repeal almost all of the Child Poverty Act 2010 and place a new duty on the Secretary of State to report annually to Parliament on children’s ‘life chances’. This will cover children living in workless households, children living in long-term workless households, educational attainment at age 16 and the educational attainment of disadvantaged children at age 16. The Bill will also change the name and remit of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, so that it becomes the Social Mobility Commission.

Third, the Bill provides for the introduction of extensive changes to welfare benefits, tax credits and social housing rent levels, which together will account for around 70 per cent of the £12-13 billion in welfare savings identified by the Chancellor in the Summer Budget. These include: lowering the benefit cap threshold and varying it between London and the rest of the UK; a four-year benefits freeze; limiting support through Child Tax Credits/Universal Credit; and reducing social housing rent levels by one per cent each year for four years from 2016-17.

The House of Commons Library has published a substantial briefing paper on the Bill. Following its second reading in July, the Bill has now been sent to the Public Bill Committee, which is able to receive submissions of written evidence on matters contained within the Bill. Deadline for submissions 15 October (although earlier submission is recommended)

Consultations, reports and reviews

Independent Review of Children in Care

A leading charity has launched a review to investigate why children and young people who have been in care are more likely to get into trouble with the law

The Prison Reform Trust has launched an independent review to consider why looked after children are more likely than their peers to become involved with the criminal justice system, and what can be done to help them stay out of trouble. The review, which will be chaired by Lord Laming, wants to hear from those who have experience of local authority care and the criminal justice system, including children and young people themselves, their families and carers, social workers, local authority leads, YOT managers and others who work with looked after children.

The review will consider which features of the care system increase (or reduce) the chances of a child or young person offending, and which features of the youth justice
system increase the chances that a young person with experience of care will become involved in the criminal justice system. Among other issues, the review will also investigate whether some parts of the youth justice system have an unfair impact on children or young people who have been in care, and which aspects of other services – such as education, health and housing – increase or reduce the likelihood that a young person with experience of care will offend. The review team is inviting submissions of written evidence to inform its inquiry. **Deadline for submissions 4 August**

**Joint Targeted Area Inspections**

*Ofsted and three fellow inspectorates are consulting on proposals for joint area inspections*

Ofsted and its fellow inspectorates have announced plans for joint targeted area inspections, commencing in October, to evaluate how well local agencies are working together to protect children. This follows an announcement in February ([see RPU 168](#)) that the inspectorates would not go ahead with fully integrated inspections, as the evidence from two pilots suggested that ‘the methodology did not deliver sufficient added value’. Instead, they would develop proposals for shorter and sharper targeted inspections that focus on how well agencies work together and other specific areas of concern.

Under the proposals, which have now been published for consultation, Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and HM Inspectorate of Probation will conduct 5-day inspections during which small multidisciplinary teams of inspectors will jointly evaluate the multiagency response to all forms of child abuse and neglect at the point of identification and referral, and the quality and impact of subsequent assessment and decision-making. Local areas will be given eight days’ notice that an inspection is to take place.

Inspections will include a ‘deep dive’ investigation into the experiences of a specific cohort of children and young people at risk of harm. For the six joint targeted area inspections that the inspectorates plan to conduct between October and March, the deep dive aspect will focus on children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation and those missing from home, care or school. From April 2016, the ‘deep dive’ aspect will focus on other cohorts of children or areas of practice – for example, children living with domestic abuse, children at risk of intra-familial sexual abuse, older children, and girls at risk of female genital mutilation.

Following inspection, findings will be set out in a published letter to the chair of the LSCB and senior agency leaders. The letter will highlight key strengths and recommendations, making clear ‘what needs to improve and where the partnership needs to focus its attention’, but it will not make a graded judgement. **Consultation ends 11 August**

**Editorial note:** Alongside publication of the plans for joint area inspections, the Department for Education has published a related [consultation seeking views on proposed amendments to the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2005](#). That consultation also closes on 11 August.

**Service Model for People with Learning Disabilities and Challenging Behaviour: Draft scope**

*NICE is developing a social care guideline on models of service delivery for people with learning disabilities and behaviour that challenges*
NICE is developing a service model for people with learning disabilities and behaviour that challenges, and is now consulting on the draft scope. The guidance will be aimed at health and social care practitioners and services. It will cover children, young people and adults with mild, moderate, severe or profound learning disabilities and challenging behaviour, as well as their families and carers. It will apply to children and young people living in the community, in children’s homes and in children’s mental health and learning disability inpatient settings, including tier-4 CAMHS and secure settings.

