Thomas Coram Research Unit

Annual Review

2015 - 2016

Researching childhood, parenting and families
Contents

Unit director 4
Research projects 5
International activities and collaborations 16
Public engagement: informing policy and practice 18
Consultancies 20
Doctoral research and teaching 22
Funders and funding 27
Our team 28
Staff publications 29
Unit Director

In the past year we have experienced significant institutional changes at the Thomas Coram Research Unit. Following the Institute of Education’s merger with University College London (UCL) in December 2014, in August 2015, TCRU joined four other leading IOE research units (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Cohort & Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources, Quantitative Social Science and Social Science Research Unit) to form a new Department of Social Science.

The department establishes TCRU’s position in one of the largest centres of multi-disciplinary social science research and teaching in London. In addition the department provides a more resilient and secure base in a challenging national funding environment for research.

In November the quality of TCRU’s research, in particular its “innovative new approach to providing research evidence for policy-makers in the field of children and families”, was recognised in IOE Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education award. The Prizes are a biennial award scheme within the UK’s national honours system. They are the most prestigious form of national recognition open to a UK academic or vocational institution. The awards are presented by The Queen, with the Duke of Edinburgh, in recognition of work by universities and colleges judged to be of world class excellence. This award celebrates both the creativity and rigour of TCRU’s research which seeks to inform policy makers and practitioners making key decisions about children, young people and their families.

The year started, however, with sadder news, the death of Professor Barbara Tizard, Director of TCRU between 1980 and 1990, on January 4th. Barbara, an eminent developmental psychologist, and one of the first Professors of Psychology in the UK, led a distinguished career. As Professors Julia Brannen and Ann Phoenix wrote in their Guardian obituary: Barbara’s research was driven by important theoretical questions together with a concern ‘to make life as good as possible for children’. Her contribution to understanding adversity and its impact on children’s lives were celebrated with family and friends in a moving event at the Highgate Scientific and Literary Institute.

TCRU’s current portfolio of research, as outlined in this 2015-2016 Annual Review, continues to provide original insight into the everyday lives of children, young people and families. One of our flagship projects, the ERC funded Families and Food poverty in three European countries, led by Dr O’Connell, is already beginning to attract the attention of politicians and policy makers, wanting to understand how low-income families manage food insecurity and how policies can be best shaped around their needs.

Our Annual Review pays tribute to the work of Emeritus Professor Sonia Jackson whose research has been influential in the Government’s 2014 statutory requirement that local authorities (LAs) appoint a “virtual head teacher” to promote the educational achievement of all the children looked after by that council. Her work and that of Professor Claire Cameron, in their book on Educating Children and Young People in Care has received acclaim across the UK. How LAs support young people leaving public care, both in the UK and cross-nationally, and their psychosocial transitions, underpins several projects in TCRU, including one funded by the DfE funded Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme led by Dr Munro.

The experience of the very young, their parents and carers continues to preoccupy the TCRU research agenda, through comparative analysis of parental leave systems; digital mothering, fathers work-family negotiations, supporting parents with troubled lives and crying babies. In July findings from the ESRC funded project on Preschool childcare in Britain, led by Antonia Simon, were launched profiling the fragmented and fragile nature of preschool childcare provision. It is rather depressing that so little has changed since TCRU’s 1980 Penguin classic Nurseries Now: a fair deal for Parents and Children.

This year has also seen some departures and arrivals, notably the retirement of Professor Marjorie Smith in July. Marjorie, has co-directed TCRU as deputy or director since 1991 standing down in late 2013. She has given tremendous service and support to TCRU, the wider Institute and cadres of early career researchers over the years. Fortunately Marjorie’s PhD supervision and writing projects mean that she continues as Emeritus Professor. Marjorie’s distinguished contribution to psychological research on parenting and family life was celebrated at memorable evening event with guests from across government departments as well as academia.

In terms of arrivals, I am delighted to welcome Dr Mette Berg, who joined us in October as Senior Lecturer from the University of Oxford’s Centre on Migration, Policy and Society. As well as leading our exciting new undergraduate BSc Social Sciences programme to be launched in autumn 2016, Mette’s work will deepen our scholarship on diversity and migration. The experiences of children and families who migrate has been a focus in previous research including our current AHRC funded project Child Language Brokering, led by Dr Sarah Crafter; in Professor Julia Brannen’s book also published this year Fathers and sons: Generations, Families and Migration and in Professor Ann Phoenix’s writing on patterns of intersectionality for children and families. How children and parents shape and make sustainable family and work lives in times of adversity and, as cities become increasingly complex and diverse, is an important future research agenda for TCRU.

I would finally like to congratulate all TCRU colleagues who have been incredibly productive and creative despite several waves of institutional change, including; contributing to an increase in research and teaching income, 5 books, 20 articles in high ranking journals, 36 research reports and significant book chapters and over 50 invited lectures, presentations and key notes across the globe. Special congratulations also to Ann who has been awarded the prestigious Jane and Aatos Erkko Visiting Professorship at the University of Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies.

Professor Margaret O’Brien
Director
**Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain**

**Funder:** Economic and Social Research Council’s (ESRC) Secondary Data Analysis Initiative

**Research team:** Antonia Simon (PI), Charlie Owen and Katie Hollingworth

**Duration:** December 2012 to July 2015

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the shape of childcare provision and usage in Britain, and to inform its future development.

The specific objectives were to:

- Examine childcare usage in Britain, including combinations of formal and informal care, and how the use of care relates to families’ demographic characteristics
- Examine who provides informal childcare, their demographic characteristics and the extent to which they have other caring responsibilities
- Examine the formal childcare workforce, including their demographic characteristics, their qualifications and their work patterns.

