

A scoping study to identify how research on workforce issues has been used to inform practice within services for children and young people

A pilot study

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1. Introduction

Considerable investment has been made in recent times into the field of research and evaluation in the children's workforce (see, for example, Childrens Workforce Development Council (CWDC), 2010a; Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009; DCSF, 2007a). Developing research and evidence informs practitioners who have a professional obligation to ensure that their practice is evidence-based (DCSF, 2008a). The evidence base for practice within the children's services extends beyond that focusing on professional practice *per se*, and includes research and evidence about workforce issues which concern the development of the workforce and its capacity to provide a service.

For the purpose of this report, research/evidence, workforce issues and workforce research are defined as follows:

Research/evidence: the interpretation of what constitutes research or evidence is broad. Included within it are published or accredited academic research and evaluation studies, evidence produced by government agencies and knowledge disseminated through Higher Education courses, as well as information arising from practitioners' reflection on their own practice. For the purposes of this study, a typology of research/evidence (see p14) was developed.

Workforce issues: workforce issues are considered to be those which influence the way that individuals working within services for children and young people acquire and develop necessary knowledge and skills; or which affect the way that agencies and services are organised or structured.

Workforce research: research or evaluation studies conducted about workforce issues, or evidence arising from the workplace about workforce issues.

This report presents findings from a pilot study that included two phases of data collection. The first phase involved nine agencies delivering services for children and young people. One manager from each of two local authority and seven voluntary sector organisations was interviewed. In the second phase, three of these organisations (one local authority and two voluntary sector) also participated in the pilot as case study sites. In each of these three sites between five and seven individuals from a range of roles and differing seniority took part.

The pilot study was commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to provide an insight into how agencies delivering services for children, young people and their families use research and evaluation about workforce issues to develop and enhance their professional practice. The purpose of the pilot study was to develop and test a methodology for possible use in future research exploring the way that workforce research/evidence is used in relevant organisations. The objectives of the study were:

- to identify agencies which support the adoption of research and evaluation about workforce issues to develop professional practice;
- to explore how agencies apply research and evaluation about workforce issues to the development of everyday professional practice;
- to construct case studies from identified agencies, detailing where there have been particular initiatives developed as a result of existing research and/or evaluation about workforce issues.

This report presents the policy context of the research, the development and implementation of the methodology, key findings and lessons learnt.

2. Policy context – the development of the integrated workforce

2.1 The Children’s Workforce

The government defines the Children’s Workforce as ‘everyone who works with children, young people and their families, or who is responsible for improving their outcomes’ (DCSF, 2008b, p9). The workforce includes both the ‘core’ of people whose primary purpose is to work with children, young people and their families and the ‘wider workforce’ of people who work only partly with these groups or who have responsibility for their outcomes as part of a wider role (CWDC, 2010b, pp4-5). This workforce, therefore, comprises a range of professions and occupations and is diverse across a range of dimensions:

- Organisational sector – practitioners working with children, young people and families are to be found within statutory, voluntary, private and community sectors.
- Terms and conditions of ‘employment’ – workers may be full time, part time and either paid or unpaid, many working on a sessional and/or voluntary basis.
- Practitioners have different professional specialisms that include social care, childcare, play, health care, youth work, youth justice, sport, culture and education. In addition, they may be located within services that have different aims, purposes and philosophies with regard to their work with children and young people.
- The level of entry qualification on entering the sector varies significantly. Many people enter the workforce with a professional qualification at honours degree level or higher, for example as a social worker, teacher or health visitor. However, many others enter the workforce with few or no qualifications and start their basic training as part of their role in the setting.
- Many practitioners work in universal settings such as youth centres, breakfast clubs or early years settings, while others work in environments which specialise in offering services for those with specific needs, for example, young offenders or families in need of intensive support.

2.2 Change within services for children, young people and families

The last few years have seen a transformation of the children's workforce, largely following publication of the government green paper, *Every Child Matters* (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2003). This document was published shortly after the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) and used evidence from the report of the inquiry to support its case for systemic change within services for children and young people. Laming concluded that children's needs were being neglected or overlooked through a lack of 'joined-up' working, poor systems for information sharing and too great a reliance on professional and agency boundaries. *Every Child Matters* advocated the development of integrated practice and collaborative organisational arrangements that would seek to address gaps in service delivery carrying potentially harmful and even fatal consequences for vulnerable children, as exemplified in the case of Victoria. All services should work together and focus on outcomes for the child rather than the particular interests of organisations or professionals.