The draft scope proposes that the final guideline, which is scheduled for publication in September 2017, will cover models of service delivery, service capacity, location of services, types of provision (including alternatives to inpatient provision), timely access, integration of health and social care services and joint working with related services, including education and criminal justice, as well as safeguarding and risk management. **Consultation ends 12 August**

**Harmful Sexual Behaviour Among Children and Adolescents: Public health guidance – Call for evidence**

NICE is calling for evidence to inform development of guidance to be published next year

NICE is developing public health guidance on identifying and helping children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour (see RPU 163). NICE’s Centre for Public Health (CPH) is conducting a number of public health evidence reviews to inform development of the guidance and would welcome details of any evidence relating to the four questions already outlined in the scope:

1. What are the most effective and cost-effective multiagency approaches to identifying and helping children and young people whose sexual behaviour indicates the need for assessment?
2. How effective and cost effective are different models or tools in assessing the level of seriousness of children and young people’s sexual behaviour?
3. How effective and cost effective are assessment tools designed to identify the level of risk posed by, and address the needs of, children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour?
4. What types of intervention, including family and carer interventions, are effective and cost effective for children and young people who display harmful sexual behaviour?

The CPH is interested in identifying studies that have recently been published or are in press, as well as ongoing research studies or ‘grey’ literature that relate to the review questions. A number of gaps in the evidence have also been identified and the CPH would particularly like to hear about any evidence relating to ‘children under 10 years and problematic harmful sexual behaviour’. The CPH is also keen to receive studies on girls and young women, studies within non-clinical settings (eg educational settings) and those that address outcomes that directly affect the life chances of children and young people displaying harmful sexual behaviour. Final guidance is scheduled for publication in September 2016. **Deadline for submissions 14 August**

**further info**
Knowledge and Skills for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors in Child and Family Social Work

The government is consulting on a new set of standards for senior social workers

The Department for Education is seeking views on two new draft statements of knowledge and skills:

1. **Knowledge and skills for practice supervisors of child and family social workers**: the statement covers promoting and governing excellent practice, developing excellent practitioners, shaping and influencing the practice system, the effective use of power and authority, confident analysis and decision-making, purposeful and effective social work, emotionally intelligent practice supervision, and performance management and improvement.

2. **Knowledge and skills for practice leaders of child and family social workers**: the statement covers leading and governing excellent practice, creating a context for excellent practice, designing a system to support effective practice, developing excellent practitioners, supporting effective decision-making, and quality assurance and improvement.

The Department is particularly keen to hear respondents’ views as to whether anything else should be included in the statements, which will be used alongside the knowledge and skills for Approved Child and Family Practitioners (see RPU 162 and RPU 166) to develop a national assessment and accreditation system for child and family social workers. The system will apply to three levels of practice: Approved Child and Family Practitioner; Practice Supervisor; and Practice Leader. **Consultation ends 1 September**

Psychoactive Substances Inquiry

**MPs have launched a new inquiry**

The Home Affairs Select Committee is to hold a short inquiry into psychoactive substances or ‘legal highs’, following the government’s announcement that they are to be banned (see RPU 171 and RPU 172). The committee has issued a call for submissions of written evidence to inform its inquiry.

Submissions should address any of the following questions:

- Which groups will be particularly affected by a ban on psychoactive substances? What steps the government can take to educate those groups about the dangers, and how should the government explain the change in legal status of such substances?
- What specialist treatment do users of psychoactive substances require? What can be done to counter a shift to using controlled drugs once there is a ban?
- Do enforcement agencies have the necessary powers and resources to effectively enforce the proposed new laws?

**Deadline for submissions 2 September**

further info
**Inquiry into Benefit Delivery**

*MPs have launched a new inquiry focusing on the timeliness and accuracy of benefit delivery*

Westminster’s new Work and Pensions Committee, which is chaired by Frank Field MP, has launched an inquiry into the ‘timeliness and accuracy’ of benefit delivery by the Department for Work and Pensions. The committee is inviting submissions of written evidence relating to:

- the extent to which the DWP delivers benefit and Universal Credit payments correctly and promptly
- the impact of errors and delays, and how such effects are mitigated
- how the DWP’s performance in this area might be monitored and improved.

