



The Rees Centre Newsletter
November, 2021

Rees Centre secures major Nuffield Foundation grant



The [Nuffield Foundation](#) has awarded the Rees Centre a five-year programme grant for an ambitious project to improve the lives of children and families by better understanding their needs and experiences.

Professor Leon Feinstein, Director of the Rees Centre, will co-direct this with Professor Lisa Holmes and Professor Elaine Sharland (University of Sussex), Dez Holmes ([Research in Practice](#)) and Dr Polly Vizard (London School of Economics). The project will be a collaboration between local authorities and universities to transform how information about and from children and families is gathered, interpreted and used in child and family social policy at both local and national level.

Statistical or 'administrative' information about children and families – commonly known as data – can improve practice and policy, but there are gaps and complexities in how this information is used. Other types of information, particularly the views and expertise of children and families, are vitally important. This project aims to ensure children's and families' voices, and the views of practitioners, are heard and used to improve practice, services and policy. We aim also to learn about the difference this makes.

Greater Manchester combined authority and Oldham, Rochdale, North Yorkshire and Hampshire local authorities will work with academics from five universities to build capacity and understanding about how to better use administrative data, children and families' voices and information from practitioners to improve services. A learning network, run by Research in Practice, will bring together 20 local authorities to test out the findings from the five local sites and to develop learning materials to support better information use across England.

[Read more](#)



Final report published for Reading Together study

Professor Judy Sebba and Dr Priya Tah recently completed work on a mixed methods randomised controlled trial with over 200 children in care and their foster carers on book gifting and paired reading, led by a research team at Queens University Belfast and funded by the [Economic and Social Research Council](#). While the statistical analysis showed no significant difference between the intervention and control groups, the book parcels – and in particular having a choice of books – was well received by children and the paired reading handbook and training were positively commented on by foster carers. The findings raised some important issues about the impact of the pandemic and about foster carers' confidence in supporting reading and alternative ways of providing support for them to do so.

[Read more](#)



New DfE contract to evaluate the extension of Virtual School

The government recently [announced](#) more than £16 million for councils to extend the role of Virtual School Heads to champion education for children with a social worker in every local authority in England. A further £3 million has gone into a [new pilot](#) to support children in care and care leavers in post-16 education. The Rees Centre will be evaluating these new initiatives to inform any future support for both these cohorts, including sharing learning and best practice with all local authorities. The [evaluation](#) will be jointly led by Professor Judy Sebba, Dr Neil Harrison and Dr Nikki Luke, with the first phase taking place from October 2021 to March 2022.



Final reports published on evaluation of Regional Adoption Agencies

The Department of Education has published the final reports on the views of adoptive parents about the support they receive and the matching and placement processes. Professor Julie Selwyn and Dr Shirley Lewis led the mixed method study on the views of prospective and approved adopters in



Rees Centre publications translated into Japanese

We are grateful to Professor Kazuhiro Kamikado of Waseda University for arranging the translation of five of the [Rees Centre's reports into Japanese](#) for the first time. The publications comprise four of our systematic literature reviews on fostering and education, plus our outcomes framework for children's social care. Professor Kamikado has

Regional Adoption Agencies - the reports can be found below.

[Read more](#)

been instrumental in the development of fostering in Japan and we hope the publications have been helpful to him and to policymakers.

Staffing changes



Dr Lisa Holmes moves to Sussex

On 1st January 2022, Dr Lisa Holmes will move to the University of Sussex to take up a post as Professor of Applied Social Science. Lisa will be much missed as a previous director at the Rees Centre, deputy director of research for the Department of Education and a wonderful colleague in Oxford. We are delighted that we will have many opportunities to continue to work closely with Lisa on several major projects.

Other staffing changes

We are also saying goodbye to Dr Shirley Lewis who moves to the University of Huddersfield and David Sanders-Ellis who is pursuing a PhD at University College London – we wish them well and hope they stay in touch!

