**EXIT-[case site name] Research Plan**

**Purpose of this document**

The purpose of thims Research Plan is to create a working document which incorporates all relevant information relating to the operationalisation of the Exploring Innovations in Transition to Adulthood (EXIT) [case site name] case study so that all project stakeholders can develop a shared understanding of the intended aims and approach. It will be reviewed and updated by the EXIT team to reflect any changes agreed with [organisation name] as the case study progresses.

**Background to the EXIT research study**

Care leavers in the UK typically experience a journey to adulthood that is ‘accelerated and compressed’ compared to their peers in the general population (Stein, 2006). Care leavers are expected to navigate multiple changes in their lives simultaneously and do so without the practical, emotional and financial support typically offered by birth families. Overall, relative to their peers who have not grown up within the care system, care leavers are more likely to experience homelessness (Cameron et al. 2018), social exclusion (Stein, 2006), mental ill health (Viner and Taylor, 2005), lower levels of educational attainment (O’Higgins et al., 2015; Mannay et al., 2017) and are less likely to enter higher education (Sebba et al., 2015), or to be in employment (Viner and Taylor, 2005; Wade and Dixon, 2006). The reasons for these disparities are complex and multi-faceted but include changing structural and economic conditions, experience of neglect and abuse before coming into care and a lack of continuity in relationships and emotional support (Munro, 2018; Colbridge et al., 2017; Fratto, 2016; Schofield et al., 2012).

Over the past decade the government has introduced legislation and statutory guidance which has strengthened duties on local authorities with the aim of improving outcomes for young people negotiating the transition to adulthood. Legislative changes have supported a move away from accelerated and compressed transitions at ages 16-18 (Munro, 2018). Legislative changes include permitting young people to remain with their foster carers until 21 years old (‘Staying Put’; Children and Families Act 2014, Section 98) and requiring local authorities to provide support from a leaving care Personal Adviser until the age of 25 years (Children and Social Work Act 2017, Section 3). Additionally, the Department for Education’s (DfE) Children’s Social Care Innovation programme (2014-2020) provided funding for projects across children’s services, a number of which were focused on care leavers, including New Belongings (Dixon and Baker, 2016) and No Wrong Door (Lushey et al., 2017). In 2018, the DfE provided funding for 8 pilot sites of the [innovation name] programme which aimed to improve outcomes for care leavers during the transition from a children’s home to independent living. These care leaver innovation projects aimed to develop new ways of working and knowledge around how to best support care leavers navigate the transition from care to adulthood.

Despite these policy initiatives, a recent survey exploring innovation in children’s social care reported that service providers considered resource limitations (both in terms of people and finance) were a key barrier to committing to the level of innovation required to make a significant impact in the lives of the people they work with (Costa, 2021). Further challenges are associated with the development and sustainability of innovations beyond the initial pilot. Additionally, innovations that do sustain often lack a robust evidence-base and it is not clear if they have a meaningful impact on improving the lives of young people leaving care (Campie et al., 2015; Fitzpatrick & Williams, 2017).

Understanding what is needed to support innovation move beyond initial pilot phases, including generating evidence of outcomes and what helps or hinders diffusion and scale up, is needed to enable policy makers and innovators to create sustainable innovations that have lasting and meaningful impact for young people leaving care.

**Overview of the EXIT research study**

The EXploring Innovation in Transitions to adulthood (EXIT) study aims to improve understanding of the enablers, barriers and the factors that are important for implementing, sustaining, scaling up and evaluating innovations for care leavers in the UK.

Our goal is to build an evidence base of how ‘meaningful’ (evidence-based) innovation for care leavers can best be supported to scale up and become part of widespread practice; moving from what we know about what works, to what we do in practice. The four-year research project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and brings together a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from the University of Warwick, the University of Bedfordshire, University of Birmingham, and Newcastle University.

The objectives of the study are to:

• Explore what innovations currently exist for young people leaving care;

• Identify what helps or hinders how meaningful innovation is implemented, sustained and scaled up;

• Explore how innovation is adapted as it moves from one site to another and with what effect;

• Critically examine how the success of innovation is ‘measured’;

• Discover how the wider spread of innovation that works can be better supported so innovation makes a difference to more care leavers.