Launching the inquiry, Mr Field said the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger, which he chaired, had found that the Department would be able to cut by a third the numbers of people having to rely on food banks if it was able to ensure that all legitimate benefit claims were paid promptly. **Deadline for submissions 4 September**

**Further info**

**Independent Review into the Impact on Employment Outcomes of Drug and Alcohol Addiction, and Obesity: Call for evidence**

*Ministers have commissioned a review into how to support benefit claimants with a substance addiction into work*

The government has asked Professor Dame Carol Black to carry out an independent review into how best to support benefit claimants with potentially treatable conditions, such as an addiction to drugs or alcohol, back into work. The review will consider the ‘holistic needs’ of those affected and will assess the availability and cost effectiveness of treatments and interventions to facilitate a return to work for different population sub-groups. Professor Black has published a call for evidence to inform her review.

The call for evidence emphasises that addiction to drugs and alcohol can have ‘profoundly damaging impacts on individuals and their families’, as well as significant costs for the taxpayer and the economy. Research suggests there are between 200,000 and 300,000 children in England and Wales who have at least one parent with a drug misuse problem. Among other questions, the call for evidence asks how children and families are affected. **Deadline for submissions 11 September**

**Further info**

**Social Mobility in the Transition from School to Work for 14 to 24-year-olds: Inquiry**

*Members of the House of Lords have launched a new inquiry*

The House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility is inviting submissions of written evidence to inform its inquiry into social mobility in the transition from school to work for 14 to 24-year-olds. While recent government action has tended to concentrate on those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or at high risk of becoming NEET, the committee has decided to focus its inquiry on those who ‘fall between’ the route of A-levels and Higher Education and those classified as NEET.

Committee Chair Baroness Corston said: ‘Recently, focus has been placed on those who study A-levels and who are able to go on to university, and those who are not in
education, employment or training at all. We want to look at the group that falls between these two categories. They are often known as the “missing” middle, and could make up as much as 50 per cent or half of all of 16-19 year olds – if not more. Too little attention has been given to this group for too long, and we hope to establish with our inquiry what this group needs by talking to businesses, experts and most importantly, young people.

**Deadline for submissions 14 September**

**further info**

**Special Guardianship Review: A call for views**

Ministers have announced a review of special guardianship

The government has launched a review of the use of special guardianship, ten years after it was introduced as a new permanence option. The Department for Education is calling for views to inform the review and has published a consultation paper setting out a number of areas of concern, as well as a series of specific questions on which the Department would welcome responses. The paper highlights that the number of children leaving care through a SGO rose from 5 per cent for the year ending March 2010 to 11 per cent in March 2014. Special guardianship is also being used more often for young children – between 2013 and 2014, there was a 64 per cent increase in the use of SGOs for children under 12 months.

The paper highlights that Family Justice System reforms have seen a fall in average care case duration from 55 weeks three years ago to 29 weeks in 2015. Although improved pre-proceedings work has helped local authorities identify potential special guardians earlier, there are concerns that some assessments ‘are being undertaken to short timescales, resulting in SGOs being awarded on incomplete or partial information’. Local authorities have also expressed concern that the threshold is lower when children are placed with relatives than for other types of permanence. Another message to emerge from the Department’s work with local authorities is that special guardianship ‘is not consistently perceived as a permanence option for children’ and is sometimes seen ‘as a temporary measure until a child can be returned to his or her parents’.

Specifically, the consultation asks:

- **Are any changes needed to the legal or practice framework within which decisions relating to special guardianship are made?**
- **How well does assessment for special guardianship work at present – and could it be improved?** The paper highlights that although local authorities must assess prospective special guardians to establish whether they are able to meet a child’s needs, they could be assessing a close relative who already has a strong relationship with the child or someone who does not know the child well at all. (‘LAs are not required to follow a consistent or minimum assessment framework for birth parents, potential special guardians, and prospective foster carers or adopters.’)
- **What advice and support is most important at each stage of a Special Guardianship Order?** The paper says that where an SGO order entails a child moving to a new home, ‘there may be specific things that could support that transition to be successful’. In addition, many children who leave care on an SGO, or are placed under an SGO as an alternative to care, ‘may need support throughout their childhood to manage the impact of abuse or neglect in their early childhoods, and their guardians may need support to care for them and protect their best interest’.
- **What does best practice in special guardianship look like** (so that all practitioners can be supported to deliver it)? The paper emphasises that the rate
Consultation ends 18 September

Consultation on Statutory Multi-agency Guidance on Female Genital Mutilation

The government is consulting on draft practice guidance for frontline practitioners

The Home Office is seeking views on draft statutory multiagency practice guidance for frontline professionals on how to protect girls and women from female genital mutilation (FGM). The draft guidance covers types of FGM, its international prevalence, cultural underpinning and motives for FGM, and the long-term implications for women’s health and welfare. There are also chapters on identifying girls and women at risk, reporting responsibilities and good practice (including talking about FGM, and the duty to safeguard children), and legal interventions. The guidance includes separate chapters with specific guidelines for those working in children’s social care (chapter 9), health services, schools and colleges, and the police.