The research was conducted in collaboration with the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) and the Family and Childcare Trust. The coverage and characteristics of childcare usage and provision was investigated through a secondary analysis of large-scale national quantitative data.

**Further information:**
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/childcareinbritain

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**The Surviving Crying Study**

**Funder:** National Institute for Health Research HTA Programme

**Research team:** Professor Ian St James-Roberts (PI), Charlie Owen, plus others from DeMontfort University, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Middlesex University, National Childbirth Trust, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, University of Leicester and University College London.

**Duration:** September 2012 – October 2016

The Surviving Crying Study is a first step towards providing routine NHS services to support parents who are worried about their baby’s prolonged crying. The study involves a collaboration between De Montfort University, Leicester, Leicester Partnership NHS Trust, University College London, Leicester and Middlesex Universities, and the charities National Childbirth Trust (NCT) and Cry-Sis.

The study has completed the first stage of data collection, involving development of a website, printed materials and a practitioner Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)-based handbook for supporting parents. Stage 2, to evaluate the support package has begun.

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**Evaluation of Ealing’s Intensive Engagement Model: Adolescents in and on the edge of care**

**Funder:** Department for Education (DfE)

**Research team:** Dr Emily Munro (PI), Katie Hollingworth and Veena Meetoo

**Duration:** April 2015 to July 2016

The London Borough of Ealing is implementing a new intensive engagement model to transform the social care system for adolescents and expand and reshape its fostering service. The ‘Brighter Futures Model’ is intended to support and enable the children’s social care workforce to build effective, consistent relationships with young people, families and carers to bring about positive change.

The evaluation will look at what happens during implementation, whether the model (or aspects of it) deliver the intended aims and the proposed cost benefits. It will incorporate: analysis of management information data; focus groups and interviews with strategic managers and frontline staff; surveys and interviews with young people, parents and carers; and a costing exercise.

A participatory peer research approach is being adopted and young adults who are in, or on the edge of care, are being trained and supported to develop research tools, interview young people and analyse data to produce an accessible report for their peers. Social Network Analysis will also be utilised to visually map the frequency and perceived quality of inter-professional and inter-personal relationships.

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6 | Annual Review 2015 - 2016
Daybreak family group conferencing

Funder: DfE
Research team: Dr Emily Munro (PI), Veena Meetoo, Katie Quy
Duration: April 2015 to March 2016

Daybreak is a charity specialising in the provision of family group conferences (FGCs) and the project sets out to increase the number of safe placements made with the agreement of family members. The objectives include: raising the quality of FGCs, promoting consistently good outcomes, reducing court costs and ensuring that final decisions are reached more quickly.

The aim of this evaluation is to assess the outcomes of offering and delivering the model to all families receiving a ‘letter of intent’ to issue care proceedings.

A mixed-methods approach is being adopted, including, secondary data analysis (in two project and two comparator LAs), surveys of all family members and children over five at three data collection points, focus groups with social workers and in-depth interviews with children, parents and social workers involved in a sample of cases.

Families and food in hard times

Funder: European Research Council (ERC)
Research team: Dr Rebecca O’Connell (PI), Professor Julia Brannen, Dr Abigail Knight, Antonia Simon, Charlie Owen, Silje Skuland, Anine Kleiv Frykholm (Statens institutt for forbruksforskning, Norway); and Penny Mellor (Project Administrator)
Duration: May 2014 to April 2019

The research aims to understand the extent and experiences of food insecurity for young people aged 11-15 years and their low-income families in Austerity Europe and the roles social contexts and social policies play. Applying a mixed-methods international comparative case study design, the study provides for ‘a contrast of contexts’ in relation to conditions of austerity, focusing on Portugal, where poor families with children appear to have been most affected by economic retrenchment, the UK, which is experiencing substantial cuts in benefits to poor families, and Norway which, in comparison with most societies, is highly egalitarian in terms of income and has not been subject to austerity measures. The mixed methods research strategy includes secondary analysis of national and international data and a range of in-depth qualitative methods with 45 young people and their parent or parents in each country. In addition to addressing substantive and methodological research questions the study sets out to inform the intervention and advocacy work of NGOs, policymakers and practitioners concerned with poverty and the effects of austerity on children, young people and their families in Europe.

An evaluation of Focus on Practice in three London Boroughs

Funder: DfE
Research team: Professor Claire Cameron (PI), Heather Elliott, Dr Humera Iqbal, Dr Emily Munro and Charlie Owen
Duration: May 2015 to March 2016

The aim of this evaluation is to examine the impact of a systemic therapy based change programme in children’s services in three London boroughs. The programme consists of training for staff and managers, changes to recording, observation and coaching, and reflective groups.

Methods include interviews and focus groups with families, social workers, managers and key stakeholders, as well as an analysis of local authority statistics.

The evaluation is part of a large programme of innovation in children’s social care that aims to reduce caseloads, reduce costs, and reduce the number of children coming into local authority care.
Funder: EU Tempus
Research team: Professor Claire Cameron (PI) and Dr Ian Warwick (Department of Education, Practice and Society), in partnership with universities in Denmark, Sicily, Nis, Novi Sad and Belgrade
Duration: December 2013 to November 2016
The aim of the project is to strengthen higher education in the field of social policy making and social services delivery through developing new study programmes, improving existing study programmes and establishing effective links between academic programs and social/labour market needs. We are doing this through reviewing existing programmes and establishing new programmes in social policy, social work and social pedagogy curricula at BA, MA, PhD levels in three Serbian universities using the expertise and experience of the EU 27 universities. Now into its final year the project consists of baseline research about workforce competences, workshops, briefing papers, tracking progress, advising on curricula outlines and pilot courses.

