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Balancing looked after children's protective, provisional and participatory rights in research, policy and practice

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**Balancing looked after children's protective, provisional
and participatory rights in research, policy and practice**

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A Doctoral Thesis by Publications

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Abstract

In England around 68,000 children are currently looked after by the state. Sixty two per cent of this population are admitted to care or accommodation in response to abuse and neglect. As the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledges, the state has a unique responsibility for these children and is expected to ensure their safety, wellbeing and development.

Underpinned by a rights-based framework the publications in the thesis make an original contribution to social work research, policy and practice, in respect of looked after children nationally and internationally. Three cohering theoretical strands - the 'new' sociology of childhood, attachment theory and focal theory, and different methodological lenses, (from participatory research with young people to cross-national analysis of administrative data), are employed to advance understanding of the balance of protective, provisional and participatory rights ('3 Ps') for these children and young people. The work focuses upon their life pathways at two key stages in the lifespan: early infancy and adolescence into adulthood.

Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of the research, the methodological approach employed in two of the four core studies sought to promote children's active participation in the research process, and to give them a 'voice'. The participatory peer methodology adopted moved beyond involving care experienced young people in interviewing their peers, to training and engaging them in several major aspects of the research cycle, including analysis of the data and the design and write up of the findings, to produce accessible peer research reports for young people.

At the national level the work undertaken demonstrates how a needs-based discourse, and orientation towards considering looked after children as objects of concern, can mean that young children's protective rights may be prioritised in policy and practice, at the expense of their provisional and participatory rights. Children's participation rights are also constrained due to assumptions about the (in)capacities of younger children to express their wishes and feelings. In this context parents' rights tend to be prioritised at the expense of the rights of the child.

Whereas parents' rights may take precedence when children are young, in adolescence the rights of parents are more peripheral. Cross-national comparisons reveal variations in how young people's provisional, participatory and protective rights are balanced as young people negotiate the transition from care to adulthood in western societies, as well as different drivers for reform. Empirical research on recent policy developments in England also illuminates the tensions and dilemmas professionals can face as they attempt to protect and provide for young people, whilst recognising their evolving capabilities and their right to autonomy and active participation in decision making processes. Finally, the studies highlight that young people with the most complex care histories may be denied the right to decide for themselves if they want to remain in foster or residential care into early adulthood.

Key words: children's rights, looked after children, care leavers, transitions, social work, vulnerable children, comparative child welfare.

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Introduction

In England around 68,000 children are currently looked after by the state either on a court ordered basis ('in care') or under a voluntary arrangement at the parent or child's request ('accommodation' under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989) (Department for Education, 2014). Around 62 per cent of this population are admitted to care or accommodation in response to abuse and neglect. As the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) acknowledges, the state has a unique responsibility for these children and is expected to ensure their safety, wellbeing and development (General Assembly resolution A/RES/64/142, 2010).

Underpinned by a rights-based framework the publications in the thesis make an original contribution to social work research, policy and practice, in respect of looked after children nationally and internationally. Three cohering theoretical strands - the 'new' sociology of childhood, attachment theory and focal theory, and different methodological lenses, (from participatory research with young people to cross-national analysis of administrative data), are employed to advance understanding of the balance of protective, provisional and participatory rights ('3 Ps') for these children. The work focuses upon their life pathways at two key stages in the lifespan: early infancy and adolescence into adulthood.

The publications included in the thesis and the rationale for their selection (which has a biographical connection and is linked to my development as a researcher) is presented in Appendix 1. These research outputs represent a small selection of my work. A full list of publications and a summary of national and international keynote presentations that I have delivered is provided in Appendix 2. Letters from co-authors outlining my contribution to the publications that have been included in the thesis are also provided in Appendix 3.

Theoretical underpinnings

In the last 25 years there has been a growth in sociological interest in children and in the modern children's rights movement. Both the 'new' sociology of childhood and the discipline of children's rights have challenged the social construction of childhood as a 'protectionist experience' and 'as a period when there is an absence of responsibility and, in which there are rights to protection and training but not to autonomy' (cited in Freeman, 1998, p. 436). This body of scholarship has also served to promote recognition of the importance of:

- Children as subjects rather than objects of social concern or social control;
- recognising children and young people's agency and rights as active 'beings' in the here and now;
- hearing children's voices and promoting their participation in research and decision-making (Christensen and James, 2005; Freeman, 1998; James and Prout, 1997; Wyness, 2006).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has also meant that the 'during the last decade of the twentieth century the human rights of children finally became visible' (Lansdown, 2002, p.285). The general principles of the Convention relate to:

- Non-discrimination (Article 2);
- the best interests of the child as a primary consideration (Article 3);

- the right to life, survival and development (Article 6);
- the right to express views and the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child (Article 12).

The central rights outlined in the UNCRC also acknowledge that children have provisional, protective and participatory rights ('3 Ps') (Hammarberg, 1990; Wringe, 1995). That is:

- Rights to protection: the right not to be subject to abuse, neglect or exploitation (including Article 19, 21, 32);
- rights to provision: the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (including Article 24, 27, 28);
- rights to participation (Article 12, as outlined above).

The UNCRC also recognises that the family is the 'natural environment' to promote children's wellbeing and development, and has a central role to play in providing appropriate guidance to assist children to exercise their rights 'in accordance with their evolving capacities' (preamble and Article 5). In cases where parents are abusive and neglectful the state may need, as a measure of last resort, to separate children from their birth family to protect them from harm. In such circumstances children are entitled to care and special protection from the state to physically and psychologically recover (Article 20, 21). The *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010), which are intended to enhance implementation of the UNCRC, also highlight that in situations where children are separated from their parents, or at risk of being so, the State should:

- Ensure families have access to support to assist them in their caregiving role (including support for those whose capacities are limited by factors such as disability or drug and alcohol misuse);
- support efforts to keep children in, or return them to, the care of their family, or failing this, to find another appropriate and permanent solution;
- ensure that, while such permanent solutions are being sought...[that] the most suitable forms of alternative care are identified and provided, under conditions that promote the child's full and harmonious development;
- have due regard for the importance of ensuring children have a stable home and of meeting their basic need for safe and continuous attachment to their caregivers, with permanency generally being a key goal (p.2-4).

Whilst these provisions apply irrespective of a child's age and developmental stage the Guidelines also make specific reference to protecting the rights of young children and those making the transition from care to adulthood. In respect of the former, the Guidelines acknowledge the developmental needs of babies and young children, including the importance of 'ensuring their ongoing attachment to a specific carer' (p.14). This is consistent with attachment theory, which the publications in this thesis draws upon. The theory highlights the importance of the development of secure attachments in the early years as a foundation for children's future psychological development (Ainsworth et al. 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Abusive and neglectful parenting and/or multiple care givers children can

disrupt the development of secure attachments as children adopt psychological defences to cope with anxiety and distress. Both experiences can cause the development of internal working models that impair children's ability to relate to others (Howe, 2005). Although internal working models established in early infancy are not entirely fixed, the theory provides a framework to assist in understanding how looked after children's pre-care and in-care experiences influence their life pathways into adulthood (Howe, 1995; Oppenheim and Waters, 1995).

With regards to looked after children approaching legal adulthood, the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010) identify that States should:

- Plan and prepare children for independence;
- take into consideration children's age, gender, maturity and particular circumstances in the process of transition from care to aftercare;
- provide aftercare support (p.19).

The importance of these three requirements can be understood with reference to focal theory.