The EXIT research plan involves four work packages (WP) that aim to explore the contemporary innovation context, practices, projects and processes that support care leavers’ transitions to adulthood in the UK.

**WP1**: We have conducted two literature reviews of the academic literature and grey literature which identified over 80 innovations, with some occurring at multiple sites and at national level. The focus of the innovations related to different areas of transition for care leavers including education, employment and training, housing and support for the development of relationships.

**WP2**: We have conducted 30 interviews with key policy and practice stakeholders, to explore some of these innovations in detail and through this preparatory stage, we identified six innovation case studies, including [case site name], to include in WP3.

**WP3**: We aim to conduct six innovation case studies to explore the innovation journey, from development to implementation, adaptation, scale up and diffusion.

**WP4**: We aim to synthesise the findings from the individual case studies, with a specific focus on outcomes.

**EXIT- [case site name] Research Case Study**

The case study of [case site name] aims to explore the implementation, sustainability and scale up processes adopted.

[case site name] was identified as a potential case study in the WP2 stakeholder interviews.

[Information redacted that identifies the case study site].

**Research questions**

The research questions that will guide the [case site name] case study research (and the five other case studies in WP3) are:

1. What are the barriers and facilitators to development and implementation of innovation for care leavers?’
   1. what are the sources of innovation?
   2. what are barriers and facilitators to implementation of innovation?
   3. what are the mechanisms for sustaining and diffusing innovation?
   4. how are innovations adapted as they diffuse?
2. What are the outcomes of the innovation as care leavers transition out of care?
3. As the innovation diffuses, what adaptions are necessary and what effect do they have on outcomes?
4. How can we support sustaining and diffusion of evidence-based meaningful innovation for care leavers?

**Research approach**

The research plan is informed by an interpretive perspective and adopts a qualitative approach, with three key sources of research data: stakeholder interviews; non-participant observations of stakeholder meetings and review of evaluation and outcome information. Care experienced young people also contribute to the study team and will assist in carrying out interviews and data analysis, alongside the researchers.

Our way of working

The emphasis of our way of working is on partnership and doing research with you, rather than about you; feeding back our learning in real-time to support implementation of the projects that we are researching and contributing to organisational learning. We would like to develop a community of practice within and across participating EXIT case study sites to build capacity for knowledge exchange and learning.

Methods

Stakeholder interviews - we plan to invite 25-30 [case site name] stakeholders to participate in a research interview to explore their perspectives of the innovation processes and outcomes for care leavers. See Appendix 1 for invitation to participate in an interview letter and Appendix 2 for draft discussion guides.

Non-participant observation - we plan to observe 10-12 key stakeholder meetings to explore how innovation processes are supported in delivering the innovation. See Appendix 3 for draft observation template, and suggested meetings to observe.

Review of evaluation/outcome information – we plan to discuss and review evaluation/outcome information that is collected by [organisation name] to explore the nature of outcomes/evaluation and how the outcome data is analysed and utilised.

Sampling criteria

We will agree the sampling criteria with [lead contact for the research within the organisation]. A suggested list of interview participants is in Appendix 4.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the study has been granted by the University of Warwick. An informed consent process will be conducted by a researcher with each stakeholder who is invited to take part in an interview. Outcome information provided to the research team will not include any individual identifiers.

While [organisation name] will be identified as a case study site in research outputs the anonymity of individual participants will be protected in the research outputs.

Analysis approach

The analysis approach will adopt an abductive thematic approach guided by the codebook that was developed in the analysis of interviews in WP2. See Appendix 5.

Sharing findings

We plan to share the findings from our analysis with [organisation name] throughout the project. We will review dissemination opportunities at operational and strategic meetings to identify appropriate forums and formats.

