



Five-Year Strategy for the Rees Centre






Mission and vision

Our mission as a research centre is to produce research and evidence which enables practitioners, policymakers and the research community to understand and improve children's social care and education. Our vision is that children and young people supported by children's social care services have stronger and more stable relationships, better educational outcomes, and better lives. We conduct research to understand the nature and causes of outcomes and to test ideas about how things might improve, to inform policy and practice.

We begin from a commitment to the rights of children, particularly those with a need for care and protection, and to independent research of the highest quality that supports the full realisation of these rights. This requires us to understand the experiences of those interacting with children's social care and the ways the system functions. It requires us to co-design research with those most affected by it and to make our findings accessible to those seeking to act on them.



Strategic Objectives

We have 5 strategic objectives to help us achieve our mission and vision, objectives relating to:

1.

Academic Research

2.

Practice in Education

3.

Practice in Children's Social Care

4.

Policy and System Change

5.

The Rees Centre as a Place to Be



Strategic Objective 1

is to publish high quality academic research

We will publish high quality academic work in the literatures of social care, social work, education, social policy, public administration, psychology and other disciplines. What makes our academic work achieve change in the world is its relevance to policy and practice, addressing concerns or raising issues important to those in the field, with engaged audiences and identified pathways to impact.

To achieve our vision the Centre will produce high quality academic work. We will develop new approaches to research and evaluation that improves advice for policy and practice.

Based in the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, our primary concern is to contribute work that helps improve the impact of both policy and practice on educational outcomes. We value descriptive as well as causal evidence, including voice and measurement as means to ensure there is better understanding of how people and institutions interact.

Our research includes:

- Study of personal journeys and experiences using longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data to understand lives, outcomes and the intersection of lives and services.
- Analysis of the effectiveness and cost of activity intended to improve lives and outcomes. We conduct evaluative research from Theory of Change to Randomised Control Trials depending on the stage of development of interventions.
- Development of new research capacity that improves the quality of information available for research, such as through new surveys, linked data or new ways of using management information systems.

Whilst focusing on educational experience and outcomes we will always place a child within the wider context of those that support them and in their wider development.

We will judge our success in this work by measuring our delivery of:

- High quality academic publications in a range of journals of different disciplines and types to support wide dissemination and to underpin our aim of diverse research methods.
- Regular and timely presentations to seminars and conferences.
- Development of impact and material for an impact case study in each subsequent Research Assessment Framework, as well as for wider communication and engagement.
- Citations of Rees academic research.

Our research is on three primary topics: Practice in Education; Practice in Children's Social Care; and Policy and System Change.

Strategic Objective 2

is for our research to improve Practice in Education

Our primary focus is the education and training of children and young people supported by children's social care services. Our work will support improvement to ensure that all educational institutions such as schools are places where all children feel safe, included and learn, and where children supported by children's social care have good experiences of learning. We will study all institutions and phases of education in particular early learning, schools, alternative provision, FE and HE.

Over the next five years the Centre will develop insight through nationwide and local studies of how schools and other education and training settings improve the work they do internally and with others to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of children supported by social care services, particularly in relation to inclusion, achievement and well-being and reducing average gaps in outcomes.

Key themes in schools will include approaches to behaviour and communication, school ethos, pedagogy, CPD and training, and uses of information and data. These can address the challenge of supporting schools to operate as safe and inclusive places for all children. Our research aims to shed light on experiences and outcomes and how the education and care system can adapt to address potential barriers. As part of this theme we will look at mental health and well-being as important domains of life, development and learning for children supported by social care and how to support inclusion and belonging in education settings for our cohort.

We aim to inform the way practitioners in education learn and work with our specific cohort of children. Key practice groups include practitioners working in mainstream and special schools, including senior leadership (MAT and school), teachers, SENDCos, Designated Safeguarding Leads, Designated Teachers, and other school staff (teaching, non-teaching, pastoral), as well as practitioners working in alternative provision, post-16 settings, local authority education and social care teams – including Virtual Schools, Educational Psychology, attendance and exclusions teams, SEND services, Early Help, and youth justice – health services, and third sector and voluntary organisations.

This also includes understanding the impact of innovations such as the introduction of the Virtual School Head role in every Local Authority in England to represent children with a social worker in their interactions with schools and colleges.

We will not only consider education in school settings but also conduct research on the early learning experiences

of children supported by children's social care and post-16 education and training. We will work with University of Oxford to ensure the University is a good and accessible place for care experienced students and staff and draw in this learning to support wider national approach to making HE accessible and attractive to care experienced students and staff.