Focal theory is concerned with how young people cope with social transitions and changes in their lives (Coleman, 1974, 1978 and 1980). Coleman and Hendry (1999) argue that adolescents adjust to change by 'dealing with one issue at a time' (p.15). Those who have to negotiate multiple changes in their lives simultaneously adjust less well (Simmonds and Blythe, 1987). Stein (1997, 2002, 2004 and 2006) has applied this theory to care leavers, who, in England tend to experience 'accelerated and compressed' transitions to adulthood. That is, they are expected to negotiate a series of major life events at the same time, and to do so at a younger age than their peers in the general population.

Methodological lenses

Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this body of research, the methodological approach employed in two of the four core studies sought to promote children's active participation in the research process and to give them a 'voice' (see below for further discussion). The participatory methods employed in these projects were also embedded within mixed methods studies. Methods included documentary analysis of children's social care records, and interviews or focus groups with different parties involved in the lives of looked after children (including their birth parents, foster carers, adoptive parents, social workers, children's guardians and judges) (Publications 1,3,4,8,9). The studies provide a window into the micro domain of everyday social work practice and how this is experienced by children and families. They are complemented by a series of publications which examine the mezzo domain, that is, 'where relationships between the nation-state, welfare regimes and social professions are played out' (Houston and Campbell, 2001, p.68).

Publications 2, 5 and 8 develop an international perspective on service responses to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers. These highlight ideological differences in perceptions of the role and purpose of care in different countries, which serve to influence how children and parents rights are protected and promoted. Broadly speaking, these

publications employed what Payne (2006) has described as 'partialising and comparative strategies' (p.197). The goal of such approaches is to understand commonalities and differences in looked after children and care leaving populations and how their rights are upheld (Pinkerton, 2008).

- In Publication 2 each country gathered material on welfare regimes, legal and policy frameworks, secondary data and research, as well illustrative case examples of practice responses to meet the needs of care leavers.
- In Publication 8 a search of UNCRC state party reports was undertaken to identify what information (if any) each country supplied on the legal and policy frameworks in place to support young people's transitions from care to adulthood, and to examine whether or not Concluding Observations identified strengths and weaknesses in policy and practice to promote the rights of this group. A follow-up questionnaire was administered to country experts to facilitate exploration of factors promoting or inhibiting developments.
- Finally, in publication 5, published aggregate administrative data on children in contact with children's social care services during the period 1999-2010 were collated for England, Australia, Norway and the United States. An international working group was also established to verify the accuracy and interpretation of the data and to explore changes in recognition of, and responses to, abuse and neglect over time, both within and between countries.

In England there is a tradition of bringing together methodologically diverse research study findings from a series of government funded research studies to inform social work policy and practice. In a similar way the subject matter of the publications in this thesis:

Overlaps and intertwines. Putting them all together is like viewing a building through many different windows, each showing a different perspective, but each shedding a different light on the wider picture (Davies and Ward, 2012, p. 27).

Participatory rights and research with looked after children and care leavers

A critical concern in the design and delivery of applied research to inform social work policy and practice is that it meets what Aldridge (2014) describes as the 'top down' demands of the academy and funders for scientifically robust research evidence, whilst upholding the ethical values of social work and trying to 'give voice to clients and thereby attempting to democratise both research and social work itself' (Parton and Kirk, 2010, p. 24). In practice, dilemmas and challenges can arise in meeting these demands.

In research with vulnerable groups, less conventional and more participatory research designs which are tailored to meet the needs of participants, may empower them, facilitate their active engagement in research and give them a voice (Fleming, Goodman and Skinner, 2009; Kilpatrick et al., 2007; Murray, 2006). However, the validity of the findings may be questioned and policy makers can be cautious about accepting this research evidence, which can serve to undermine its transformative potential (i.e. contribution to policy and practice to developments) (Aldridge, 2014; Walker, Schratz and Egg, 2008).

Mayall (2006) notes that in England policies emphasise the need to protect and provide for children and she suggests that:

The third P of the UNCRC, participation, has risen up the agenda, in the sense that children are almost routinely approached for their views, but many think that respect for children's participation is tokenistic (p. 11).

My work has contributed to contemporary debates on such issues as they apply in research involving looked after children and their families (Publications 6 and 7). Particular difficulties can be encountered because this group are defined as vulnerable on multiple grounds, as a result not only of their age, but also because they have experienced adversity and are separated from their families and in receipt of children's social care services. In this respect there is a danger that they are over-protected and denied the opportunity to make an informed decisions about whether or not to participate in research (Ward, Skuse and Munro, 2005).

Application of the principles of effective research governance allowed me to break new ground by integrating the use of participatory (peer) research methods in two large scale government funded research studies (Publications 3 and 4). Twenty eight care experienced young adults aged 18-25 were trained in research methods and engaged in several of the major aspects of the studies. This included the design of information leaflets, survey and interview topic guides, conducting telephone and face to face interviews with looked after children and care leavers, undertaking analysis of the data, production of peer research reports, and dissemination of the findings (Publications 4 and 5; Edwards, 2011; National Care Advisory Service, 2012).

Mayall (2013) describes those who have enabled children to act as researchers throughout the research cycle, and to work for policy change, as 'pioneering' (p. 23). Furthermore, the work demonstrates that participatory research can facilitate looked after children and care leavers' participatory rights and produce rich data to influence the development of child welfare policy.

Concerns have been raised that peer researchers are often tasked with collecting data for 'qualified and experienced' academics who then exclude them from participating in the analysis phase (Clark 2004; Coad and Evans; McLaughlin, 2005). However, Holland and colleagues (2010) note that:

There is an issue that what may be endlessly fascinating to social scientists might be too dull or too challenging (emotionally or intellectually) for young people, or indeed any lay participants (p. 369).

Others have challenged this view and suggest that young people readily understand the principles of thematic analysis— looking for patterns in data, contrast and paradox and can use these techniques extremely well to make sense of the data they have collected (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Fleming, 2010). However, confidentiality issues, commitment, maintaining participatory research relationships over time (especially when the lives of those involved can be transitory) all present challenges (Bryne, Canavan and Millar, 2009). On

this basis there are limited examples of participatory interpretation and analysis of data (Bryne, Canavan and Millar, 2009; Nind, 2011).

In Right2BCared4 and Staying Put, I was responsible for managing the development of an analytical approach that would empower the peer researchers to undertake thematic analysis of some of the data and actively contribute to shaping the research findings, whilst recognising that they had minimal formal research training, and were inexperienced in the coding and analysis of qualitative data (see also Lushey and Munro, 2014).

Balancing the '3 Ps' at different stages in the life course

Babies and young children in care: life-pathways, decision-making and practice

Infancy is a critical period in children's development and child-carer interaction in the early years can have a long-term impact on children's physical, cognitive, social and emotional development into adulthood (Barlow and Underdown, 2008; Gerhardt, 2004). Termination of relationships with birth parents can create an enduring sense of loss but the *quality* of children's relationships with carer givers is also of fundamental importance (Schofield, 2001; Howe, 2001). It is also noteworthy that early infancy is a period in which children are at high risk: forty-five percent of serious case reviews relate to babies under the age of one and this age group are eight times more likely to be killed than older children (Department for Education, 2010, Smith et al., 2011).