Timings

Data gathering will take place from December 2021 to September 2022. The proposed plan of data gathering is in a series of stages with indicate time scales as below;

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **2021** | **2022** | **2022** | **2022** | **2022** |
|  | **Q4** | **Q1** | **Q2** | **Q3** | **Q4** |
| Data gathering and analysis  (Interviews -set 1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Data gathering and analysis  (Interviews -set 2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Data gathering and analysis  (Interviews-set 3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Data gathering and analysis (Additional interviews if needed) |  |  |  |  |  |
| WP4 synthesis |  |  |  |  |  |

Research team

The research will be conducted by:

* Professor Graeme Currie, University of Warwick, Principal Investigator
* Professor Eileen Kaner, Newcastle University, Co-Investigator
* Dr Ruth McGovern, Newcastle University, Co-Investigator
* Debbie Smart, Newcastle University, Research Assistant
* Dr Hayley Alderson, Newcastle University, Senior Research Associate
* [Peer Researcher name], University of Warwick, Co-researcher
* Dr Rebecca Johnson, University of Birmingham, Senior Research Fellow

**Appendix 1 Invitation to interview**

Exploring innovations in Transition to adulthood (EXIT Study)

Dear ….

Thank you for your interest in taking part in our EXIT study which is exploring innovations in transition to adulthood. The study is investigating the factors that support or hinder the diffusion, adoption/adaptation and scale up of innovations. Specifically, we aim to provide learning for your organisation to help you implement and scale up innovations that work so looked after young people transition into adulthood with better life chances.

We have completed interviews with 31 key policy and practice stakeholders, to help us scope our research and now we are carrying out fieldwork to examine in-depth cases of innovation. We would like to invite you to participate in an interview to gain your view on the challenges and solutions to their implementation and scale up. The interview will last between 45 to 60 minutes. We will carry out interviews through digital means, such as MS teams. If you are willing to be interviewed, one of our research team, will be in contact once you have confirmed this via e-mail, to arrange a day and time that is most convenient for you. Where possible a care experienced young person will co-facilitate the interview. If you would like further details of the EXIT study, please access our study website at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/exit-study/.

The interview will be both confidential and anonymised and in no way will you be able to be identified by the content of the interview. The session will be audio recorded, transcribed, and held securely by the University of Warwick in accordance with the University’s data policy. The anonymised interview data may be used within dissemination events and publications, your confidentiality and the anonymity of your responses is assured.

Moreover, your participation in the research is voluntary and should you wish to not take part, be audio recorded or withdraw from the study at any time, in the first instance please contact (Graeme.currie@wbs.ac.uk). There will be no adverse consequences should you wish to withdraw. Key stakeholders will not be compensated or incentivised to take part; however, your participation is greatly appreciated. Participants taking part as a care leaver representative will receive a £10 shopping voucher as compensation for their time. At the end of the study, a report of the findings will be issued to the funders, any data extracts from interviews will be entirely anonymous.

Our research team is committed not just to carrying out research but ensuring its impact upon policy and practice so that looked after young people are better supported in their adult transition in the future.

Best Wishes

Graeme Currie, Principal Investigator and Professor of Public Management, Warwick Business School

(Graeme.currie@wbs.ac.uk)

**Appendix 2 Draft Discussion Guides**

**Draft Discussion Guide – [case site name]**

***(NB: These questions cover all roles/responsibilities and the relevant questions will be selected for each participant, depending on their role within [innovation name])***

**Participant role**

* Can you tell me about your role in relation to [innovation name]?
* Who do you work with in relation to your role as part of [innovation name]?

**[case site name] story**

* Can you tell me about [innovation name]?
* When was it introduced?
* What was the rationale for its development?
* What is its story?
* Who has been involved?
* Where did it start?
* What stage of development is it in now? (implementation/roll-out/scale up/spread)
* What are your expectations re timelines for implementation, embedding, scale and spread?
* What have been important milestones in its journey?
* Where do you think it is heading?

**Aims, objectives and outcomes**

* Can you tell me about the key aims and objectives of [innovation name]?
* What are the specific expected outcomes that relate to care leavers?
* How successful do you think [innovation name] is at achieving its aims, objectives and outcomes?
* What would help [innovation name] to achieve its aims, objectives and outcomes?

**Values and principles including co-production**

* How would you describe the core values and principles that underpin [innovation name]?
* How would you describe the ethos of co-production, specifically?
* How are these values and principles embodied in practice?
* How does co-production inform the design, delivery and adaption of [innovation name]?
* What are the enablers and barriers to embedding these values and principles , including co-production?