Foster care breakdown

Funder: Jacobs Foundation
Research team: Professor Claire Cameron and Hanan Hauari, in partnership with University of Applied Sciences, Zurich, and University of Siegen, Germany
Duration: November 2014 to September 2017
This three country study aims to document foster care breakdown, broadly defined, in Switzerland, where little data is recorded on children in care.

The study seeks to learn, through narrative interviews, from the experiences of children, foster carers and professionals in Switzerland, Germany and England about the factors that shape breakdown and how any adverse impact of breakdown might be ameliorated in future.

Digital Mothering: a scoping study towards the development of a research proposal on technologies and mothering practices in mothers’ blogs about feeding families

Funder: IOE/UCL Strategic Partnership Research Development Fund
Research team: Heather Elliott (PI); Dr Rowanne Fleck University of Birmingham, formerly UCLIC, UCL; and Dr Rebecca O’Connell
Duration: November 2014 to June 2015

‘Mummyblogging’ has emerged as a means of documenting mothering practices and of developing communities of interest as well as commercial opportunities. Analysis of blogs offers insights into how technologies are shaping women’s everyday lives as well as cultural narratives about motherhood. While there has been academic interest in parents’ understandings of their children’s online lives, mothers’ own online practices and identities are relatively underexplored.

The main aim of this project was to establish the basis for a research proposal on technologies and family life.

We undertook pilot research with bloggers and Mumsnet, identified key research questions based on the literature and fieldwork and developed several academic papers.
Servicing super-diversity

**Funder:** ESRC IAA  
**Research team:** Dr Mette Louise Berg (PI)  
**Duration:** October 2014 to September 2015

This Knowledge Exchange Fellowship focuses on two research projects, co-developed with Southwark Council (external partner), to enhance knowledge of the everyday impact of super-diversity on residents. One project will work with the Latin American Women’s Rights Service to assess the needs and impact on local services of Latin American immigrants. The other project works with council and housing association tenants, leaseholders, shared owners and home owner residents’ organisations to provide input into the development of Southwark’s new housing strategy. The fellowship complements and informs the Council’s policies and service delivery practices, leading to new social science understanding of urban diversity with clear policy implications and generating insights of use to other local councils across the UK and Europe. It gives Dr Berg an ‘inside-out’ perspective on the challenges of service delivery to a super-diverse population and issues of concern to local residents, which will feed into ongoing and future research collaboration.

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Child Language Brokering: Spaces of identity belonging and mediators of cultural knowledge

**Funder:** Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)  
**Research team:** Dr Sarah Crafter (PI) and Dr Humera Iqbal  
**Duration:** January 2015 to September 2016

When families migrate to a new country their children often learn the local language faster than their parents. As a result, they find themselves interpreting and translating for their families and friends. In this research arena, these young interpreters are known as child language brokers. These conversations often take place in contexts and spaces of officialdom with professionals who do not speak the family’s home language. These young people are more than just direct word-for-word communicators of language; they are often the bridge or mediators of cultural worlds.

The aim of this project is to examine how child language brokers as mediators of cultural knowledge, values and norms act as a communicative and performative process. We aim to gain good understandings of what child language brokers focus on when translating in particular contexts, whether or not they are conscious of translating cultures and how this influences feelings of identity and belonging.

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Against all odds? Exploring and explaining positive outcomes for young adults formerly in public care - a three country comparison

**Funder:** Norwegian Research Council  
**Research team:** Professor Elisabeth Backe-Hansen (PI), Charlie Owen, Elisiv Bakketeig, Tonje Gundersen and Christian Madsen (Norwegian Social Research - NOVA); Turf Böcker Jakobsen (The Danish National Centre for Social Research - SFI); Professor Janet Boddy (University of Sussex).  
**Duration:** September 2014 to August 2017

To support care leavers into adulthood, it is not sufficient to focus on risk factors – we need to learn more from the experiences and developmental pathways of those who do well. Research about positive outcomes among these young adults is still relatively scarce and there is an urgent need to address this critical knowledge gap.

This international collaborative study between research centres in Norway, Denmark and England seeks to identify why some care leavers end up doing well as young adults, against all odds. The study is adopting a mixed methods approach. Analysis of administrative data at the national level is being used to describe general characteristics of care leavers. A qualitative approach will be adopted to explore how young adults themselves define positive outcomes and factors contributing to them.
**The Educational Experience of Children and Youth in and after Public Care**

**Funder:** Leverhulme Trust (Emeritus Fellowship)

**Research team:** Professor Sonia Jackson (PI) and Katie Hollingworth

**Duration:** October 2014 to October 2016

The primary purpose of this project is to prepare material for an Institute of Education archive on the education of children and young people in out-of-home care, an important focus of Sonia Jackson’s research and writing since the 1970s. Collecting this material together documents how, over the course of 30 years, the poor educational performance of children in care has progressed from a minority interest of a few individuals to become a matter of major concern to government and professionals.

In the process of summarising over 150 boxes of papers it became evident that the contents will offer scope for further work. Through two major research projects, ‘By Degrees’ and YiPPEE, TCRU has built up a unique body of data on the post-secondary and higher education of care-experienced young adults. The researchers have undertaken secondary analysis of this material to produce new empirical evidence on Coleman’s focal theory of adolescent development. A second topic is the pre-school education of children in foster care, on which, there is a dearth of information despite its importance. The third project has been to build on an earlier study by Sonia Jackson and David Berridge by interviewing a representative sample of Virtual School Heads (leaders of virtual schools for children in care). This is now a statutory position, and the objective is to assess its usefulness for raising the attainment of children and young people in public care.