Social workers can face criticism for both under- and over-intervention in family life when there are concerns about parental capacity to provide adequate care (see for example, coverage of the Baby Peter Connelly case and reports of children being 'stolen' from their birth families to meet adoption targets) (Elsely, 2010; Reid, 2007). Publications 1 and 9 address gaps in the evidence base in respect of young looked after children and explored the decision-making process influencing their life pathways, and how the rights of parents' and children were balanced.

The underlying philosophy of the Children Act 1989 recognises that it is generally best for children to be brought up by their families and that professionals should work in partnership with parents. However, the welfare of the child and their best interests is the paramount consideration. Article 3 of the Human Rights Act 1998 also acknowledges that everyone has an absolute right not 'to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment'. However, in keeping with the UNCRC it also recognises the importance of respecting 'private and family life' (Article 8). The 'mutual enjoyment by a parent and child of each other's company constitutes a fundamental element of family life' [*W v. the United Kingdom* (1987) *EHCR*, para. 59]; however, interference with this right is permissible 'for the protection of the rights and freedom of others' (Human Rights Act 1998, Article 8(2)).

Clearly tensions may exist between the positive obligation inherent in Article 3 and the rights of both parents and children under Article 8. Williams (2004) highlights that:

The right of the child to a family life under Article 8, may, in an abusive family, be in direct conflict with the state's positive duty to protect him or her from abuse and neglect (p.44).

This serves to highlight the tensions and dilemmas that professionals routinely face as they try to balance potential competing rights claims when children are in or on the edge of care.

The parents of the 42 babies in the sample were affected by one or more problems known to affect parenting capacity, including drug misuse, alcohol misuse, mental ill-health and/or domestic violence (Cleaver, Unell and Aldgate, 2010). Abuse or neglect was the primary reason for two-thirds of admissions to care or accommodation: in 10 of these cases children were identified as being at risk because their siblings sustained non-accidental injuries. While half the babies started to be looked after before they were a month old, the remainder spent a period in the care of parents who were experiencing difficulties that meant they struggled to provide a predictable routine and consistent care to promote the development of secure attachments. The study highlighted that *prior to entry* 19 of these babies experienced one or more changes of primary carer and/or domicile, as a result of their parents' lifestyle or circumstances. In some cases, therefore, efforts to keep children with their parents did not serve to promote stability or ensure their safety.

Having taken action to separate children, in order to uphold their protective rights, social workers, children's guardians and judges have to make difficult decisions about whether parents can be sufficiently supported to meet their children's needs, or whether they require an 'alternative family for life' (for example, via adoption). As the Children Act 1989 acknowledges, delays in the decision-making process are likely to be prejudicial to the welfare of the child, but the study revealed that on average it took eight and a half months for care proceedings to be completed for babies admitted to care before their first birthdays. Thus these very young children spent their early childhoods awaiting decisions necessary to secure their long term futures. Moreover, lack of continuity of care prior to entry to care was compounded by instability within the system: in the first twelve months, 17 of the babies had three or more placements. This unpredictability and instability made it harder for these young children to develop the continuous attachments that the UNCRC acknowledges are so important for their social and emotional development.

A complex inter-play of factors contributed to delays in determining whether or not it was safe to return children to their parents care. Expert reports were frequently requested, although social workers questioned whether these offered any additional insight into the case. One local authority solicitor suggested that in almost all cases the parents' solicitor would insist upon an expert report. Speight and Wynne (2000) suggest that judges seem to require 'a trial of rehabilitation' and have a 'bias towards the rights of neglectful parents against the interests of the child' (p. 193). Publications 1 and 9 highlighted the fact that it is important to ensure that parents are given an opportunity to demonstrate whether they are able to offer 'good enough' parenting, but that this may have unintended and detrimental consequences for the children concerned.

Firstly, a number of these babies experienced additional changes of placement and carer while they waited for social workers and/or the courts to decide whether, on the balance of probabilities, parents would be able to overcome entrenched difficulties. In some cases it was clear that extensive efforts to return children home served to postponed their transition to a permanent 'family for life' via adoption. Moreover, as children's age increases the pool

of prospective adoptive carers reduces. The findings highlighted that some of these young children were falling into the 'harder to place' category following extensive efforts to reunite them with parents with multiple problems. As one adoptive carer reflected:

I don't know if anything can be done about it, but children don't bounce. Yes, they are resilient, but if you move a child several times before their adoption then the adoptive parents are going to have a long struggle to get them to realise this is where they are for good (Adoptive mother, cited in publication 9, p. 3).

Secondly, high levels of child-parent contact were sustained even when there was every expectation that courts would endorse plans for permanence away from home. These young children's wishes and feelings were not taken into account. Professionals questioned whether contact was always in children's best interests and felt that parents' rights were sometimes prioritised over those of children because only the former can actively participate in review meetings. Fortin (1998) notes that very young child do not have the right not to attend contact. Winter (2011) also highlights that:

Even pre-verbal children can express fear or confidence, affection or mistrust vividly in their body language...If adults decisions are to be informed they have to take as much account as possible of children's views (p.403).

Finally, the research found that although the *Guideline for the Alternative Care of Children* (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010) emphasise the importance of ensuring that 'families have access to support to assist them in their caregiving role' (p. 2-3), in practice adult services were not immediately available to help parents address issues affecting their parenting capacity. The provision of services to parents is important to maximise the chance that children will be able to return to the family home. However, as publication 9 emphasises:

Even once services have been accessed, treatment is a lengthy process. A balance needs to be struck, as the timescales for rehabilitation may not be compatible with the need for very young children to have a permanent and secure base with carers able to meet their needs (Publication 9, p.7).

Overall, the publications serve to illuminate how the principle of family preservation and reunification mean that there can be over-optimism about the viability of parents overcoming longstanding difficulties, resulting in delay and instability for the children concerned, before permanence is achieved. The absence of very young children's voices in the decision-making process also means that parents' rights can be prioritised over children's rights in certain instances.

Transitions from care to adulthood

My work has also made a substantial contribution to the knowledge base in relation to young people's transitions from care to adulthood both nationally and internationally (Publications 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8).

Publication 2 was the first book in the field to bring together the latest research relating to the transition of young people leaving care, outlining and comparing the range of legal and

policy frameworks, welfare regimes and innovative practice across 16 countries (Publications 2a and 2b). It illuminated variations in preparation and planning to support young people's transitions, in expectations about when they should move to independence, and whether aftercare services were offered as a right, or on a discretionary basis. Drawing the material together Stein (2008, p. 296-297) identified two main patterns of transition: 'accelerated and compressed' and 'extended and abrupt'. The former was most common in Europe, Australia, Canada and the United States, where traditionally young people have been expected to:

Cope with challenges and responsibilities of major changes in their lives-leaving foster care and residential care and setting up home, leaving school and entering the world of work, (or more likely being unemployed and surviving on benefits) and being parents – at a far younger age than other young people (Stein, 2002, p. 68).

In contrast, in former communist countries young people may stay in care until their mid-twenties but then experience 'extended and abrupt' transitions when they move from an (over) protective environment of 'all providing' care, to independence. This model of delivery can leave them ill-prepared and facing 'instant adulthood'. The *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010) advocates an approach that is more akin to 'extended and graduated' transitions from care. Emphasis is placed upon young people's active participation in preparation and planning their move towards independence, and taking on more responsibilities, in light of their evolving capacities. However, it also acknowledges that the State should have a role in providing aftercare support (including 'ongoing education and training opportunities' and 'access to social, legal and health services, together with appropriate financial support'). In this context I identified the potential for benchmarking a number of countries' compliance with this framework.

