**Interviews with Au Pairs in the UK 2012-2014 explanatory notes**

**Aims of the interviews**

We aimed to interview 40 au pairs. We initially expected to interview 20 au pairs in London and 20 au pairs in one other region of Southern England. However, we soon found that rather than attempt to locate interview subjects by geographical area it was more practical to make contact using internet sites and then interview the chosen subject using Skype. This meant that we had a greater geographic spread than we had originally anticipated having. We did not limit ourselves to au pairs of any specific nationality or age group. Rather, we wanted to find out more about what the different countries au pairs in the UK had come from, how they had traveled to the UK and why they had decided to become au pairs at all and au pairs in the UK more specifically. We asked how old they were and whether they had previously lived at home with parents or other family members. We were interested in how much language acquisition was an important factor in deciding to become an au pair and whether au pairs perceived what they were doing as a life-stage event or a migration. That is, were they intending to be an au pair in the UK for six months to a year and then return home or move somewhere else or were they using the opportunity to be an au pair as a chance to migrate to the UK? We wanted to know the level of formal education the au pairs we interviewed had achieved and whether they had any particular interest in or training in the care of children. We asked au pairs how they had found out about being an au pair in the UK and how they had organized their placement. We also wanted to learn as much as we could about the experiences au pairs had had or were having. How many children were they asked to look after? Were they also required to look after pets or do other duties? How much housework was involved? How much pocket money were they given and was it enough to live on? Did they take on other jobs as well? What were their employers like? What was their accommodation like? What did they think of the UK? Did they feel exploited or like a worker or a member of the family? How had the experience of au pairing in the UK shaped au pairs own parenting philosophies and ideas on motherhood, fatherhood and family life? What did they think of British food and dining habits? All these questions and more helped to give us a picture of what it is like to be an au pair in the UK.

**Making contact with au pairs for interview**

It is important to note that the term ‘au pair’ is officially meaningless in the UK context so in seeking to interview ‘au pairs’ we relied upon finding people who had advertised their services under the ‘au pairs and nannies’ category on gumtree.com or who were otherwise identified as au pairs by the categories used by websites and agencies, people who self identified as au pairs or were identified as au pairs by employers. We also relied upon Facebook and other social media groups where people self identified as au pairs to make contact with individuals.

We offered a £10 M&S voucher to all those interviewed.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and then coded using NVivo.

Some interviews were conducted face to face (in the interviewer’s home or in a café). However, we were making contact with people using the internet and the people we ‘met’ were often located a long way from central London. Also, au pairs have real limits on their free time. We found it was easier for the au pairs to offer to interview using Skype. Therefore the majority of the interviews were conducted using Skype.

*Agencies*

We attempted to make contact with au pairs by contacting au pair agencies and explaining the aims of our study but agencies contacted by email did not reply. We decided it would be more productive to attempt to contact au pairs directly and so used gumtree as well as facebook groups to ‘approach’ au pairs over the internet.

*Gumtree*

Gumtree.com has a section where people looking for work can advertise their services to prospective employers. We aimed to make contact with people who advertised themselves as au pairs looking for a first or a new position by responding to these ads and explaining the purpose of our project. In fact, the majority of au pairs who advertised themselves on gumtree were already working as au pairs and were seeking a new position. A number of au pairs contacted in this way were disgruntled with their current au pair position and that is why they were actively seeking a new position. This should be noted in terms of the effect how we found the au pairs interviewed had on the outcome of the interviews.

*Social media/Facebook*

Au pairs and prospective au pairs have an active online presence. There are numerous talkboards, Facebook groups and individual Facebook pages through which people look for au pairs or host families. Au pairs also use these pages to make contact with each other in order to discuss their experiences and to make contact with new friends. The pages are used to organize social events for new arrivals in cities and towns all over the world and to ask advice of each other. We used Facebook to post messages to groups and to individual au pairs asking people to contact us if they were interested in being interviewed.

*Personal contacts*

Some of the au pairs interviewed were working for friends or community contacts of the interviewer. This was not ideal, though, as the au pairs in question tended to be part of the broader school community of which the interviewer and her children are part. Interviewing these au pairs blurred personal and professional life in a way that was sometimes awkward.