

The ADCS Research Group

Guidelines for ensuring effective research projects and evaluating research proposals

Children's services departments are very frequently asked to take part in research exercises and surveys, and the Research Group wants to ensure that the projects carried out are worthwhile and that the topics best reflect the main concerns of departments.

In order to receive approval for research projects, a submission needs to give evidence that it contributes to:

1. Increasing our knowledge of what improves outcomes for children, young people, families and communities.
2. Increasing our knowledge of evidence based practice in services for children, young people and families including evidence that supports with teaching and learning.
3. Increasing our understanding and knowledge of factors that influence development of Children and Young People in to successful adults.
4. Does not unnecessarily repeat research.
5. Robust methodology and evidence of quality of research proposal.
6. Ensuring ethical issues have been addressed in the proposal

If you want to involve four or more children's services departments in your project you should submit your proposal to the Group for a critical appraisal. This means that the Group considers your research proposal and says either yes or no to recommending to directors that their departments should co-operate with the project. You should NOT contact children's services departments asking for their help with your project before you get approval for it from the Research Group.

The process takes around four weeks from the Group receiving an application (and fee) to the applicant getting a decision. There is a sliding scale of fees to cover the costs of the evaluation. It should be borne in mind, however, that an approval does not guarantee that any individual department will agree to take part in the project. You should note that any project that may result in the denigration, or exploitation, commercially or otherwise, of service users cannot be supported by the Group. Research' projects that are in reality aimed at marketing a product will not be supported by the Group under any circumstances.

Projects involving three or fewer departments

As a general guideline, you need not submit your project to the Research Group if you plan only to involve three or fewer children's services departments. You should approach the departments concerned directly.

How do directors know which projects have been approved?

Directors of children's services are regularly updated on recent applications and the Group's decision about each one. This list is also published on this website. Researchers are notified at the same time. The Research Group encourages local authorities to participate in approved research proposals.

The next section gives guidelines for researchers who are planning research involving children's services departments.

Before you start

You need to bear in mind that children's services departments are often large and diverse organisations, operating many services from many locations with staff drawn from many occupational groups. Generally they are under extreme pressure to achieve all that is expected of them. When you are planning your research project you should take into account:

- the time involved for children's services staff. The research should take up as little time as possible, while still producing useful results
- the relevance to children's services concerns
- plans for publication and dissemination of your results
- any ethical issues associated with the proposed project
- how competent you are to carry out the intended programme of work.

Positives

- Projects with clearly set out aims, objectives and research questions, which incorporate a good research design and feasible research methods
- Projects which pay good attention to research outcomes and how these will be effectively disseminated, and provide useful and accessible evidence and recommendations for LAs and other local and national partners.
- Well framed projects which are developmental in nature and/or suggest a partnership between researchers and LA/local partners for mutual benefit.
- Well focused and well-constructed questionnaires and schedules.
- Questions that are straightforward to answer through provoking and show an understanding of the way children's services departments work.
- Questions that will elicit easy-to-analyse, meaningful answers, which will yield good-quality evidence.

Negatives

- Projects that are not well focused, are over complex and are unclear in their methods and the demands they will make on LAs and other local partners
- Projects that are unlikely to yield evidence that will be useful to LAs/local partners and add value to their policy-making and practice
- Projects which make excessive time demands by proposing to interview large numbers of staff/service users at great length and to no good effect
- Projects which involve the time-consuming extraction of large amounts of data from paper or computer files
- Questionnaires/schedules which contain questions which are over-generalised, leaving staff not knowing how to answer, or need lengthy narrative answers
- Projects which pay limited attention to research outcomes, the intended audience(s) for the research findings and to questions of dissemination, utilisation and impact

Who's going to hear about the results of your research?

- If possible you should send a report to all children's services departments, not only those which participated in the project
- You should write a short summary of your main findings, indicating where there may be implications for the development of policy and practice, and send copies with your report. This summary is vital as it will be read by more people than the full report (which will, of necessity, contain methodological details and very fine-grained findings)
- An article in the popular trade press – for example, Children Now magazine or the Local Government Chronicle – is likely to reach an even wider audience within children's services departments.
- Send the Research Group a copy of the full report and the summary. A list of reports received from projects approved by the Association is published on this website

Have you looked carefully at the ethical issues of your project?

Children's services departments have a clear responsibility towards the users of their services and their families and carers. This responsibility has many facets, including the protection of vulnerable children and young people from unwanted attention and the preservation of the confidentiality of information about them.

Will you be operating legally?

There are legal limits to what information departments can disclose, both in specific areas and under data protection legislation. You should explore fully the implications of this in your proposed field of research.

Are you competent to carry out the project?

The competence of the researcher is a key consideration. The Group will not recommend that directors participate in projects where there is reason to believe that the researcher is not capable of carrying out and completing a well-constructed and potentially helpful piece of work. Your application should include details of the qualifications and experience of the main researcher(s).

The Group accepts that there are many people who want to carry out a research project as a component of a course of study. The Group believes that these should be local rather than national studies.

Fees

The Group charges a fee to researchers seeking its support. The amount charged depends on the size and cost of the project.

Project Cost	Fee
under £5,000	£27.00 + VAT
£5,000 - £20,000	£180.00 + VAT

£20,000 - £100,000 £360.00 + VAT
£100,000 - £500,000 £600.00 + VAT
£500,000+ £1,000,000 ££1,175.00 + VAT

Applicants are charged a fee irrespective of the outcome of their application. The Group reserves the right to waive the fee in the appropriate cases (for example, bona fide research students who are not getting a grant to carry out the research). If you ask for the fee to be waived you should give reasons.

The processing of your application will not begin until your fee is received. If you email or fax your form, or do not attach a cheque to a posted form, the Research Group will send you an invoice. Cheques should be made payable to the Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd.

Completing the application form

The application form is available as a downloadable MS Word document, which will allow you to include information from other documents. Your completed form can be emailed as an attachment, sent by post or faxed. If you email the form, your email address will be taken as your signature, but if you mail or fax the form, you must remember to sign it. If you send the form, you should enclose a cheque for your fee. If you do not enclose a cheque, or you fax the form, you will be invoiced for the appropriate amount, and you should note that your application will not be processed until your fee is received.

Completed forms should be returned to:

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