Publication 8 illustrates how the UNCRC reporting process and guidelines from the Committee can be used as an instrument to track global patterns of progress in realising children's rights. The analysis revealed that decisions concerning support for care leavers have largely been driven by domestic factors, including political ideology and economic conditions, rather than UNCRC compliance. As the article states:

The driving force behind developments in the UK has not been compliance with the UNCRC even though the measures taken have served to promote the rights of young people making the transition from care to adulthood. The drivers have been the Government's commitment to invest in children as citizen-workers of the future and its identification of specific groups, including care leavers, requiring additional support to overcome the risk of low educational attainment and social exclusion (p. 2421).

The motivation for reforms has not been a desire to uphold children's rights in the here and now, but more about them as adult 'becomings' and the fact they are judged to be at high risk of benefit dependency in the future.

In contrast, in Norway rights have been more central to debates concerning service responses to meet the needs of care leavers. The first modern Norwegian Child Welfare Act permitted provision of aftercare support up to the age of 23 but, following concern that this infringed young people's rights to independence and autonomy (in early adulthood), the child

welfare services began to take a more passive role in the 1990s. The problems caused by gaps in after care support led an organisation of young people in care and the union of social workers to lobby for revisions to the legislative framework to improve provision. The Ministry acknowledged that messages from young people and workers informed their decision to implement new legislation and to offer services to former looked after children until the age of 23 (Storø, 2008, p. 150-15, in publication 2).

Alongside this comparative work, I also undertook the first empirical research studies in England to examine the implementation of two pilots designed to facilitate a move towards more 'extended and graduated' transitions from care to independence. These programmes both had the potential to enhance young people's participatory and provisional rights (Publications 3 and 4).

- The Right2BCared4 pilot sought to: encourage young people to remain looked after until the age of 18; provide them with a greater say in the decision making process preceding their exit from care; and ensure they were prepared for independent living (Publication 3).
- The Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot (Staying Put) was targeted at young people who had 'established familial relationships' with foster carers and offered this group the opportunity to remain with their carers until they reach the age of 21 (Publication 4).

Drawing on data provided by young people, social workers, personal advisers and case record data, I developed a new typology to describe young people's transition pathways (direct, transitional or complex). In addition I also explored the factors precipitating these routes to independence (young person led, age-related or complex) and how young people coped with living alone (Publication 3, p.132-142; Publication 4, p.73-77).

Data from the Staying Put research study was also used to identify different models of delivery of the pilot (Publication 4, p. 25-31). This served to illuminate how eligibility criteria denied some young people with the most complex needs and/or care histories the right to choose whether or not to remain with their carers beyond 18. Only around 37 per cent of looked after young people in England aged 16 and over reside in foster care (Department for Education, 2014). The majority of local authorities also required young people to have an 'established familial relationship' with their foster carers in order to be eligible to stay put. This 'pure familial model' of Staying Put denied certain young people the right to choose to extend their placement post 18.

Young people who enter care or accommodation in adolescence have often been exposed to longstanding abuse and neglect and have developmental delays and complex needs as a result (Education Select Committee, 2012; Rees et al., 2010; Sinclair et al., 2007). Late entrants to care, with emotional and behavioural problems, are more likely to have a first placement in residential care rather than foster care. Boys are also significantly more likely to be placed in residential care than girls (Sempik, Ward and Darker, 2008). Expecting these young people to leave at 18, often because the State has not taken timely action to uphold their right to protection from abuse and neglect, and then opts to place them in residential

care, appears inconsistent with the principles espoused in the *Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children* (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2010).

In addition to the criteria above, four of the six in-depth case study sites decided to adopt strict education, employment and training (EET) eligibility criteria for Staying Put. This was in keeping with new Labour's social investment state orientation, in which spending was legitimated to increase future labour force participation. However, it meant that enhanced provisional rights were limited to those who were already engaged in EET. In two local authorities fewer conditions of entitlement were imposed in recognition of the fact that young people with evidence of additional support needs (including, for example, those with emotional and behavioural difficulties and offending behaviour) often experience multiple placement changes, and are less likely to complete schooling or access specialist provision to meet their needs (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008). Consequently, a vicious circle can occur whereby they are alienated from efforts to provide effective support (Holmes and Ward, 2006). Strict eligibility criteria mean that the availability of extended care and enhanced provisional rights may vary inversely with the needs of the leaving care population (the Inverse Care Law: Hart, 1971).

Findings from the empirical research also contributed new understanding of how child-foster care attachment relationships influenced young people's decisions about whether or not to remain in foster care into early adulthood. As the UNCRC acknowledges it is important that the State ensures that children and young people have a stable home that meets their need for safe and continuous attachment to their caregivers. In the Staying Put evaluation I used Schofield and Beek's (2005) analytical framework on what constitutes a secure stable base in care to explore the link between young people's attachment to their foster carers and the decisions they took about the timing of their departure from the foster home (Publication 4, p. 43-48).

The analyses revealed that the quality of relationships young people had with their foster carers was key to young people's decisions about whether to stay beyond 18. The majority of young people assessed to have a strong and secure base within their current foster placement, opted to stay put. The most common explanation young people provided for not wanting to stay put was poor quality relationships with their carers, or others in the placement. Other key factors were the desire to be 'free' and 'independent' or to return to live with birth family. Those who did not stay put tended to experience multiple accommodation changes once they left care.

Messages from young people also reiterated the central importance of consistent and supportive relationships with social workers and personal advisers to assist them in preparing for, and navigating, the transition from care to independence. They also highlight the difficulties young people can encounter when they are forced to leave care before they feel ready.

At the same time, findings from both Right2BCared4 and Staying Put highlighted that not all young people, who professionals perceive might benefit from a less 'accelerated and compressed' transition, opt to exercise their right to remain in care for longer. Older entrants to care, and young people who experienced high levels of placement instability, were found to have a marginally higher likelihood of opting to leave early. Social workers identified that

they had to be mindful of, and largely responsive to, requests from young people to move to independence, even when they did not perceive this to be in young people's best interests. They reported that, if they did not agree to support young people's transitions, then the young people concerned would often take action to destabilise their placement, or simply to leave, meaning they experienced unplanned and abrupt transitions to adulthood. On this basis social workers were generally inclined to work with young people and ensure that packages of support were made available in the community.

The research also served to highlight that if young people were 'over' protected by foster carers then they would be ill-prepared for the realities of living independently. Thus 'accelerated and compressed' transitions might be replaced by 'extended and abrupt transitions'. As these scenarios illustrate, some young people continue to face instant adulthood which, as focal theory demonstrates, can mean that care leavers struggle to cope during the social transition to independent living.

Conclusion

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has suggested that policy development and implementation is reflective of the place of the child in society and the political priority accorded to children and their rights (United Nations, 2003, para 10). The publications in this thesis advance knowledge and understanding of the extent to which governments and social care services take their UNCRC obligations towards children in care or accommodation seriously. They also illuminate variations in the emphasis professionals place on children's protective, provisional and participatory rights at different stages in the life span.

At the national level the work undertaken demonstrates how a needs-based discourse, and orientation towards considering looked after children as objects of concern, can mean that young children's protective rights may be prioritised at the expense of their provisional and participatory rights (see also Winter, 2006).