**Enablers**

* Can you tell me about what seemed to make the implementation/roll-out/scale up/spread work well?
* Where has it worked best?
* Why do you think it worked so well?
* What has been the biggest enabler of its success?
* What else would support it to work well?

**Challenges**

* Can you tell me about any challenges you have experienced during implementation/adaptation/scale up?
* What is your understanding of the reasons for these challenges?
* How has the nature of challenges changed over time?
* How have the challenges been experienced by different stakeholder groups?
* What has been the biggest challenge?
* How have these challenges been overcome?
* What further challenges do you anticipate?

**Adaptation**

* What changes/adaptations have been made from the initial [innovation name] offer?
* What were the reasons for these changes? e.g.adaptations to specific context
* Who instigated the changes ie nationally/locally-driven?
* What was the impact of these changes?
* What further changes are required?

**Evaluation/outcomes**

* How is [innovation name] evaluated? Which outcomes measures are used?
* How well have the evaluations to-date explored the intended aims, objectives and outcomes?
* What challenges have been associated with evaluation? e.g. control over the outcomes; capacity; measures?
* How have the evaluations been used? How have they impacted on changes that have been made to the delivery of the innovation?
* Where are the current gaps in evaluation?
* How does the way you evaluate/ the outcomes you use have an effect (e.g. means can draw down sustained funding, but not a meaningful measure)?
* Where do the evaluation outcomes/outcome measures come from (e.g. are they imposed, co-produced etc?)
* What developments are required to make evaluations/outcome measures more meaningful?
* Please could you share any evaluation reports or relevant outcome measure information with me?

**Sustainability and future of [case site name]**

* What do you wish you had have known at the outset of implementing [innovation name]?
* What advice would you give to new LAs who are interested in implementing the programme?
* What developments are required nationally to support local authorities to implement [innovation name]?
* Is there anything else that would help make [innovation name] more successful from the perspective of care leavers?
* What is your biggest fear for [innovation name]?
* What is your hope/ ambition for [innovation name]?

Other

* Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences of [innovation name]?

**Appendix 3 Draft observation template**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Case study site: |  |
| Date: |  |
| Researcher initials: |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number of people present (excluding researcher): |  |
| Roles of people present: |  |
| How did the observation take place e.g. online/ in person |  |
| If the meeting was in person, where did it take place? |  |

|  |
| --- |
| What is the aim of the meeting? |
|  |
| What points are discussed in the meeting? |
|  |
| Who is chairing/ leading the meeting? |
|  |
| Who participates in the discussion? |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Is there any discussion relating to different aspects of the innovation process e.g. implementation, diffusion and scale-up |
|  |
| Is there any discussion about challenges relating to the different innovation processes? |
|  |
| Is there any discussion relating to outcomes? |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| What decision where made during the meeting? |
|  |
| Who were the decision made by? |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| What actions were agreed at the end of the meeting |
|  |

**Researcher reflections**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Appendix 4 Sampling considerations for interviews and observations**

**Table 1 potential interview participants**

**[Details redacted]**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name** | **Role** | **Notes** |
|  |  |  |

**Table 2 [innovation name] potential meetings to observe**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Stakeholder Group** | **Meeting** | **Recurring Timing** | **Notes/priority** |
| [innovation name] operational team | [innovation name] project meeting |  |  |