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**Best Interests of the Child in China: Research feasibility visit**

**Funder:** Sino British Fellowship Trust

**Research team:** Professor Ann Phoenix (PI), Professor Monica Dowling, Dr Abigail Knight, Dr Xu Qiong; Professor Jane McCarthy (Open University) and Guangyu Freear (Open University)

**Duration:** August to September 2014

The aims of this research were to:

- Investigate the feasibility of the proposed research design by conducting pilot study research.
- Explore and strengthen UK/Chinese collaborations by writing joint papers in the area of children, childhood and the best interests of children in state care in China.
- Meet with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other academic partners to inform the preparation of an Economic and Social Research (ESRC) Council bid.

The team felt that the collaborative research trip increased their understanding of China in relation to the planned research bid. The ESRC proposal is in the process of being submitted, one journal article has been submitted and two others are in process.
Research projects (spotlights)
Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain

Funder: ESRC, SDAI
Research Team: Antonia Simon (PI), Charlie Owen and Katie Hollingworth

Background: This research aimed to understand childcare provision and usage in Britain using a number of large-scale national datasets, including the Family Resources Survey (FRS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (CEYSP). Analysis focused on the most recent data but also compared patterns between 2005 and 2014.

Duration: 2012-2015

More information: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/childcareinbritain

- The childcare workforce has shrunk by five per cent in Britain since 2005 (from 329k in 2005-07 to 313k in 2012-14: LFS). This trend raises concerns about who will do childcare work in the future.

- The results show a highly gendered (98% female), low valued workforce in which qualifications are modestly rising (12% increase over time in NVQ level 3) but persistently low paid (on average £6.60 per hour compared with £13.10 per hour for other occupations).

- More people describe themselves as childminders in the LFS than are registered with Ofsted, suggesting a possible growth in illegal childminding.

- Despite previous concerns of high workforce turnover, the mean service length is now over six years and increasing. Employment in this sector may offer nonfinancial benefits such as satisfying work and the opportunity for part-time employment that can be combined with family life which may explain long periods of service among workers, given the low pay.

- Childcare usage is high (68%), with around half of families using more than one type and reliance on informal care is still high (31% of all usage is grandparents). This suggests current childcare does not cover what parents need, especially to work full-time, as parents are using more than one form of childcare to provide cover for what they need.

- Childcare use is not evenly distributed: formal childcare is used more by employed, higher income families whereas informal care is used more by mothers who are not employed and by younger mothers. Couples where both partners were in employment were most likely to use formal childcare.
The Surviving Crying Study

Funder: National Institute for Health Research HTA Programme
Research Team: Professor Ian St James Roberts (PI), Charlie Owen, plus others from DeMontfort University, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, Middlesex University, National Childbirth Trust, Northamptonshire Healthcare NHS Trust, University of Leicester and University College London.

The Surviving Crying Study is a first step towards providing routine NHS services to support parents who are worried about their baby's prolonged crying. The study is based at De Montfort University, Leicester and funded by the National Institute for Health Research HTA Programme. It involves a collaboration with Leicester Partnership NHS Trust, University College London, Leicester and Middlesex Universities, and the charities National Childbirth Trust (NCT) and Cry-Sis.

Background: Prolonged infant crying can trigger maternal depression, poor parent-child relationships, premature ending of breastfeeding, over-feeding, problems with long-term child development, and infant abuse in a small number of cases. Yet, there are no tried and tested NHS practices for supporting parents in managing the crying. Instead, parents turn to popular books, magazines or websites, which give conflicting advice.

The study so far
Stage 1 of the Study (Development of an Intervention Package) began in November 2014 and data collection is now complete:

• 55 Health Visitors in Leicester Partnership NHS Trust have collaborated in the research by informing parents of previously crying babies about the study.
• Focus groups with 20 of these parents have obtained information about their experiences: what they found challenging and what helped.
• The parents have been shown example websites and other materials designed to provide support; quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to assess parents' preferences about the sorts of support materials and services they need.
• Development of a package of materials designed to meet parents' needs, including a website, written materials and practitioner-delivered support sessions, is nearing completion.
• Safeguarding protocols have been developed.

Stage 2 of the study (Feasibility Study of Package Implementation in the NHS) has started and will last for a year. It will provide provisional data on the effectiveness and cost of the package, find out whether parents and Health Visitors consider it worthwhile, and make recommendations about its inclusion, and further evaluation, in the NHS. For more detailed reports of the findings so far, and to be kept posted on future reports and publications, please contact: i.stjamesroberts@ioe.ac.uk
Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme

The Department for Education launched the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme in October 2013 to act as a catalyst for developing more effective ways of supporting vulnerable children. The programme is seeking to inspire whole system change so that in five years’ time the following is achieved:

• Better life chances for children receiving help from the social care system;
• Stronger incentives and mechanisms for innovation, experimentation and replication of successful new approaches; and
• Better value for money across children's social care.

Building on our international reputation and specialist expertise in the conduct of policy-relevant research in children’s social care (including, for example, studies on: children with additional support needs; children on the edge of care; looked after children and care leavers), the Thomas Coram Research Unit are conducting three independent research evaluations of projects funded as part of the Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme.

Rethinking children’s social work – large-scale projects to transform the children’s social care system
Focus on Practice is an investment in the staff working with families to transform practice. Its aims are to: embed a new ‘cultural norm’ for practitioners based on systemic theory; reduce the number of families who are repeat clients; reduce the number of children in care.

Rethinking support for adolescents in or on the edge of care
Ealing Brighter Futures Model is intended to support and enable the children’s social care workforce to build effective, consistent relationships with young people, families, communities and carers, and to use those successful relationships to bring about positive change.