We will judge our success in this work by measuring our delivery of:

- The development, application and use of a clear and tested Rees approach to relational models of school practice.
- Use of Rees approach and research in CPD and training of teachers, school leadership and other key practice groups.
- Use of Rees research and advice within University of Oxford to support care experienced students and staff.
- Use of Rees research findings by HE and FE institutions to improve post-16 pathways and experiences of care leavers and care experienced people, as evidenced by citation, Altmetric and qualitative case study data.

Strategic Objective 3

is for our research to support improvement to Practice in Children's Social Care

Our work will help those working and living with children and young people supported by social care, (in particular social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents and kinship carers) to sustain stable homes and relationships, and support children and young people in their education, learning, wider development and well-being.

Over the next five years the Centre will improve the research and evaluation evidence on how those who live and work with children and young people supported by children's social care can best help improve stability, relationships and life chances.

We will ground our work in an understanding of the wider experiences of children of care, including foster care, kinship care, adoption and special guardianship. We will look at issues relating to entry to care and in transitions out of care – including care leaving. Additionally, we will include interactions with health and social policy through early years.

The Rees Centre will work with other specialist centres who work on the care system as a whole, on social work as a whole or on specific themes of care like adoption, child protection or kinship care. The focus of Rees will be on how children supported by children's social care can best be enabled and supported to form stable relationships and to thrive in their formal education and wider learning and development.

We will collaborate with experts and specialists on all aspects of the system, including experts by experience in order to bring specialist knowledge across the whole system to our work.

We will judge our success in this work by measuring our delivery of:

- The training and CPD of social workers, foster carers, adoptive parents and kinship carers informed by Rees research, as evidenced by citations to Rees research and qualitative case study data.
- Use and coproduction of Rees research by agencies working directly with families and practitioners, as evidenced by references to Rees research in training approaches and similar documentation, and qualitative case study data.
- Strong, lively and engaged network of practitioners of care (including social workers, and foster carers).



Strategic Objective 4

is for our research to improve policymaking and the work of the education and social care systems

The Centre will lead research on how the care system learns and improves, in particular on how children's social care uses information and data to support improvement in the experiences and outcomes of children and families. This knowledge will ensure that our policy and practice advice is credible, informed and realistic. The Centre will use our research to support policymakers to test improvements to policy and and their impact on practice.

Over the next five years the Centre will develop a clearer understanding of the way the policy environment of the education and care system operates and we will engage with policymakers to support the development of future policy on the basis of this evidence.

This work reflects the Centre's goal of using research evidence to influence policy, bringing a systematic and evidence based approach to policy development. We will seek to engage with policy processes and achieve wider impact from our work as a result. We will work with think tanks, non-governmental organisations and others who share our values about the meaningful and appropriate use of sound evidence and theory, and who seek to develop and influence policy in similar ways. We bring to this a core body of research about how the system might better meet the needs and aspirations of children supported by children's social care, and also a theoretically grounded appreciation of the influences on effective policymaking and the role of evidence and theory in achieving change.

Our work may involve different stages of contribution to policy from data collection/linking, evaluation, intervention design, and the feedback loops in between.

We will judge our success in this work by measuring our delivery of:

- Engagement with MPs on our research findings and mention in Parliament and Parliamentary Committees of our work.
- Engagement with local government and other policymakers who use our research to improve the working of the system supporting our cohort.
- Involvement of the Centre in policy development with civil servants through commissioned research, presentations and citations in policy papers.
- Use of Rees research by think tanks, NGOs and other key influencers.

Strategic Objective 5

is to improve the Rees Centre as a Place to Be

The Centre will continue to develop as a lively and active place where staff, students, associates, fellows and visitors feel a sense of belonging and can undertake high quality research with impact. The Centre will have a tangible physical base where colleagues can meet, talk and work in alongside a vibrant digital presence.

Over the next five years the Centre will become a financially sustainable place that is more than the sum of its research projects and a great place to work and learn. The Centre will have an active digital and in-person array of activities to support communication and dialogue.

We will be known across the University, and around the world, as a go to place to foster and support research on children's social care, and our networks will expand to include a much greater number of people with experience of children's social care, those who live and work with children and young people supported by children's social care, policymakers and academics at all stages of career.