**Appendix 5 Analysis codebook**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Category/Node** | **Sub-codes level 1** | **Sub-codes level 2 (bullet points – level 3)** |
| **Innovation background and description** | Innovation perspective | definition/understanding of innovation |
| perceived value of ‘innovation’ |
| Other |
| Innovation description | Innovation 1 |
| Innovation 2 |
| Innovation 3 |
| Innovation rationale | macro factors |
| micro factors |
| key argument/theory |
| evidence-base |
| other |
| Other |  |
| **Innovation context** | Macro context | Socio-economic   * + - * austerity       * other |
| Political   * leaders * policies * other |
| Institutional   * broken system * bureaucracy * statutory landscape * accountability   + OFSTED   + other * other |
| Other |
| Local context | Organisational culture |
| Values |
| Priorities |
| Demographic profile   * high UASC * deprivation * rural/urban * BAME * other |
| OFSTED |
| Other |
| Government relations | Relational partner   * Central government department. (e.g. DfE) * Government agency (e.g. Innovation unit/ OFSTED/ What Works Centre) |
| Nature of relationship   * funder * outcome of lobbying * other |
| Nature of support   * Financial * Strategic * Other |
| Perception of govt role   * controlling * coercive * helpful * other |
| Other |
| Other |  |
| **Innovation stage** | Pilot | Plans |
| Practices |
| Processes |
| Other |
| Diffusion | Plans |
| Practices |
| Processes |
| Other |
| Scale up | Plans |
| Practices |
| Processes |
| Other |
| Sustain | Plans |
| Practices |
| Processes |
| Other |
| Other |  |
| **Innovation characteristics, factors and processes** | Innovation characteristics | Flexible/agile/adapted |
| Rigid |
| Fidelity to original |
| Other |
| Leadership | Dynamics   * relational practices * individual * collaborative * other |
| Behaviours   * championing * challenging * intransigence * listening * coaching * giving feedback * consensus-seeking * risk-taking * delegating responsibility * sharing power * giving voice * scoping/searching for innovation opportunities * other |
| Collaboration/partnership practices | internal   * innovating organisation * implementing organisation * other organisation * other |
| external   * individual organisation * multi-agency working * other |
| other |
| Young persons’ participation (activities not values) | consultation/listening /feedback |
| involvement in planning and decision making |
| fully involved in co-production |
| Other |
| Resource capacity | Time |
| Funding |
| access to and adequate data (including data sharing) |
| human capital (i.e. appropriate workforce/volunteers and their associated capabilities or lack of) |
| social capital (i.e. accessibility and availability of networks or channels to influence to facilitate change |
| other |
| Responsibility and accountability | governance structures e.g Boards of Trustees, corporate parenting boards, children in care councils, strategic advisory boards; working groups |
| nature of responsibility   * centralised e.g. government agencies or a national organisation * shared e.g. across a partnership * other |
| management of innovation processes |
| other |
| Embedding of innovation in organisational strategy and structure | organisational strategy, organisational mission and/or organisational identity |
| organisational culture (e.g. by adopting a particular practice model, reduction in silo working etc.) |
| HR practices (e.g. changed practices or new practices such as training or recruitment methods) |
| finance (e.g. ring-fencing, diverting or pooling finance) |
| investment/bid selection processes |
| Other |
| Communication strategies and practices | Organisation |
| Individual |
| Knowledge mobilisation |
| Other |
| Leveraging relationships/networks | Internal |
| External |
| Other |
| **Innovation values** | Core values | Explicit |
| Implicit |
| Other |
| Enacted values | Organisational |
| Individual |
| Other |
| **Innovation outcomes** | Outcome strategy | how evidence is generated (methods) |
| how outcomes are evaluated |
| how outcome data is used |
| relevance and connectedness (or not) to care leaver priorities |
| use of outcome frameworks or measurement tools |
| how outcomes are integrated (or not) into innovation |
| other |
| Outcome types | statutory outcomes (e.g. EET and other KPIs) |
| bespoke outcomes |
| softer outcomes (e.g. relationships) |
| economic outcomes (e.g. cost-benefit analysis) |
| organisational-level outcomes (e.g. staff satisfaction) |
| multi-faceted outcomes (e.g. wider social value and impact) |
| other |
| Outcomes perspective (participant’s view) | Value |
| Application |
| Critical issues |
| Other |
| Other |  |
| **(Mis)alignment with(in) innovation/organisations** | Practices and processes | Technology |
| Specific to care leavers |
| Statutory guidelines/requirements |
| Business need |
| Policy initiative |
| Practice model |
| Other |
| Stakeholders | Values/beliefs |
| Other |
| Other |  |
| **Power and language** | Power | political power |
| organisational structures |
| individual roles |
| stakeholders’ sharing power |
| care leaver empowerment |
| other |
| Language | emotive |
| moral |
| critical |
| reflexive |
| other |
| **Impact on innovation/nature of factor/process** | Help/enabler |  |
| Hinder/barrier |
| Other |
| **Other** |  |  |

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