Other priorities in children’s social care
Daybreak is a charity specialising in the provision of family group conferences (FGCs) and the project sets out to increase the number of safe placements made with the agreement of family members. The research teams are employing mixed methodologies in the three projects. This allows different methods to be applied to answer the multi component complex issues found in social work practice.
In 1987, Sonia published the results of her first study examining the education of looked after children in England. She found that education departments and social services departments rarely talked to each other and so children’s educational attainment, and attendance, was often simply not seen as important. In 2004, local authorities were finally given a duty to promote the educational attainment of children in care, in no small part due to Sonia’s continuous campaigning work. Shortly afterwards, children’s services departments brought education and social work together.

In 2005, Sonia led a TCRU team who reported on a five year action research project into the factors that contributed to success at university for the small minority of young people who had been in care and were participants in higher education. Their study recommendations were accepted in full by the then government and included having a ‘tick box’ on the UCAS application form to indicate whether an applicant had been in care as a child. This innovation has helped universities track and offer resources to young people for whom they have a special responsibility. In various publications from 2010 - 2014, Sonia and Claire Cameron reported the results of the EU funded YiPPEE study. While about the same proportion of young people from public care access higher education in the five countries examined, policy development, and targeted services to support care leavers, were better established in England than in Denmark, Sweden, Hungary or Spain. In Catalonia (Spain) this work led to a long term programme to record care leavers’ educational participation.

In 2009, Sonia was instrumental in an evaluation of the pilot Virtual School Heads; in 2014 these became statutory requirements in local authorities. However, much remains to be done to address the difference in attainment of five GCSEs among children in care and those never in care (a 40 percentage point gap in 2014). Teachers are still rarely educated about the particular circumstances of children in care or effective strategies to support this group. TCRU has been working with IOE colleagues in PALAC, a knowledge exchange project about promoting the wellbeing and attainment of looked after children, where, after being presented with the research, school staff and an IOE facilitator work together to identify and carry through a feasible local project to improve the wellbeing of children in care. This work, entering its second year, and running with three cohorts across England, constitutes real practical impact of Sonia’s long standing contribution to the field.
International activities and collaborations

International Research Network on Transitions from Care to Adulthood (INTRAC)

TCRU Deputy Director Dr Emily Munro is one of the co-ordinating committee of the International Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood (INTRAC), which was established in 2003. Representatives from 16 countries meet annually to explore the process of transition made by young people moving from care to adulthood. This year the INTRAC meeting was hosted by Zurich University of Applied Sciences, in conjunction with the SGSA-Congress. Members of the network have also been preparing contributions for a new edited collection on Young people transitioning from care: International research, policy and practice.

Dis/located Children: Children in/and Care Network, Australia

The Dis/located Children Network is a wide-ranging project bringing together inter-disciplinary scholars interrogating the experiences of children and young people at the margins of society or who otherwise do not, or cannot, conform to normative ideals around childhood. Dr Emily Munro delivered an invited lecture on children in residential care, and a masterclass on children in out of home care to provide an international perspective and inform discussions. In November she returned to South Australia to contribute to policy debates on the use of residential care for looked after children.

Cultural diversity

Mette Louise Berg spoke at the II Conference on Cultural Diversity and Conflicts in the European Union, held at Sorbonne, Paris. Her talk was drawn from ongoing research in Southwark, London examining everyday experiences of diversity and difference in a super-diverse urban space.

Learning and Teaching in Culturally Diverse Settings International Group

This year, Sarah Crafter became the Principal Coordinator for SIG21 Learning and Teaching in Culturally Diverse Settings International Group. She was joined by a new co-coordinator who is Charles Max from the University of Luxembourg. She is one of the organising committee members for the next SIG21 conference which will take place in Tartu, Estonia. The conference will bring together three special interest groups: learning and teaching in cultural diverse settings, social interaction and educational theory. These groups are all part of the European Association for Learning and Instruction (EARLI).

Child language brokering resource

Earlier in the year, Sarah Crafter and Humera Iqbal travelled to the University of Bologna in Italy to record a video cast with Rachele Antonini about her work with young interpreters. This can be found at languagebrokering.org.

International Sociological Association RC06 Committee on Family Research

With Barbara Neves (University of Toronto), Margaret O’Brien is coordinating next year’s ISA RC06 stream at the ISA Forum in Vienna in July 2016 which will consist of 14 symposia on range of themes including: families and migration, family policy challenges across Asia and work-family policies in southern Europe.

International Network on Leave Policies

The International Network on Leave Policies, coordinated by Peter Moss and Fred Deven with Margaret O’Brien as one of the UK representatives had its 12th seminar in Trondheim in September. The event was hosted by Professors Berit Brandth and Elin Kvande who have done so much research on the benefits of Norway’s father quota. The Norwegian Parental Leave Debate was a focus of intense discussion with contributions from the Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion (Arni Hole), the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (Synnøve Konglevoll) and the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO) (All Åge Lønne). The network now has more than 60 members from over 35 countries. The 2015 report is available on the network’s website www.leavenetwork.org.

EU Network on the social dimension of education and training

Monica Dowling was part of a core team of experts in a successful bid by PPPI Lithuania to EU for 2015-2018 creating a Network of experts on the social dimension of education and training www.nesetweb.eu. The network will provide advice to the EU and research reviews for policy makers.