Among other questions, the consultation asks whether the draft guidance provides sufficient and clear information for social workers, whether it will enable professionals and public sector organisations to protect girls at risk, and whether it does enough to describe a multidisciplinary approach that will ‘allow the voice of the child to be heard and respected whilst working to protect and support her’. **Consultation ends 30 September**

Editorial note: (i) The government has published a short cross-government declaration outlining the UK’s progress towards ending FGM and child marriage following last year’s Girl Summit, which was co-hosted by the UK government and Unicef. (ii) The international charity Equality Now, which advocates for the human rights of women and girls around the world, has published the results of a study which estimates that in 2011 there were 137,000 women and girls permanently resident in England and Wales who were affected by FGM (born in countries where FGM is practised). It also estimates that 60,000 girls aged between 0 and 14 had been born in England and Wales to mothers who had undergone FGM.

Young Adult Offenders – Inquiry

**MPs have launched a new inquiry**

The House of Commons Justice Committee has launched an inquiry into the treatment of young adults in the criminal justice system. The committee is keen to assess the implications of the findings of the Harris Review and selected recommendations for current policy and practice. It also wants to examine the evidence on what might constitute more effective or appropriate treatment of young adults throughout the criminal justice process, and to review the impact of guidance that advises sentencers to consider the maturity of the offender when reaching their decisions. (For the purposes of the inquiry, the CJS is taken to include the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts, the sentencing framework, youth offending teams, probation services and prisons.)
The committee is now inviting submissions of written evidence to inform its inquiry.

Questions that the committee intends to address include:

- The effectiveness of the Ministry of Justice’s strategy for dealing with young offenders, and the suitability of current provision for young adult offenders in the community, and in custody.
- What measures should be prioritised in addressing levels of suicide, self-harm and violence among young adult offenders held in custody?
- Should sentences to detention in a young offender institution for 18 to 20-year-olds be abolished? And if so, what should replace them?
- Was the Harris Review right to conclude that all young adults in prison are vulnerable and that the experience of being in prison is particularly damaging to them as they are developing?
- Is it appropriate to seek to divert more young adults from custody and the criminal justice system, and if so, how would this best be achieved?
- What legislative or other barriers are there to more appropriate practices for young adult offenders and how could these be overcome?
- And how would a criminal justice system that treats young adults on the basis of maturity (rather than age) operate in practice?

**Deadline for submissions 30 September**

**further info**

**NICE Consultation on Guideline and Quality Standard Topics Relevant to Social Care**

NICE is considering social care topics for the development of new guidance and quality standards.

NICE is asking stakeholders to provide feedback on a list of potential social care topics for the development of new guidance and quality standards. NICE has published details of 18 potential topics and is asking stakeholders to say whether or not a topic should be included, what key areas should be covered by the topic if it is included, and to identify key sources of evidence for that topic. NICE is also inviting stakeholders to suggest additional topics that are not included in its potential list.

The list of potential topics includes:

- **Adoption in looked after children and young people**
- **Disabilities and complex needs** in children, young people and adults, including how services should work together
- **Fostering in looked after children and young people**, including supporting ‘new and longer-standing foster placements’, supporting children for a return to their parents or a more permanent placement, and the recruitment of foster carers
- **Respite care for people with social care needs and their carers**, including determining the need for respite care
- **Support for carers and young carers**, including identifying young carers
- **Support for adults, children and young people with sensory disabilities** (ie lifelong deafness, visual impairment, dual deaf blindness and other conditions to do with a loss of touch)
- **Support for young parents in the community**, including identifying young parents in need of support
- **Support for looked after children and young people leaving care**, including service models to support care leavers and approaches to supporting individuals
research in practice

- Supporting children in care homes – sexual orientation and preventing sexual exploitation, including identifying and responding to issues of sexual identity in children’s homes
- Supportive approaches and physical environments in children’s homes, including the physical layout of care homes, facilities available in care homes, and responding to challenging behaviour.

