The English Adoption Journey: Mapping Needs, Costs, and Outcomes

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Outline of session

• Adoption policy and practice context in England
• Development of a standardised conceptual framework
• Introduction to the Cost Calculator tool
• Estimating costs of the adoption journey
• Making use of the information
Adoption policy and practice context in England

• Context: Data (to year end March 2015)
  – 69,540 looked after children in England (in out of home care)
  – 3,320 placed for adoption (5%)
  – Variability across local areas

• Adoption breakdowns
  – 3.2% after Adoption Orders granted (12 year period)
    Selwyn and Masson (2014)
Adoption policy and practice context in England

• Policy focus over the past five years: Plan for improving and tackling delay in the adoption system
  – Fostering for Adoption
  – Concurrent planning
  – Adoption Leadership board
  – Adoption Support Fund
Development of a standardised conceptual framework

• Explore the relationship between needs, costs and outcomes for vulnerable children and their families
• Process driven approach
• Bottom up costing methodology
  • Child as the unit of analysis
• Routinely collected child level data linked with time use activity and finance data to develop unit costs
Development of a standardised conceptual framework

- Unit costs and costs of care packages
- Longitudinal analysis
- Comparative element to conduct cost effectiveness analysis
- Use of assumptions and ‘decision-rules’
- Transparency
- Potential costs avoided and cost savings
Development of a standardised conceptual framework

Separation between

- ‘Services’
  - Placement, universal, targeted and specialist (therapeutic interventions, including groups and one-to-one)

- ‘Case management activity’
  - Assessments, finding services, statutory visits, reviews
  - Activities are organised into processes

- Variations
  - Explanation for variations in costs
Development of a standardised conceptual framework

• Child welfare service response and processes
  • What happens?
  • Who is involved?
• Standardised universally applicable framework
  • Decision making; Assessment; Care planning; Placement support; Referrals
• Replicable across different contexts (and countries)
Estimating the costs of the adoption journey

- Extension of the Cost Calculator model
  - Funding from the Department for Education Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme
  - Build on work to date to estimate the care journey for children placed in out of home care
  - Captures the adopters and the child’s journey
Estimating the costs of the adoption journey

• Conceptual framework
  – Map out the processes
  – Capture the ‘time use’ activity
  – Link these to data about the needs and outcomes of children

• Develop a series of analyses and reports to inform practice and policy
Estimating the costs of the adoption journey
Collection of ‘time use’ activity data

• Focus groups
  • Distinction between case related and non-case related activities
  • Identification of key tasks and who carries these out
  • Identification of a ‘standard case’ and variations
  • Context setting
• Online surveys
  • Time use data for key tasks and activities
  • Data from large sample of workers
Cost Calculator: Inputs and Outputs

- Time use activity data provided by children's social care personnel
- Salary data for each type of children's social care personnel involved in the 8 processes
- Organisational overheads (running costs) finance data for the children's social care service
- Unit costs for the 8 processes for looked after children (includes standard case costs and variations)
- Child level data (needs, placements and outcomes)
- Finance data (placement fees and allowances)
- Unit cost reports for individual children, groups of children or by placement type
- Process unit costs of 8 cost calculator processes for looked after children
- Analysis of social care costs by outcomes
- 'What if' analysis to explore the costs of providing alternative placement types
Implementing change

- Cost effectiveness analysis requires differentiation between:
  - Organisational components
    - Administrative, structural processes, wider systems change
  - Staff components
    - Recruitment and retention, confidence, skills and competencies
  - Child components
    - Outcomes
Making use of the information

• Exploration of time use
  – Potential efficiencies without compromising quality

• Comparing costs between different agencies
  – Introducing transparency and comparability

• Economic impact of different approaches to regionalisation
  – Changes to the adoption process
  – Organisational costs
For more information

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