Norwegian Collaboration

Professor Ingeborg Marie Helgeland and Associate Professor May-Britt Solem from Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, came to visit the Unit from 19th to 21st May 2015 to discuss qualitative longitudinal research methods, masculinities and fatherhood with Julia Brannen, Margaret O’Brien, Charlie Owen and Ann Phoenix.
Public engagement: informing policy and practice

Special Guardianship: Showcase event and contribution to a government consultation

Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU), in collaboration with UCL IOE colleagues from London Centre for Leadership in Learning (LCLL) have established a research-bridging network. This brought together strategic and operational managers, frontline social workers and Special Guardians (providing legally secure placements for children who cannot live with their birth parents) from six London Boroughs in the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium (NLAFC). In July 2015 Dr Emily Munro (TCRU), Professor Louise Stoll (LCLL) and the NLAFC network held a Special Guardianship Showcase event which:

- Outlined the approach that TCRU and LCLL designed to support the development of responsive services for children and Special Guardians in North London;
- Provided insight into the strengths and limitations of current provision, based on the experiences of Special Guardians and the latest research evidence;
- Highlighted recent proactive developments aimed at transforming services and support for Special Guardianship in the North London Adoption and Fostering Consortium.

UCL IOE also hosted a meeting bringing members of the research-bridging network together with policy makers at the Department for Education, to inform the current government consultation on Special Guardianship.

Informing New Zealand’s review of statutory child protection services

The Modernising Child, Youth and Family Expert Panel has been appointed by the New Zealand Minister of Social Development to provide independent advice on a programme of work to redesign the delivery of statutory child protection services to vulnerable children, young people and their Whānau. At the request of the Panel TCRU’s Dr Emily Munro has been invited to discuss her research and perspectives on best practice in relation to youth transitions to independence from state care.

How do local authorities deal with the increasing diversity of their clients and residents?

This Breakfast Briefing, based on research in the London Borough of Southwark, explored how local authorities and other service providers, deliver welfare and other services to populations which are rapidly changing and increasingly diverse in their needs and backgrounds, in a context of funding cuts. The Briefing event was attended inter alia by journalists, Home Office civil servants, MPs researchers, local authority representatives, and civil society members.

Speakers: Mette Louise Berg and Ben Gidley (COMPAS, Oxford). http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/events/breakfast-briefings/previous-breakfast-briefings/#c3217
‘Making Food Fair’ Conference, hosted by the Kindling Trust

The conference brought together speakers and over 70 participants to explore the injustices of the current food system. Rebecca O’Connell was invited to give the opening talk: Our Unfair food system and why it disadvantages so many. Slides are available at foodinhardtimes.org/resources.

Private roundtable with Maria Eagle MP

Rebecca O’Connell was invited to a private roundtable with Maria Eagle MP. The Labour Party fought the 2015 general election with a commitment to take action to reduce food bank use by reforming social security and tackling low pay. Given the outcome of the election the purpose of the roundtable was to discuss the Labour Party’s response to the high levels of food bank dependency in the UK. Contributors drew on national and international evidence, including interim findings of the Fabian Food & Poverty Commission.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Making markets work for low income consumers

Rebecca O’Connell participated in a private roundtable about scopine measures to ease the impact of rising food prices on low income groups. The discussion was chaired by Sir Brian Pomeroy and was the second of three such events being organised by JRF, the others examining energy and public transport markets respectively. The roundtables helped shape a major JRF conference in the autumn that was designed to more publicly discuss the scope for targeted action around the three markets.

Work Care Share roundtable

TCRU hosted the first Work Care Share (www.workcareshare.com) roundtable in September. Initiated by six advocates for equality and child welfare – three mothers and three fathers – Work Care Share is planned as an alliance of individuals and organisations wishing to explore how care and paid employment can be more equitably shared in the UK - between men and women, across diverse family groups, between the generations, within workplaces.

It plans to contribute ideas and evidence to inform policy development in the public and private sector and for national government bodies. Peter Moss and Margaret O’Brien were delighted to host the meeting as TCRU has a strong interest in parental leave and fathers through the work of www.leavenetwork.org and fathers www.modernfatherhood.org/. The UK’s new legislation on “shared parental leave” is an early focus of attention.

Informing policy debate about the provision of preschool childcare

TCRU hosted an important event on 24 July 2015 to launch the key findings of the Provision and Use of Preschool Childcare in Britain research project. Key policy makers from the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions and local government, practitioner organisations, trade unions and prominent academics working in the area of childcare and child wellbeing attended. The event received considerable interest from national press and specialist media such as ‘Nursery World’, ‘Children & Young People Now’, ‘Voice The Union’ and ‘Teach Early Years’.

Influencing the national classification of the childcare workforce

The Provision and Use of Preschool Childcare in Britain research project collaborated with the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), a providers’ body, and the Family and Childcare Trust, a charity campaigning for childcare for parents. This collaboration had a significant impact on the direction of the research and the reach of the key findings. Both organisations were instrumental in the design and write up of the key findings and contributed to the study’s dissemination events.

The NDNA and TCRU submitted a letter to the Office for the National Statistics suggesting areas for improving their classification of the childcare workforce, which is expected to directly change the way these workers are counted and classified in national statistics in the future.

Centre for Understanding of Social Pedagogy (CUSB)

The Centre for the Understanding of Social Pedagogy (CUSP) began in 2009 as a local, national and international focal point for social pedagogy in the UK. It continues to build its national and international reputation as the leading UK centre for development of knowledge and understanding about Social Pedagogy. Its standing is based on research and development activities in this country and abroad. This year, aside from publishing papers and contributing to the Social Pedagogy Development Network, there have been two main activities. First, we hosted a doctoral studies seminar and a very popular evening lecture in June. Second, we have been focused on generating a grant to support the development of infrastructure for the scaling up of social pedagogy. Together with key players in the field, we plan to develop a social pedagogy professional association and two qualifications, at Levels 3 and 5, to ensure that those working with children and young people and their families have access to accredited career development options and that communities of practice develop a UK social pedagogy.
Consultancies

Care leavers and employment
Claire Cameron was commissioned by SOS Children’s Villages International to examine employment opportunities for care leavers. Outcomes for those young people who ‘age out’ of the care system are known to be poor but actual data on care leavers’ employment is sparse. This short consultancy aims to gather such information as there is on care leavers and employment in five countries - Austria, Germany, Croatia, Norway and Hungary - as a first step to generating recommendations to the EU.