Once the consultation period has concluded, NICE will review responses with the Department of Health and the Department for Education before presenting a final list of topics to ministers. Topics will then be formally referred to NICE for the development of new quality standards and guidelines for social care. **Consultation ends 9 October**

**further info**

**Care Leavers’ Transition to Adulthood**

The National Audit Office has published a new report on care leavers’ transition to adult life

The government’s Care Leaver Strategy (see RPU 153) was not set up as an effective programme, according to a new report by the National Audit Office. While the report describes development of the strategy as ‘a positive step’, the NAO says the strategy does not have the characteristics it would expect to see in a successful programme. ‘There was no strong evidence of government working in an integrated way; limited implementation capability; no regular reporting of progress or outcomes; and no evidence of a sustained effort to continuously improve.’

The report says there is no reliable information with which to monitor the lives of care leavers over time. There are no official statistics on whether care leavers have timely access to health services, whether they feel they left care at the right time, or the extent to which they have poor social outcomes. And the Department for Education ‘does not collect data on care leavers after the age of 21 on their participation in employment, education and training, or where they live and whether this is suitable accommodation’.

The NAO also highlights that most of the costs of young people being NEET do not fall on local authorities, while government departments that do have a financial interest lack the ability to provide effective local support. Incentives such as ‘payment by results’ need to reward improvement in both medium and long-term outcomes and to encourage innovation, the report says. It also highlights the wide variation between what local authorities spend on supporting care leavers. In 2013-14, this ranged from £300 to £20,000 for each care leaver, a discrepancy that ‘the Department for Education cannot explain’.

The NAO makes a number of recommendations for the eight government departments involved in the cross-government strategy for care leavers. These include:

- **Government should monitor the lives of care leavers to see if they are improving** and to understand the impact of its initiatives. This should include the development of indicators to measure progress against the objectives for care leavers, and the collection of data on the problems care leavers face, such as homelessness, domestic violence and mental health problems.
- **Government should investigate how it could use incentives**, such as payment by results, to encourage innovation and joint working towards improving outcomes for care leavers.
- **The Department for Education should use the data it collects from local authorities**, Ofsted and elsewhere to help improve local services, including the development of clearer triggers for a range of intervention activities.
The Department for Education should work with others to develop and share good practice, including through the creation of a ‘central store’. The report highlights New Belongings (which is partly funded by the Department and involves 30 local authorities), and the National Benchmarking Forum run by Catch22 (which involves 78 local authorities) as examples of good practice. However, ‘there is no national forum that all local authorities and stakeholders, including voluntary organisations, can access’.

Further info

Cuts that Cost: Trends in funding for early intervention services

Two leading children’s charities are calling on the government to show its commitment to early intervention services in the next Spending Round

The National Children’s Bureau and the Children’s Society are calling on the government to introduce five-year protected support for early intervention services in the next Spending Round this autumn. The charities also want the government to support local authorities to set up an Early Intervention Improvement Board, aligned with the Early Intervention Foundation, to ‘identify and share creative approaches to maintaining and strengthening early intervention services’.

The call comes in a new report analysing the impact of the Coalition government’s austerity programme on central government funding for local authority intervention services in England. The report finds that despite the best efforts of many councils to cushion the blow of a substantial reduction in central government funding (the early intervention allocation, as measured by the Early Intervention Grant and ongoing equivalent allocation, fell by 55% during the Coalition government’s five years in office), spending on children’s centres and family support services still fell by 24 per cent between 2010-11 and 2014-15. This represents a cut of more than £700 million a year.

The report calls on the government to develop an effective approach to measuring spending on early intervention services in order to provide ‘a better understanding of how spending on these services is changing over time and the effectiveness of measures that seek to achieve a move towards earlier intervention’.

Further info

Running the Risks: The links between gang involvement and young people going missing

A new report from Catch22

Some children and young people who run away or go missing are being used by gangs to extend inner-city drugs empires into coastal and other towns, according to a new report from Catch22. The report, which has been produced in partnership with Missing People, is based on the results of a survey of professionals and focus groups held with young people, family members and practitioners. It concludes that the market in illegal drugs is ‘a key activity for gang-involved children and young people’ with children being recruited to travel to areas away from home to sell drugs.

As with the findings of recent investigations into child sexual exploitation, the report also highlights a tendency to criminalise children and young people and to interpret repeat episodes of running away as ‘evidence of lower risk rather than a need for safeguarding’. Some professionals made distinctions between those who were ‘genuinely’ exploited and
those who they perceived as making a ‘choice’ to engage in criminal behaviours, the report says.

