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Project title: Establishing outcomes of care proceedings for children before and after care proceedings reform

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The project aim was:

1) to examine the process of care (child protection) proceedings and the orders granted for two random samples of c 300 children subject to these proceedings before (S1) and after (S2) major legal reforms intended to streamline and shorten proceedings. The samples were selected from 6 (anonymous) local authorities, 5 in Southern England and 1 in Wales. Permission to collect these data was given for S 1 in 2010 by Her Majesty’s Court and Tribunal Service Data Access Panel and by the President of the Family Division. For S2 the consent of HMCTS was not required data collection was allowed by Cafcass in England and the local authority in Wales; the President of the Family Division gave consent in accordance with the Family Procedure Rules 2010, Practice Direction 12G on 23/7/15. These data are recorded in a child level SPSS database.

2) to establish children’s post court outcomes and the utility of Department for Education Administrative data for this by linking data collected above to administrative data relating to children’s social care. Linkage to Administrative data was achieved using deterministic methods with the permission of the Department for Education Data Management Access Panel. Administrative data were provided for the England sample by the Department for Education from the Looked After Children (LAC) and Children in Need (CiN) databases and, for the Wales sample, by the local authority sharing equivalent data it deposited with the Government of Wales. These data covered the period 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2016. For S1 children this covered a period of approximately 5 years after proceedings ended; for S2 children the period was approximately 1 year after the proceedings ended. These data cannot be deposited but key variables derived from them are included in the SPSS database.

3) to capture the qualitative information about the child’s progress and well-being, that is not available through the DfE data, one year (T1) and 5 years (T2) after the proceedings ended. This included information about the care plan, the reasons for any changes of plan or placement (reasons for placement changes have only been requested in the SSDA903 returns since 2015-16), family contact (birth parents, siblings, other relatives), services and support needed or supplied, the child’s physical and mental health, and behavioural and emotional wellbeing (SDQ scores are not available for children who are not in care, and not always supplied for those who are). Access to local authority files was with the permission of the local authorities participating in the study. In each local authority 10 files were selected from each sample; the selection criteria were their age at the end of proceedings and the order made in proceedings. Researcher ratings were made for children’s wellbeing as explained below. Data from these files was extracted and recorded in an SPSS data base.

4) These quantitative datasets are supplemented by 1) interview data collected in 2016-17 from local authority managers and lawyers in each local authority in the Study, exploring policies and practices relating to care proceedings, care plans, assessment of carers and provision of services. 2) focus group data from focus groups in 2018 with judges who hear care proceedings. This material is in a NVivo database.

5) Quantitative data on court outcomes was supplemented by identifying any further proceedings up to November 2017 relating to the children in the Cafcass cms and e-cms databases (these data were not available for Wales). NB The S1 data was collected under ESRC Grant RES 062-23-226 at case level (see Related Resources).