Community-based Interventions in Ireland
Marjorie Smith continues to act as a consultant in Ireland, in her role as a member of the Expert Advisory Committee for the Area Based Approach Childhood (ABC) Programme. This cross-departmental initiative is building on and continuing the work of the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP: 2006 - 2013), in which she was involved as a member of the expert advisory groups for each of the three projects in different areas of Dublin. The new €29.7m ABC initiative, which is jointly funded by the Irish Government and Atlantic Philanthropies, now extends the previous work to include a total of 13 areas across Ireland, building on the learning from the PEIP programme and best international practice. The overall aim of the ABC programme is to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

West London Zone: collective impact for children and young
The West London Zone (WLZ) is a place-based intervention that aspires to improve the life chances of disadvantaged children and young people in West London through early intervention delivered at scale. WLZ is guided by the principles of collective impact and based on the Promise Neighbourhoods initiative. Collective impact represents the effort of multiple players to co-ordinate their approaches around a shared goal over the long term to address to scale hard to shift issues and improve community level outcomes. Claire Cameron and Emily Munro have been working with West London Zone to support them to develop a process evaluation plan.

Promoting the Achievement of Looked After Children (PALAC)
Following a successful Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) funded project last year, the PALAC project team have tripled the volume of activity this year. PALAC is a knowledge exchange programme working in schools to improve the education of looked after children. Currently running in South Tyneside, Nottingham and London, school staff work with their virtual school head and an IOE facilitator to identify and carry out a feasible change oriented project. This year the team (Claire Cameron, Catherine Carroll from the Department of Psychology & Human Development and Gill Brackenbury from the Special Educational Needs Joint Initiative for Training) are working on a book to support the delivery of the knowledge exchange programme and developing a database of completed projects.
The Thomas Coram Research Unit has an active and thriving postgraduate research programme to be joined by an exciting new Undergraduate Degree programme. In September 2016 two new undergraduate programmes in the social sciences are being launched in the department we are now part of - BSc Social Sciences and BSc Social Sciences with Quantitative Methods. Both offer a mix of social science disciplines, including economics, sociology and psychology, together with extensive research methods training.

Last year, members of TCRU staff supervised 36 PGR students across a variety of programmes such as the MPhil/PhD in Social Science, the Doctorate in Education and the Doctorate in Educational Psychology. There were 5 students who successfully completed their doctoral studies. The students are able to make use of a thriving research environment which includes a attending weekly seminar series, presenting as part of the postgraduate research seminar and engaging with monthly Reading Group meetings. This last year also saw the introduction of a new meeting group for supervisors in the Department of Social Science.

TCRU staff are involved in teaching at Foundation Degree, Masters and Doctoral levels. For the Foundation degree members contribute to the Working with Children, Education and Wellbeing. Staff also contribute to MA research methods and health and wellbeing modules. This includes teaching on: the Education, Health Promotion and International Development MA; the online Research Methods in Education MA; the Sociology of Childhood and Children’s Rights MA; the Participatory Planning and Project Management of Health Promotion in the Context of International Development module; and the Developing and Promoting Health and Wellbeing: Concepts and Issues module. An important part of TCRU’s contribution to teaching at IOE involves the teaching of research skills for the Doctoral School, EdD and MRes programmes, including quantitative analysis; Interviewing and Qualitative Data Analysis courses.

**Doctoral research and teaching: introduction**

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Doctoral research and teaching projects: highlights

Relationship between early childhood and primary education in France and Sweden

Yoshie Kaga (MPhil/PhD)
Relationship between early childhood and primary education is intensifying in recent years. With almost all children in Western Europe attending early childhood education (ECE) programmes by the age of four, there is increasing demand for primary education to be better linked with the preceding stage in the interest of improved educational transitions and outcomes. As participation and investment in ECE grows, the question arises as to whether this is a distinct phase of education or an adjunct to primary schooling and what the consequences of the different types of relationship might be. This study aims to understand and compare the relationship between early childhood and primary education in France and Sweden, which have contrasting histories and approaches in relation to ECE and schooling. In particular, using globalisation and the social construction of the child as key framing concepts, the study seeks to understand and compare policy changes over time and the views and experiences of key stakeholders in ECE and schooling regarding the relationship in both countries.

Shifting traditions of childrearing: Narratives from three generations of women in China and language unit

Xin Guo (MPhil/PhD)
This study aims to explore the continuity and change in mothering practices across three generations in China. The projects focuses on twelve families from high, middle and low social and economic status, who have three generational mothers (born around 1930s, 1950s and 1980s respectively). For each family, 3-4 family members (mainly women) are interviewed individually to explore mothers’ own accounts of their childrearing experiences. These three generations together have witnessed the huge social transformations as well as experienced some traumatic historical events in China. By taking on the modified Biographic-Narrative-Interpretive Method (BNIM), this thesis focuses on both women’s biographic life trajectories shaped by the historical and structural elements, and mothers’ subjectivities demonstrated through a detail analysis of both the structures and content of their narratives. Therefore, this study is concerned with bringing the interpretivism and structuralism together in presenting a) the dynamic and mundane features of ‘doing motherhood’, b) the fluidity and complexity of the subjectivity of mothers, impacted by their multiple positioning (eg., class, gender, rural/urban etc), and c) how women lived the social transformations in their everyday life.