Publications 1 and 9 served to highlight that having separated children, to protect them from harm, there can be delays in the provision of services to support parents to overcome issues affecting parenting capacity. Boddy and colleagues (2014) also reflect that in child-protection focused systems, children's best interests tend to be equated with keeping children safe. Once this condition is achieved, work with families can cease to be a priority. Children's participation rights are also constrained due to assumptions about the (in)capacities of younger children to express their wishes and feelings, meaning that limited attention is paid to non-verbal cues to inform placement decisions and contact arrangements¹. In this context parents' rights tend to be prioritised at the expense of the rights of the child.

Delays engendered in determining whether or not children can safely return home can maintain an unacceptable status quo – leaving infants in limbo awaiting the decisions necessary to provide them with a secure stable base with an alternative family for life (with, for example, special guardians or adoptive parents). During this time they may experience

¹ See Clark and Moss (2011) on gaining the perspectives of babies and young children.

additional movement and changes of carer which undermine their opportunities to establish secure attachments to long term carers.

Babies and Very Young Children in Care has been widely cited and used to inform the *Review of the Child Care Proceedings System in England and Wales* (Department for Education and Skills and Department for Constitutional Affairs, 2006) and the *Family Justice Review* (Ministry of Justice, Department for Education and Welsh Government, 2011). Of particular importance was evidence that initial care plans can be overly optimistic about parental capacity to change within a timeframe that is compatible with children's need for permanency. This approach can lead to delays in the decision-making process which are not consequence free for the children concerned.

The research highlighted the high level of placement movement young infants experienced as result of professionals' reluctance to make the difficult decisions that the infants could not safely return home. Central arguments in my work, including a call for greater decisiveness in early assessment, and concern that young children's rights should not be subsumed in a drive to protect parents' rights, have been reconfirmed by subsequent studies and have contributed to academic discourse and policy debates (see for example, Davies and Ward, 2012; Giovannini, 2011; Gove, 2012; Ministry of Justice, Department for Education and Welsh Government, 2011; Ward, Brown, Westlake, 2012). Drawing on the existing evidence base, including work in this thesis, David Norgrove, Chair of the Family Justice Review, reflected that:

Prejudice against care as an option for children and distrust of local authorities are fuelling delays in the system. It is of course right that we endeavour to keep families safely together but we must be quicker to recognise when this is not possible (cited in Ministry of Justice, Department for Education and Welsh Government, 2011, p.3).

Whereas parents' rights may take precedence when children are young, in adolescence the rights of parents are more peripheral. However, balancing the '3 Ps' remains challenging. Tensions can arise as adults seek to protect and provide for young people, whilst recognising their evolving capabilities and their right to autonomy and active participation in decision making processes (see also Hartas 2008, Tisdall and Morrison, 2012). The latter has risen up the research, policy and practice agendas in recent years (Alderson, 2012, Holland, 2009; Sharpe, 2015). Whilst this is welcomed it does raise ethical issues, as well as dilemmas for professionals in social work settings.

My work addresses gaps in the literature concerning the ethical issues that arise in moving beyond 'tokenistic' participation in research with children and young people in care or accommodation, who as a group, are routinely framed as vulnerable and in need of protection (Holland, 2009). It highlights that in some instances adult gatekeepers have adopted policies that deny children the opportunity to decide for themselves whether or not they wish to participate in research, and in doing so has denied them a voice. Thomas (2005), with reference to my work, highlights that:

Social work research depends on the voices of the vulnerable and marginalised. Systems which make that kind of research more difficult are not only bad for research – they also reduce the opportunities for those voices to be heard (p. 1003).

The participatory approach employed in Right2BCared4 and Staying Put moved beyond involving care experienced young people in interviewing their peers, to training and engaging them in several major aspects of the research cycle, including analysis of some of the data and the design and write up of the findings to produce accessible peer research reports for young people (Edwards, 2011; National Care Advisory Service, 2012). This approach was adopted with a view to empowering young people to participate in research by minimising power imbalances between researchers and participants. However, this framework also added layers of complexity to the process and raised ethical dilemmas as an overly 'inclusive' approach to selection of peer researchers could have been to the detriment of both parties. Recruiting peer researchers without the skills and capacity (with appropriate training and support) to fulfil the research task would have set them up to fail, but it would also have denied research participants a voice by compromising the quality of the data. This dilemma serves to highlight the importance of effective research management throughout the process.

Since the completion of Right2BCared4, a major EU project on transitions from care to adulthood in Finland, Albania, Poland and the Czech Republic has been undertaken using a participatory peer research approach (Stein and Verweijen-Slammescu, 2012). Greater use of peer research methodology is welcomed and can yield rich research findings to contribute to policy and practice. However, as Alderson (2012) acknowledges it is important that we do not limit the development of 'new insights through sustained theoretical analyses' by limiting ourselves to research questions and processes that children and young people can perform (p. 237). In a recent article I also acknowledge that:

Applying a historical intergenerational lens and using a life course biographical approach to understand transitions to adulthood (see Nilsen and Brannen, 2014) would be beyond the scope of peer researchers (Lushey and Munro, 2014, p. 12).

On this basis I have cautioned against a reductionist approach that privileges peer research methodology above other methods of inquiry.

In my work I have made use of a range of methodological approaches to explore developments in policy and practice to promote the rights of young people making the transition from care to adulthood, both nationally and internationally.

While in Norway a rights-based discourse has influenced reforms, in England policy developments have not been implemented with the promotion of children's rights in mind, but due to political commitment to investing in children as citizen-workers of the future (Fawcett al., 2003; Lister 2003; 2006). The circumstances under which young people in the Staying Put pilot were eligible to exercise their right to remain with carers beyond 18 (to support more 'extended and graduated transitions') were also constrained and limited to a minority of the looked after population. First, young people had to be in foster care. Second, in most pilot areas they had to have an 'established familial relationship' with their carers. Third, young people were generally expected to be engaged in education,

employment and training. These conditions tend to deny those with the most complex care histories, who have not benefitted from a secure stable base, the right to decide for themselves whether they want to remain with their carers beyond 18.

The inverse care law (Hart, 1971) appears inconsistent with the principles espoused in the UNCRC, and the emphasis placed upon 'special protection' from the state to physically and psychologically recover from separation and trauma. A central message from young people themselves was that they should have some choice and control of the timing of their departure from care rather than being 'forced, kicked, or pushed out' by the State.

Recognising young people's agency and allowing them to exercise their participatory rights may also mean accepting that some young people will opt to leave the relative protection of care, for independence, before professionals perceive they are ready to do so. Social workers are expected to safeguard young people from harm, as well as taking their wishes and feelings into account, in light of their age and understanding. Taking young people's voice seriously and upholding their participatory rights can therefore necessitate accepting that some of them may make decisions that are not perceived to be in their best interests.

Social workers reflected that denying young people's requests to move to independence in late adolescence often led them to vote with their feet and leave without warning. Such scenarios were perceived to be particularly damaging as transitions were unplanned and crisis driven. In such cases young people negotiate multiple changes in their lives simultaneously, which as focal theory demonstrates, is challenging. Some struggled to cope with the realities of independent living once they had left. There was evidence that a number of social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers did try and negotiate with young people and encourage them to remain in care a little longer, which allowed them to undertake specific pieces of work designed to prepare young people more fully for independence. Again this discovery serves to highlight the tensions and dilemmas that arise in moving beyond theoretical discussions of rights to the realities of social work practice.