The report highlights examples of good practice. These include Greenwich and Greater Manchester, which are said to be leading the way in bringing together gang intervention and missing children services, and the benefits of appointing a police missing persons co-ordinator in Margate. The report makes a series of recommendations for policy and practice, including:

- The Department for Education should provide guidance on partnership working, bringing together services dealing with gang involvement and missing services. This should include guidance on joint working between the MASH and community safety teams.
- Local authorities should ensure that all interventions for gang-involved young people prioritise strong relationship building. When gang-involved children and young people go missing, local authorities should ensure they have access to specialist services and interventions, including gender-specific support for girls.
- The Department for Education should work with the voluntary sector to pilot specialist foster placements for gang-involved children and young people (on the same basis as placements developed for children involved in child sexual exploitation).
- The Home Office and Department for Education should fund a national research project into care placements and relocation of gang-involved young people. This should assess the rate of placement breakdown when young people are placed out of area and explore whether out-of-area placements are an effective way to support gang-involved young people.

As well as the full report, Catch 22 has also published an 8-page summary.

further info

Structures, initiatives and guidance

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

Justice Lowell Goddard has formally opened the statutory inquiry into child sexual abuse and institutions, which she expects to last five years

Justice Lowell Goddard, Chair of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (see RPU 169), formally opened the Inquiry on 9 July. The statutory inquiry will consider the extent to which institutions in England and Wales have discharged their duty of care to protect children against sexual abuse. Justice Goddard said the Inquiry is now ‘open for business and is seeking information about child sexual abuse from victims and survivors, from those involved or formerly involved in the care of children, and from institutions under investigation’.

In order to manage its range of work effectively, the Inquiry has divided the institutional sectors under investigation into five broad work streams, each led by a member of the Inquiry Panel: (1) allegations of abuse by people of prominence in public life; (2) education and religion; (3) criminal justice and law enforcement; (4) local authorities and voluntary organisations; and (5) national and private service organisations.
The Inquiry's work will also be divided into three 'core projects' – the Research Project, the Truth Project and the Public Hearings Project. The evidence received in all three projects will inform the Inquiry's overall conclusions and recommendations.

- **The Research Project**, led by Professor Jenny Pearce and the Inquiry's Academic Advisory Board, will involve a comprehensive literature review to bring together analysis of all published work addressing institutional failures in child protection. It will also commission sector-specific research to understand better the scale of the problem and to identify recommendations for change.

- **The Truth Project** will allow victims and survivors of child sexual abuse to share their experiences with the Inquiry at a private session in London or one of the Inquiry’s regional centres. Accounts will not be tested, challenged or contradicted. The aim will be to enable victims and survivors ‘to contribute to the creation of shared knowledge’ and help the Inquiry ‘reach conclusions about why such crimes went unreported and undetected for so long’.

- **The Public Hearings Project** will resemble a conventional public inquiry, in that witnesses will give evidence on oath and be subject to questioning by counsel. A hearing may relate to a particular individual who appears to have been enabled to sexually abuse children in institutional settings, or may relate to an institution that appears to have demonstrated repeated failings over a number of years. The Inquiry will select case studies that ‘appear to illustrate a wider pattern of institutional failings’. Evidence is likely to be taken from both representatives of the institutions under investigation and from victims and survivors.

In her opening statement, Justice Goddard described the Inquiry as 'the largest and most ambitious public inquiry ever established in this jurisdiction’, but said she was determined to ensure it 'does not become bogged down with delays’. Her ‘sincere hope’ is that it will be possible to conclude the Inquiry’s work before the end of 2020. 'We will publish regular annual reports until then,’ she said.

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**Review into Assessment of Pupils with Lower Attainment**

*The government has announced a review led by a specialist head teacher*

Schools Minister Nick Gibb has announced a review into the assessment of pupils with lower attainment. The review will be led by Diane Rochford, Executive Headteacher of the John F Kennedy School in east London, who will work alongside a group of other experts with backgrounds in working with SEND and disadvantaged children to identify a comprehensive statutory assessment for pupils.

It is estimated there are more than 50,000 pupils whose ability falls below the standard required to take national curriculum tests. Ms Rochford said: ‘Parents of pupils who, for a wide range of reasons, make attainment and progress at a slower rate, including those with special educational needs, deserve to have accurate information about how their children are doing at school.’ More information on membership of the review group and its terms of reference will be published in September. The review's final report is due by the end of the year.

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**Further information**