Meanwhile, we have welcomed Dr Marc Wigley and Dr Georgia Hyde-Dryden to our team of researchers, plus Hannah Horne-Robinson who will be working on our administrative team.

Policy engagement

- Earlier in the year, the Rees Centre team responded to the draft [revised NICE guidance on looked after children](#), arguing that it should be better informed by research. NICE have now published their [response to stakeholder comments](#) and we are pleased to note that our contribution has led to some useful changes, especially around higher education.
- Professor Julie Selwyn is contributing to the Public Law Working Subgroup on Adoption and Contact. The group is chaired by Kate Hughes QC and meets regularly to consider new recommendations for the contact arrangements when children are placed for adoption.
- Dr Neil Harrison has been working with the [Office for Students](#) to improve the identification and recording of care-experienced students in higher education. This is important both for the provision of effective student support and to improve monitoring and research. Neil argued that the current system is making too many errors in a [recent blog post](#).

Recent events

- As reported in our last newsletter, the Rees Centre team made a significant contribution to the EUSARF Conference in September, with ten different papers and symposia. The digital archive of presentations and recordings remains available via the [conference website](#) for registered delegates.
- The [Timpson Programme](#) held a webinar on 16th September featuring Rebecca Brooks from Adoption UK talking about 'Transitions and change for care-experienced young people in school'. The recording of the webinar is now [available online](#).
- Professor Harriet Ward chaired the national Looked After Children and Care Leavers Forum on 21st and 22nd September, bringing together professionals and care leavers to share best practice on issues including early intervention and multi-agency working, attachment awareness and kinship care.

- Dr Shirley Lewis spoke at the National Commissioning and Training Conference in Derby and [delivered a presentation](#) on the evaluation of the Bright Spots surveys on the wellbeing of children in care and care leavers.
- Professor Julie Selwyn contributed to a (virtual) panel discussion on the stigma and discrimination care experienced people can encounter, hosted by the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) on 27th October.
- Dr Lisa Holmes and Dr Shirley Lewis recently presented findings from the evaluation of Lifelong Links at the [Kempe Centre international conference](#). The recording of the presentation and all of the conference content remains online on a pay-on-demand basis until October 2022.

Latest academic publications

Prentice, C. and E. Ott (2021) '[Previous experience, trickle-down training and systemic ad hoc-ery: educators' knowledge acquisition when teaching refugee pupils in one local authority in England](#)'. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 27(1-4): 269-283.

Sinclair, I., J. Fletcher, A. O'Higgins, N. Luke and S. Thomas (in press) '[Closing the gap': the conditions under which children in care are most likely to catch up in mainstream schools](#)'. Awaiting publication in *Oxford Review of Education*.

Doctoral student news

- We warmly welcome Mackenzie Fierceton to our group of DPhil students. Mackenzie is a Rhodes Scholar based in Sociology, but with Professor Harriet Ward as her second supervisor. Her study will focus on the connection between care and prison across three countries.
- Congratulations to Josie Scammell, Lisa Cherry and Jenny Ginger who have successfully passed their 'transfer of status' examinations and move on to the next phase of their studies.

Future events

- Professor Harriet Ward will be giving a keynote presentation on 'Open Adoption in Australia: Contact, Relationships and Outcomes' at the Consortium of Voluntary Adoption Agencies Annual Conference on 3rd November. She will be discussing the findings from her recent study of the long-term outcomes of open adoption policy and practice in Australia, and their relevance to the UK context.
- Áine Kelly is presenting a session entitled 'Health Experiences of Children and Young People in Care: Messages from Research and Personal Experience' at the [CoramBAAF Annual Health Group Conference](#) on the 15th November.
- Dr Neil Harrison will be presenting a paper entitled 'Enabling care-experienced students to thrive in higher education using the capabilities approach' at the [Society for Research into Higher Education](#) conference in December with colleagues from the Universities of York, Sheffield and Leeds. He is also convening a symposium on marginalised communities and contributing to a symposium on critical approaches to doctoral education.



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