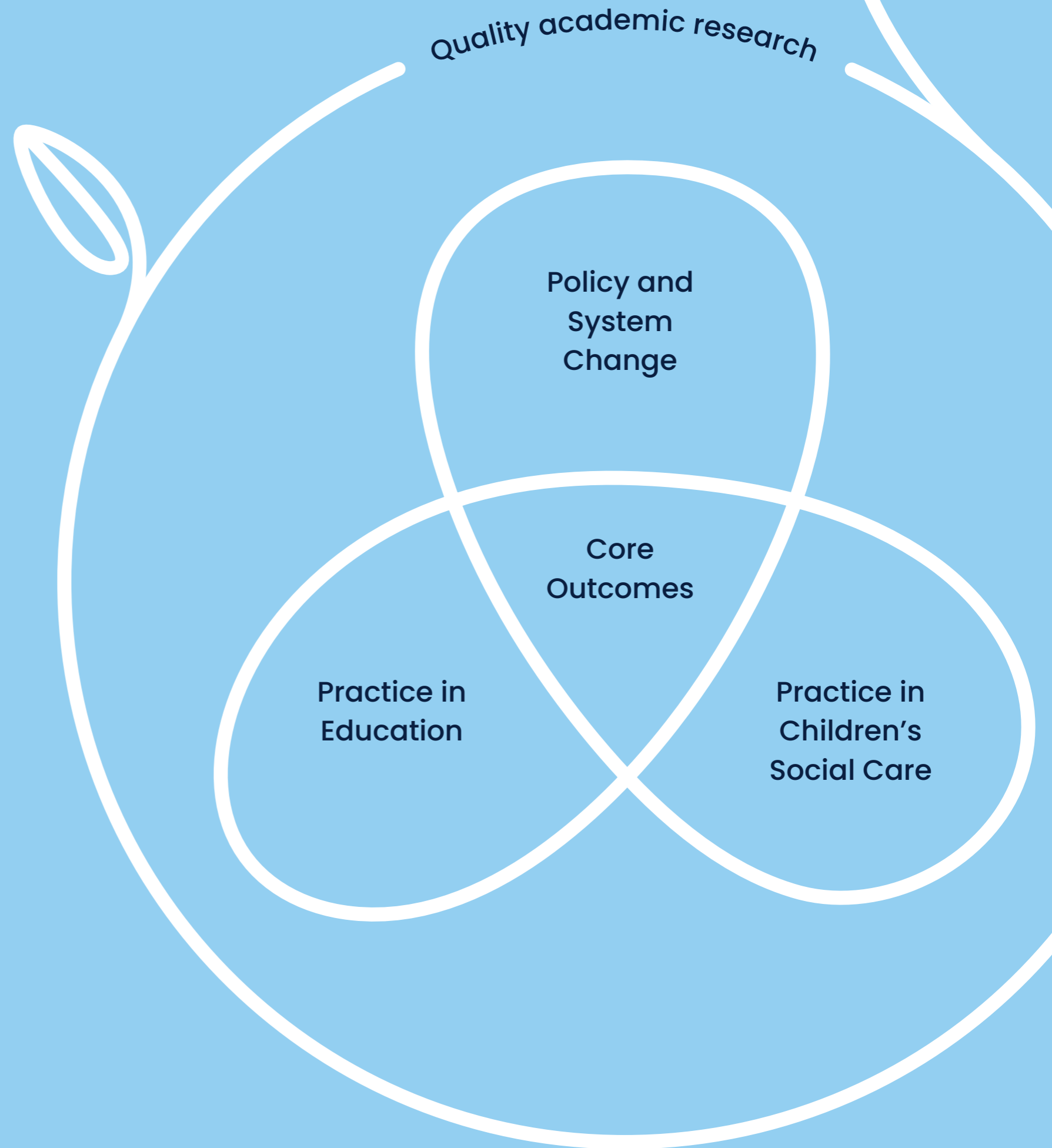
The Centre will welcome PhD students, associates, fellows and visitors. This wider cohort of stakeholders will become a more evident and visible part of the Centre's life and offer a well attended range of seminars, webinars and other activities.

We will judge our success in this work by measuring our delivery of:

- Academic progression of Rees researchers and PhDs, including progression through career stages at other institutions, policy research centres or into policy environments.
- PhD applications, progression and completion.
- Applications for fellowships, associates and visitors.
- Seminar/workshop programme attendance.
- Communications statistics.
- Staff survey and staff exit feedback.

Rees Centre

The core, primary outcomes our research is intended to improve are stronger and more stable relationships and better educational outcomes and experiences.





Rees Centre

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