Right2BCared4 and Staying Put have informed public debate regarding the rights of young people negotiating the transition from care to adulthood in England (Tickle, 2013). Findings have been used by MPs and voluntary organisations to argue for an amendment to the Children and Families Bill, to introduce a statutory requirement for central government to fund foster placements until 21 (Cann, 2013). The Children and Families Act 2014 placed Staying Put on a statutory footing, but currently this enhanced provisional right is limited to young people in foster placements. The Education Select Committee (2014) has recently recommended that young people living in residential children's homes should also have the right to remain there beyond the age of 18 so that there are not inequities in the provisional rights afforded to looked after children as they negotiate the transition to independence.

Future research recommendations

In the 4-8 years since the outputs in this thesis were published further research on young children and adolescence in and on the edge of care has been undertaken to contribute to the evidence base. With regards to the former, of particular importance is a prospective longitudinal study of young children identified as being at risk of significant harm before their first birthdays (Ward, Brown and Westlake, 2012). The research team have also developed a risk of abuse assessment framework, and the NSPCC are evaluating the effectiveness of

this model for improving the outcomes of looked after children where reunification to birth parents is being considered. This ongoing research work is collecting evidence to support decisions concerning which children require permanent out of home placements (such as adoption) and which can safely remain with birth parents (Ward, Brown and Westlake, 2012). In recent rounds of data collection the children themselves have been participating in the research. Adopting such an approach is supported by the development of participatory research tools to facilitate young children's engagement, and by a growing body of work that has challenged the discourse that young children are incompetent to express their views (Alderson, 2008; Clark, 2009; Cook and Hess, 2007; Percy Smith and Thomas, 2010).

Winter (2010, 2012) has also applied sociological approaches and a rights-based approach to elicit young children's views of state care. This research has revealed children's vivid recollections of maltreatment, with references being made to 'being hit, neglected, locked in a bedroom, and of witnessing substance misuse and violence' (Winter, 2010, p. 189). Findings reinforce the importance of ensuring that young children's participatory rights are upheld and that these inform decision-making processes to protect children from harm.

Further work is also required to contribute to understanding similarities and differences in social work and judicial perspectives upon how competing rights claims should be balanced. This scrutiny is timely given that adoption reforms have sought to reduce delays in decisions making and promote the use of adoption, whilst legal rulings have re-asserted the principle that severing the birth family tie without parental consent is a measure of last resort (Department for Education, 2012a, 2012b; *Re B (Care Proceedings: Appeal)*, 2013; *B-S (Adoption: Application of s 47(5))*, 2014).

In respect of adolescents approaching adulthood, my research has served to highlight that countries are at different stages in their journey's towards 'extended and graduated' transitions from care to adulthood. Further research is required to explore developments in policy and practice and the impact changes have on the young people concerned, not only at the point of transition, but into adulthood. In doing so it is important to move beyond our current 'western focus' and to learn from research and practice in the 'majority world' (traditionally known as the 'third world') (Panelli et al. 2007). In a globalised world there is value in exploring commonalities and differences in transitions from care to adulthood and whether theories and practices from the majority world apply in the minority world, and vice versa. As Punch and Tisdall (2012) highlight, cross-world dialogue and learning conversations also have the potential to drive forward wider debates in childhood and youth studies.

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Wade, J. and Munro, E.R. (2008) United Kingdom. In M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 209-224.

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Ward, H., Holmes, L. and Soper, J. (2008) *Costs and Consequences of Placing Children in Care*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Ward, H. Munro, E.R. and Dearden, C. (2006) *Babies and Young Children in Care: Life Pathways, Decision-Making and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ward, H., Skuse, T. and Munro, E.R. (2005) 'The best of times, the worst of times': Young people's views of care and accommodation. *Adoption and Fostering*. 29(1), 8-17.

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Appendix 1: Publications, rationale for inclusion and contribution to co-authored outputs

Books and chapters

- 1) Ward, H. **Munro, E.R.** and Dearden, C. (2006) *Babies and Young Children in Care: Life Pathways, Decision-making and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- 2) Stein, M. and **Munro, E.R.** (eds.) (2008) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
 - a) **Munro, E.R.** and Stein, M. (2008) Comparative exploration of care leavers transitions to adulthood: An introduction. In: M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 11-20.
 - b) Wade, J. and **Munro, E.R.** (2008) United Kingdom. In: M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 209-224.

Peer reviewed research reports

- 3) **Munro, E.R.**, Lushey, C., Ward, H. and National Care Advisory Service (2011) *Right2BCared4: Final Report. Research Report DFE-RR106*. London: Department for Education.
- 4) **Munro, E.R.**, Lushey, C., National Care Advisory Service, Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H. with Holmes, L. (2012) *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme Pilot: Final Report. Research Report DFE-RR191*. London: Department for Education.
- 5) **Munro, E.R.** and Manful, E. (2012) *Safeguarding Children: A Comparison of England's Data with that of Australia, Norway and the United States. Research Report DFE-RR198*. London: Department for Education.

Refereed journal articles

- 6) **Munro, E.R.** (2008) Research governance, ethics and access: A case study illustrating the new challenges facing social researchers. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 11(5), 429-440.
- 7) **Munro, E. R.**, Holmes, L. and Ward, H. (2005) Researching vulnerable groups: Ethical issues and the effective conduct of research in local authorities. *British Journal of Social Work*. 35(7), 1023-1038.
- 8) **Munro, E.R.**, Pinkerton, J. Mendes, P. Hyde-Dryden, G. Herczog, M. and Benbenishty, R. (2011) The contribution of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to understanding and promoting the interests of young people making the transition from care to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 33(12), 2417-2423.
- 9) **Munro, E. R.** and Ward, H. (2008) Balancing parents' and very young children's rights in care proceedings: Decision-making in the context of the Human Rights Act 1998. *Child and Family Social Work*. 13(2), 227-234.

Rationale for inclusion of these publications and my contribution to co-authored outputs

The core empirical research studies in this thesis were commissioned by government departments who 'demand outcomes within tight budgets' and want answers to key issues on the policy agenda within short timescales (Meager and Wilson, 2002, p. 664). To meet this requirement studies are undertaken by research teams and generate co-authored outputs.

In study 1 I undertook the majority of fieldwork and had a key role in data analysis and the write up of the findings. Building on this, I wrote publication 9 with minimal input from the second named author. Publication 2 was jointly co-authored. I wrote the research proposals for, and directed studies 3 to 5, as well as managing the multi-site research teams involved in studies 3 and 4, which were undertaken under my intellectual leadership. I was sole author of Chapters 6, 7, 9 and 10 in publication 3, and Chapters 2 and 6 in publication 4. I also undertook the analysis for, and wrote, the core section of Chapter 4, on the relationship between a secure stable base in foster care and staying put. In addition, I wrote over 80 per cent of publication 5. Publication 6 was single authored and I took the lead in developing the central arguments outlined in the remaining peer review journal articles, as well as writing a significant proportion of the content of each.

The publications in the thesis represent a small selection of my work and a full list of publications and a summary of national and international keynote presentations is provided in Appendix 2. Letters from co-authors outlining my contribution to the publications in the thesis are provided in Appendix 3.

Given the volume of work I have undertaken it was not straightforward to decide which research outputs should be included in the thesis. The final selection has a strong biographical connection and features projects that I perceive have been particularly significant in my professional development and on my journey from Research Assistant to Senior Research Fellow.

Babies and Young Children in Care was based on findings from the first research study I was employed to work on, and was the first book I contributed to (Publication 1 and 9). Publication 9 was one of the first peer reviewed journal articles that I wrote and submitted, and also reflects my ongoing interest in the interface between children's social care and court decision-making.

