



Annex: ADR England Research Community Catalysts: Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes

Context

The data landscape for children who come into contact with early intervention services or children's social care is patchy. This limits its potential to drive and influence policy, practice, and research. It further hampers our ability to maximise the potential use and impact of administrative data – held not only by local authorities and central government but also by researchers and private and third sector players.

This was acknowledged in the Department for Education (DfE)'s [recent publication on Children's Social Care Reforms in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), which committed to improving the data infrastructure in this area.

[What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care](#) (WWEICSC) recognises the need for a national data strategy that builds on these existing DfE proposals, as well as the work of academics, charities, and other key sector players. We hope that this community catalyst will create an impetus for this work.

Overview

The purpose of this grant is to build a community of data users who can provide strategic leadership for administrative data and research, focusing on children and young people supported by early intervention services or children's social care.

We define 'children at risk of poor outcomes' as children who: are at risk of abuse and neglect; are living or have lived with parental substance misuse, parental conflict, parental mental health problems, or domestic abuse; or have experienced school exclusion, youth violence, or sexual or criminal exploitation. Such adversity affects children's development and impedes their ability to progress in education and develop good mental and physical health.

Our aim is to explore how administrative data can answer questions around improving these children's lives. We know that such data has been used to explore children's experiences of adversity, school and health outcomes, longitudinal trajectories and pathways, and experiences of intervention from Children's Social Care. WWEICSC also already uses this data to evaluate the impact of social interventions.

However, there are still huge gaps in our knowledge. This may be because the administrative data has not been fully explored, because more data linkage is required, or because research projects are not linked to decision makers who need the evidence.

Furthermore, the sector has no comprehensive and collective understanding of the state of research on children at risk of poor outcomes using administrative data. A limited number of researchers use and access this data, and no central bank of resources or training courses exists



for this area. There are few shared resources to describe how people have cleaned and coded data, and how they have made assumptions about variables. Any research in this area is complex, time consuming, and requires significant technical and topical expertise.

This grant therefore aims to address these issues by creating a community of data users to rally around a research agenda and build capacity. Ultimately, this will maximise the potential of administrative data for research on children at risk of poor outcomes.

About What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care (WWEICSC)

WWEICSC is an independent charity which seeks to improve the lives of children and young people. It generates evidence on what works in early intervention and children's social care, then uses this evidence to change policy and practice.

Objectives

The objectives for this grant are in line with those set out in the [main funding opportunity specification](#). Below, you can read more details on how these objectives might be framed in the context of children at risk of poor outcomes.

1. Strategic research leadership

Administrative data has the power to answer some of the sector's most pressing questions. Grant holders will work to develop and lead a research agenda which maximises the potential of administrative data to improve the lives of children at risk of poor outcomes.

Grant holders will identify, agree, and prioritise key research questions and explore the extent to which they can be answered with existing data. In doing so, they will engage with the Association of Directors of Children's Services, policy and analytical colleagues at the Department for Education (DfE) (including those leading the data strategy), the Department for Health & Social Care, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, and other partners.

We encourage that any related strategic activity is considered as part of developing the research agenda and community – including engaging with the DfE's dedicated team to improve data use and infrastructure in local authorities.

In mapping available data and identifying gaps we also want to explore whether there is sufficient sector alignment to develop a strategy for the future of data in this sector, and we welcome any recommendations or a proposal. We also encourage interest from funders to establish a future research centre for data on children.

2. Build capacity for academic research using administrative data

The use of administrative data in our sector is currently underdeveloped for many reasons. Grant holders will build research capacity among data users through a variety of activities. They are encouraged to extend training opportunities to policymakers and practitioners with an interest in data analysis for children at risk of poor outcomes (such as data managers in local authorities).

3. Develop a diverse administrative data research community

We hope to see the community of data users strengthened by building on the work of the [Children's Social Care Data User Group](#). This community may include:

- Researchers
- Local authority decisionmakers (including the Association of Directors of Children's Services)
- Practitioners
- Data teams (including the Children's Services National Performance and Information Management Group and Data2Insight)
- Policy stakeholders (such as the Department for Education)
- Ofsted
- The Office for National Statistics
- Other related organisations (such as Nuffield Foundation Justice Observatory, children's charities, and other What Works Centres).

4. Address research priorities: Embedded Fellowships

As described in the [main funding opportunity specification](#), the Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes Community Catalyst will use the delegated research budget to add one or two early career researchers (or an accredited researcher new to administrative data research) to the team.

The Fellow(s) will undertake a project using [ADR England linked administrative data](#) via an ADR UK [trusted research environment](#) that addresses research priorities identified from 'Objective 1: Strategic research leadership'. A member of the community catalyst team should provide supervision or mentorship to the Fellow(s) and work with them to agree the area of research. They should take into account the Fellow(s)' interests and ideally identify interested stakeholders or opportunities for collaboration across the emerging community. In the spirit of diversifying the community, Fellow(s) from an additional institution are encouraged but not essential.

There is also a research pot available to the community catalyst team to undertake their own small-scale research. This should address priorities identified in the [main funding opportunity specification](#) under 'Objective 1: Strategic research leadership', and generally support Objectives 1 to 3. Research should ideally use ADR England linked administrative data via an ADR UK [trusted research environment](#) but given the scale of funding available this is not essential. Research activities should be suggested at the application stage, then confirmed following consultation with the Steering Group and considering the emerging research agenda.

Scope

Population of interest: This is children and young people aged 0 to 25 who are at risk of having, have, or have had involvement with early intervention services or children's social care.

Datasets of interest: There are a large number of de-identified research datasets on children involved in early intervention services or children's social care. These could be explored, but we suggest that those holding information about children involved in services should be a first or

central focus point. There are many relevant national-level linked datasets from the [ADR England flagship data](#) portfolio, which are now (or soon) available for research via an [ADR UK trusted research environment](#). These include:

- Ministry of Justice – Department for Education Linked Dataset
- Data First: Family Court – CAFCASS Linked Dataset
- Growing Up in England Dataset
- Longitudinal Education Outcomes Dataset
- ECHILD and extended ECHILD Dataset
- The National Pupil Database
- Local authority data, or other forms of data.

Related research or strategic activity

The Department for Education (DfE) has committed to improving data infrastructure in Children's Social Care as part of its [response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#).

Pillar 6 of the implementation plan commits to a “system that continuously learns and improves and makes better use of evidence and data”. The DfE has outlined five subsequent actions that it will take to achieve this, including introducing a National Children's Social Care Framework and publishing a data strategy.

The DfE has expressed support for the Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes Community Catalyst, and it is expected that grant holders will work closely with DfE colleagues to ensure policy relevance. DfE has also expressed interest in joining the steering group.

Additional support from What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care (WWEICSC)

- Supporting the establishment of a steering group
- Being a member of both the relevant steering group and overarching Monitoring and Evaluation Group
- Hosting the successful team with occasional desk space at Evidence Quarter in London (as a guide 3-5 desks per fortnight, subject to other demand and pre-booking)
- Co-hosting events and steering group meetings at the Evidence Quarter in London
- Offering reduced rates for other events held at Evidence Quarter in London
- Providing access to the WWEICSC newsletter and dissemination channels/co-hosting events
- Providing access to a range of training opportunities and events
- Contributing to a proposal on the sustainability of the outputs and momentum generated during the community catalyst award, as well as recommendations for the future strategic direction of the use and development of data and translation of evidence into practice.