Rethinking the assessment of applied anatomy knowledge of medical students: An investigation of the effect of visual resources, through contextually rich single best questions, on their performance and their views on anatomy

Mandeep Sagoo (EdD)
There is a problem with assessing the anatomy knowledge of medical undergraduates, in that it is not practical for every student to assess actual patients, so alternative methods have to be employed, such as photographs, x-rays or models. But then there is the question of whether these methods are effective or valid in actually assessing students’ knowledge.

This study aims to assess whether second year medical students perform on questions without and with various visual resources. To this end, the student has constructed an online assessment, which is being completed by students. It presents a whole series of anatomical and diagnostic questions, either with or without visual resources. The research draws on the work of Wolfgang Schnotz, in seeking to explore whether the influence of the form of visualisation on the structure of mental models and the learners’ pattern of performance after knowledge acquisition is modified by the availability of a further external representation when solving tasks after knowledge acquisition.

Yoshie Kaga (MPhil/PhD)
Xin Guo (MPhil/PhD)
Mandeep Sagoo (EdD)
Positioning South Asian girls in a multicultural school setting: identity constructions, negotiations and constraints

Veena Meetoo (MPhil/PhD)

This study explores how South Asian girls’ are positioned by teachers and position themselves in relation to multicultural discourses in an inner city secondary school. Conducted over a period of 3 years with 9 girls aged 15-18, this case study draws on ethnographic methods to explore the accounts of the girls, teachers and other educational professionals. In particular, the girls’ learning, migratory paths and issues of gendered risk (e.g. forced marriage) are focused on to further understand how the intersections of ‘race’ and gender play out in a multicultural school environment.

Environment and children’s lives in India and England: everyday experiences, understandings and practices

Catherine Walker (MPhil/PhD)

This study is attached to the NOVELLA Family Lives and the Environment project and is funded by the ESRC. It explores the everyday experiences of eighteen 11-14 year old children living in a variety of contexts in Andhra Pradesh, India and the UK, in the environments in which they live. Working closely with the Family Lives and the Environment project, the study has generated narratives of children’s everyday experiences, understandings and practices in relation to their environments through multi-method case-based research with children, their family members and their peers. These narratives are used to explore children’s perspectives on their environments and the local-global spatial scales children imagine and interact with within these environments, as well as considering children’s environmental concerns and their assessments of their capacities to act upon these as a way of re-examining children’s situated agency in a variety of cultural and socioeconomic contexts.
The role of school for children who have relocated following domestic violence and abuse.

Amy Stanton (DEdPsy)

There is a national disparity in the educational outcomes of children and young people experiencing domestic abuse (DA) (CAADA, 2014). These children are said to be at greater risk of: social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, absenteeism from school, poor health, cognitive delay, self-harm and death (Sterne & Poole, 2010).

There remains a paucity of research that explores the role of school for children who have experienced DA, and the perception of professionals working with them. Research that specifically takes into account child and professionals’ views following a child’s transition into a new school is markedly limited. DA is cited as a common reason for homelessness (Shelter, 2004) and it follows that children frequently relocate school for this reason. This project aims to qualitatively explore children’s and teachers’ perspectives of the role of school following relocation because of DA.

Constructions of ‘parenting’ and social support; narratives of parenting identities and practices in online and face-to-face contexts

Joe Winter (MPhil/PhD)

This PhD studentship is linked to the ESRC-funded NOVELLA National Centre for Research Methods node through the Parenting Identities and Practices project. The research examines how online support is made available to parents on popular web forums and explores mothers’ identities and practices through the stories they tell about using parenting websites and their everyday lives as parents. The first two parts of the analysis explored the brand identities of popular websites for parents, including Mumset and Netmums. This was followed by a narrative analysis of interviews with those who set up the websites and continue to manage them. The third phase of analysis explores experiential accounts of those who use the websites. In particular this analysis illuminates turning points in women’s identities as mothers in relation to their use of popular parenting websites. The thesis also examines the use of online parenting forums as a social practice.
Funders and funding

The Unit’s total research income for the financial year 2014-2015 amounted to £995,010.12 an increase from last year. Figure 1 shows the Unit’s sources of research funding for the year, with research councils accounting for the majority of our total funding with a growth in EU funding to £175,475.50 from last year’s lower base (£19,312). Members of TCRU continue to be part of DfE’s Analytical Associates pool, reflecting their specialist knowledge and expertise in one or more of the following areas: quantitative research and secondary data analysis, qualitative research, evaluation and dissemination.

As part of the previous Department of Childhood, Families and Health other income for the year includes: tuition income from doctoral and masters teaching (£154,363); consultancies (£100,768), knowledge transfer (£145,044) and income generated from miscellaneous activities including organising conferences and teaching (£18,102).

Figure 1
Sources of Funding 2014/15

Current research funders

Arts and Humanities Research Council  European Research Council
Department for Education  Jacobs Foundation
Department of Health  Leverhulme Trust
EU Tempus  National Institute of Health Research
Economic and Social Research Council  Norwegian Research Council
European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions

35,873.47

411,847.03

8,000.00

363,814.12

175,475.50
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Androulla Annis, Ruth Cohen, Clare George, Jason Ilagan, Tracy Modha and Trijntje Ytsma.
Staff publications 2015-2016

Books


Editorship of Special issue of journal


Papers in peer-reviewed journals


Brannen, J (2015) From the concept of generation to an intergenerational lens on family lives. Families, Relationships and Societies 3(3) 485-491


Other publications and reports

http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3704/


http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/3720/


Conference papers and Presentations


Cameron, C. (2015) Processes leading to breakdown of foster care placements, 8th International Foster Care Research Network Conference, University of Siegen, 17th September (with Clara Biebach, Renate Stohler and Andy Jespersen)


Phoenix, A. (2015) Keynote address to 8th International Foster Care Research Conference University of Siegen, Germany, 17th September.