My interest in comparative research and transitions from care to adulthood (Publications 2, 3, 4 and 8) began in 2003 when a group of researchers from 16 countries came together to discuss a growing body of research that revealed that young people leaving public care were at high risk of social exclusion and poor outcomes. The group (International Network on Transitions from Care to Adulthood (INTRAC)) has been meeting annually since then to share research findings, and explore factors supporting and inhibiting developments in policy and practice to improve outcomes for this group.

In the early days of my involvement in INTRAC I was unfamiliar with the national and international literature on leaving care. Formal and informal discussions with members of the

group and shared learning have served as a critical foundation to support the development of the research I have undertaken in this area since.

Mike Stein and I co-edited INTRAC's first book, which mapped the latest research on leaving care and outlined and compared the range of legal and policy frameworks, welfare regimes and innovative practices in network countries (Publication 2). Publication 8 was also a collaborative endeavour with members of the group. Comparative research techniques were subsequently applied in Publication 5, but in this output they were also extended, as this was the first time I had undertaken work involving cross-national analysis of aggregate administrative data.

Right2BCared4 (Publication 3) was also significant as it was the first large scale study that I was a principal investigator on. Meeting the aims and objectives of the research presented challenges (and learning opportunities) because Right2BCared 4 was not a single intervention, but a set of principles, and so each local authority implemented different measures to embed these in practice. The timescale for assessing outcomes was also short. Notwithstanding these issues this study and Staying Put (Publication 4) were also important as they allowed me to utilise my understanding of the methodological and ethical issues in research with looked after children (Publications 6 and 7) to advance the use of participatory research methodology.

Appendix 2: Other publications and keynote presentations

2014

Lushey, C. and Munro, E.R. (2014) Participatory peer research methodology: An effective method for obtaining young people's perspectives on transitions from care to adulthood? *Qualitative Social Work*. DOI: 10.1177/1473325014559282.

Mendes, P., Pinkerton, J. and Munro, E.R. (2014) Young people transitioning from out of home care. *Australian Social Work*. 67(1), 1-4.

Munro, E.R., Hollingworth, K. Meetoo, V., Quy, K., McDermid, S. Trivedi, H. and Holmes, L. (2014) *Residential Parenting Assessments: Uses, Costs and Contributions to Effective and Timely Decision Making in Public Law Cases*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R., McDermid, S., Hollingworth, K. and Cameron, C. (2014) *Children's Homes: Understanding the Market and Use of Out of Authority Placements*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R. and Stone, J. (2014) *The Impact of More Flexible Assessment Practices in Response to the Munro Review of Child Protection: A Rapid Response Follow-up*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

2013

Munro, E.R. and Gilligan, R. (2013) The 'dance' of kinship care in England and Ireland: Navigating a course between regulation and relationships. *Psychosocial Intervention*. 22(3) 3, 185-192.

Munro, E.R. Hollingworth, K., Meetoo, V. and Simon, A. (2013) *Adoption Reform: Messages from Local Authorities on Changes to Processes and Timescales. Findings from Wave One*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R. and Lushey, C. (2013) *Undertaking Serious Case Reviews using the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) Learning Together Systems Model*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R., Meetoo, V. and Hollingworth, K. (2013) *Adoption Reform: Messages from Local Authorities on Changes to Processes and Timescales. Findings from Wave Two*. London: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

2012

Munro, E.R. and Lushey, C. (2012) *Local Safeguarding Children Board Chairs' Perspectives on Responding to Recommendations Outlined in the Munro Review of Child Protection: Findings from a National Survey*. Loughborough: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R. and Lushey, C. (2012) *The Impact of More Flexible Assessment Practices in Response to the Munro Review of Child Protection: Emerging Findings from the Trials*. Loughborough: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R., Lushey, C., National Care Advisory Service, Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H. with Holmes, L. (2012) *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18+ Family Placement Programme pilot: Final report. Research Report DFE-RR191*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R. and Manful, E. (2012) *Safeguarding Children: A Comparison of England's data with that in Australia, Norway and the U.S. Report DFE-RR198*. London: Department for Education.

2011

Munro, E.R. (2011) *Professional Perspectives on Reducing Bureaucracy, Performance and Accountability and Early Help and Support to Inform Munro's Review of Child Protection. Report to the Department for Education*. Loughborough: Child Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R. (2011) *The Protection of Children Online: A Brief Scoping Review to Identify Vulnerable Groups*. Loughborough: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Munro, E.R., Brown, R. and Manful, E. (2011) *Safeguarding children statistics: the availability and comparability of data in the UK. Research Brief. DFE- RB153*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R., Brown, R., Sempik, J. and Ward, H. with Owen, C. (2011) *Scoping Review to Draw Together Data on Child Injury and Safeguarding and to Compare the Position of England with that in Other Countries*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R. and France, A. (2011) Implementing Local Safeguarding Children Boards: managing complexity and ambiguity. *Child and Family Social Work*. 17, 337-346.

Munro, E.R., Lushey, C., Ward, H. and National Care Advisory Service (2011) *Right2BCared4: Final report. Research Report DFE-RR106*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R., Pinkerton, J. Mendes, P. Hyde-Dryden, G. Herczog, M. and Benbenishty, R. (2011) The contribution of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to understanding and promoting the interests of young people making the transition from care to adulthood. *Children and Youth Services Review*. 33(12), 2417-2423.

Munro, E.R. and Sempik, J. (2011) *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Safeguarding Training in Islington*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

2010

France, A., Munro, E.R. and Waring, A. (2010) *The Evaluation of Arrangements for Effective Operation of the New Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England: Final report. DFE-RR027*. London: Department for Education.

Holmes, L., Munro, E.R. and Soper, J. (2010) *Calculating the Cost and Capacity Implications for Local Authorities Implementing the Laming (2009) Recommendations*. London: Local Government Association.

Munro, E.R. and Manful, E. (2010) Appendix 5: International evidence. In: Cm 7981 (2010) *Review of the Office of the Children's Commissioner*. London: The Stationery Office.
Available from: <http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Cm-7981.pdf>
retrieved on May 5th 2014, pp. 87-105.

Munro, E.R., Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H. and National Care Advisory Service (2010) *Brief Overview of Emerging Findings from the Staying Put 18+ Family Placement pilot*. London: Department for Education.

Munro, E.R., Ward, H., Lushey, C. and National Care Advisory Service (2010) *Evaluation of the Right2BCared4 Pilots Interim Report: Overview of Emerging Themes and Issues*. London: Department for Education.

Sempik, J. and Munro, E.R. (2010) *Relationships Matter: An Evaluation of a Communication Skills Course for Young People*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

Ward, H. and Munro, E.R. (2010) Very young children in care in England: issues for foster care. In: E. Fernandez and R. Barth. (eds.) *How Does Foster Care Work? International Evidence on Outcomes*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 135-148.

2009

France, A., Munro, E. R. Meredith, J., Manful, E. and Beckhelling, J. (2009) *Effectiveness of the New Local Safeguarding Children Boards in England: Interim report. DCSF Research Report 126*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.

2008

Munro, E.R. (2008) Developing frameworks to support care leavers' transitions to adulthood: Messages from England and Norway. *Mifgash: Journal of Social-Educational Work*. 28, 155-175 (Hebrew translation).

Munro, E.R. (2008) Realising children's rights – progress, problems and prospects. In: M.S. Becker and J. N. Schneider (eds.) *Human Rights Issues in the 21st Century*. New York: Nova Science Publishing, pp. 133-150.

Munro, E.R. (2008) Research governance, ethics and access: A case study illustrating the new challenges facing social researchers. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. 11(5), 429-440.

Munro, E.R. and Stein, M. (2008) Comparative exploration of care leavers transitions to adulthood: An introduction. In M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 11-20.

Munro, E. R. and Ward, H. (2008) Balancing parents' and very young children's rights in care proceedings: Decision-making in the context of the Human Rights Act 1998. *Child and Family Social Work*. 13(2), 227-234.

Sempik, J. and Munro, E. R. (2008) *An Evaluation of the Derbyshire NCH Children's Support Service: Perceptions of Satisfaction and Effectiveness*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

Stein, M. and Munro, E.R. (eds.) (2008) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Wade, J. and Munro, E.R. (2008) United Kingdom. In M. Stein and E.R. Munro (eds.) *Young People's Transitions from Care to Adulthood: International Research and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, pp. 209-224.

2006

Munro, E.R. and Caulfield, L. (2006) *Reports to the Green Paper Team on Projects for Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

Munro, E.R. and Hardy, A. (2006) *Placement Stability: A Literature Review*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

Ward, H. Munro, E.R. and Dearden, C. (2006) *Babies and Young Children in Care: Life Pathways, Decision-making and Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

2005

Munro, E. R., Stein, M. and Ward, H. (2005) Comparing how different social, political and legal frameworks support or inhibit transitions from public care to independence in Europe, Israel, Canada and the United States. *International Journal of Child Welfare*. 8(4), 191-201.

Munro, E. R., Holmes, L. and Ward, H. (2005) Researching vulnerable groups: Ethical issues and the effective conduct of research in local authorities. *British Journal of Social Work*. 35(7), 1023-1038.

Ward, H., Skuse, T., Munro, E.R. (2005) 'The best of times, the worst of times': Young people's views of care and accommodation. *Adoption and Fostering*. 29(1), 8-17.

2004

Ward, H., Holmes, L., Moyers, S., Munro, E. R. and Poursanidou, D. (2004) *Safeguarding Children: A Scoping Study of Research in Three Areas. Report to the Department of Health*. Loughborough: Centre for Child and Family Research.

2003

Ward, H., Munro, E.R., Dearden, C., Nicholson, D. (2003) *Outcomes for Looked After Children: Life Pathways and Decision-Making for Very Young Children in Care or Accommodation*. Loughborough: CCFR, Loughborough University.

Invited keynote presentations

2014

Munro, E.R. (2014) Improving Outcomes for Care Leavers. Opening address at a *Policy Knowledge event on Improving Outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers*. 15 November, London.

Munro, E.R. (2014) Children's homes: understanding the market and use of out of authority placements. Paper presented at the *National Commissioning and Contracting Training Conference*. 5 June, Swanwick.

Munro, E.R. (2014) Supporting children in care across the system. Paper presented at the *Westminster Education Forum Seminar: Next Steps for Children in Care: Reforming Adoption, Improving Children's Homes and Supporting Care Leavers*. 13 May, London.

2013

Munro, E.R. (2013) Transitions from care to adulthood: English research, policy and practice. Paper presented at the *Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Seminar on Leaving Out of Home Care*. 5 December, Melbourne.

Munro, E.R. (2013) Transitions from care to adulthood: English research, policy and practice. Paper presented at the *CREATE Foundation Seminar to the Child Welfare Sector*. 28 November, Sydney.

Munro, E.R. (2013) International perspectives on young people's transitions from care to adulthood. Paper presented at the *Strength to Strength: Improving the Care System for Children and Young People through Participation Conference*. 23 November, Canberra, Australia.

Munro, E.R. (2013) Peer research on leaving care in England. Paper presented at the *Observatoire National de L'Enfance en Danger Conference on Transitions from Care to Adulthood*. 10 October, Paris.

Munro, E.R. (2013) Piloting more flexible assessment processes. Paper presented at the *NSPCC Working Together to Safeguard Children Seminar: The Implications of the Revised Guidance for Practitioners on the Frontline*. 24 April, Leicester and 23 May, London.

2012

Munro, E.R. (2012) More flexible assessment practices in response to the Munro Review: *Lessons from the pilots*. Paper presented at the *Celebrating Social Work Conference*. 5 December, Leeds.

Munro, E.R. (2012) Peer research and leaving care in England. Paper presented at the *Young People Making a Difference in Leaving Care Launch of the European Peer Research Report on Leaving Care*. 6 November, Brussels: European Parliament.

Munro, E.R. (2012) Peer research and leaving care in England. Paper presented at the *Young People Making a Difference in Leaving Care Launch of the European Peer Research Report on Leaving Care*. 6 November, Brussels: European Parliament.

Munro, E.R. (2012) European research and practice on young people's transitions from care to adulthood. Paper presented at the *European Social Network Vulnerable Youth in Transition Seminar*. 10-11 May, Rome.

Munro, E.R. (2012) Right2BCared4 and Staying Put. Paper presented at the *Northern Ireland Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum*. 20 January, Ballymena.

Munro, E.R. and Lushey, C. (2012) Staying Put 18+ Family Placement Programme: messages from research. Paper presented at the *National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum*. 2 March, York.

2011

Munro, E.R. (2011) Transitions from care to adulthood: International perspectives. Paper presented at the *Talking Honestly and Openly about the Welfare of Children without Parental Care Conference*. 26 May, Estonia.

Munro, E.R. (2011) The Right2BCared4 and Staying Put 18+ Family Placement pilot evaluations: Messages for policy and practice. Paper presented at the *Four Agency Supported Lodgings Conference – More than a room?* 4 May, London.

2010

Munro, E.R. (2010) *Review of government pilots from a corporate parenting perspective*. Paper presented at the 2nd Annual Future of Corporate Parenting Conference. 20 October, London.

Munro, E.R. (2010) Ensuring children leave care when they are ready and prepared. Paper presented at the *Supporting Young People Leaving Care Annual Forum. Ensuring Transitions into Adulthood and Independence*. 6 July, London.

Stein, M. and Munro, E.R. (2010) Young people's transitions from care to adulthood: the challenges of making international comparisons. Paper presented at *Inside Out. How interventions in child and family care work. 11th European Scientific Association on Residential and Foster Care for Children and Adolescents (EUSARF) Conference*. 24 September, Groningen, Netherlands.

2009

Munro, E.R. (2009) Child welfare in England and placement stability. Paper presented at the *International Perspectives in Child Welfare. Facing Challenges and Implementing Advances Conference*. 23-24 September, Oviedo, Spain.

2008

Munro, E.R. (2008) Transitions from care to adulthood: Comparative issues. Paper presented at a *NOVA expert seminar for policy makers on aftercare*. 28 February, Oslo, Norway.

Stein, M. and Munro, E.R. (2008) International perspectives on young people's transitions from care to adulthood: messages from research. Paper presented at *Transforming Lives – Improving Outcomes (incorporating the 8th International Looking After Children Conference)*. 9 July, Oxford: Keble College.

2007

Munro, E.R. (2007) Transitions from public care to adulthood: international perspectives: messages from research for policy and practice. Paper presented at the *Youth in Care – Towards Aging Out and the Years After: Research, International Perspectives and Policy Conference*. December 17, Jerusalem, Israel: Hebrew University of Jerusalem