Every Child Matters advocated early intervention, prevention and co-location of services. Significantly, it also described a workforce reform strategy to address recruitment and retention and to improve skills and effectiveness, whilst requiring a new strategic infrastructure that would support the development and embedding of the new integrated working arrangements. It described integrated working processes such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), new safeguarding arrangements and the move to Children's Trusts that would be accountable through the local authority and would bring together different stakeholders within the delivery of services – for example, social care, health care, education, the police and the voluntary sector. The new arrangements would allow for the pooling of resources and joint commissioning of services across organisational boundaries and would be led by a Director of Children's Services and an elected member within each top tier local authority. Legislation to support these new arrangements formed a central part of the Children Act (2004) including the requirement to produce a local Children and Young People's Plan. To coincide with these developments the Department of Health (2004) published *The National Service Framework for Children Young People and Maternity* which

included a set of national standards for children's health and social care. These standards mirrored many of the ideas within *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003).

2.3 Developments for the children's workforce

Since the publication of *Every Child Matters* and the associated document for young people's services, *Youth Matters* (DCSF, 2005), the detail of the workforce strategy aiming to meet government aspirations has been progressively researched and refined in the *Children's Plan – Building Brighter Futures* (DCSF, 2007b), *Building Brighter Futures: Next Steps for the Children's Workforce* (DCSF, 2008b) and finally in the *2020 Children and Young People's Workforce Strategy* (DCSF, 2008a). This last document requires children's trusts to develop their own local workforce strategy as part of their Children and Young People's Plan.

The task now is for national policy to be interpreted within a local context – a process that involves considerable change and learning for both managers and front line practitioners. However, across the workforce it is possible to describe a number of characteristic features:

2.3.1 Integrated processes

All local areas are developing their integrated working practices – sometimes described as becoming the One Children's Workforce (CWDC, 2010c). These processes are associated with the development of common values, knowledge and skills and local agreements around the use of CAF, information sharing protocols and the lead professional role. Specific cross-disciplinary training supports these developments alongside a common induction programme that draws upon a common core of skills and knowledge (CWDC, 2010b).

2.3.2 Inter-disciplinary teams

Inter-disciplinary teams are a central characteristic of the new workforce. These teams include a variety of specialist expertise and often include practitioners from a range of agencies working within different line management arrangements. They may be teams that work together, based within localities or in co-located settings such as children's centres. Alternatively, they may be

teams that come together for a particular purpose, such as a 'team around the child' (CWDC, 2009).

2.3.3 Safeguarding

Safeguarding is central to the role of all those who work with children and young people and all are required to undergo initial training and to update this regularly. The requirement for this has been further strengthened in Laming's second report (2009). This report also highlights the importance of support for newly qualified workers and high quality supervision, a culture of supervision being recognised as a potentially important driver of change within the workforce (see for example, Anning and Edwards, 2006).

2.3.4 New roles

The focus on outcomes and early intervention has highlighted the need for new roles within the workforce – for example, family support workers or learning mentors. These roles are attractive to people entering the workforce and are clearly filling a gap in service delivery; however, there remains a need to ensure that appropriate support and training are in place for these practitioners.

2.3.5 Leadership

The development of a 'world class workforce' needs inspirational leadership and a strategy for developing the leaders of the future. To meet this need there has been a range of leadership programmes delivered by the National College as well as leadership programmes for specific areas of the workforce, for example, those in integrated youth support services.

2.3.6 Commissioning

The commissioning process requires needs-analysis to identify gaps in provision and provides an opportunity for voluntary sector services that may have the specific expertise required to meet these needs. From the voluntary sector perspective this has emphasised the necessity to develop partnerships and to find mechanisms for measuring impact and added value, so that organisations

are better positioned to participate within the commissioning process (see, for example, Audit commission, 2007).

2.3.7 Professionalisation

The professionalisation of the children and young people's workforce has resulted in raised thresholds for entry into the professions and the requirement for qualified staff in every setting. For example, professional youth workers are now required to have an honours degree and all those working in Early Years have to work towards National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Level 3. In addition continuing professional development opportunities help to broaden skills and knowledge and develop reflection.

2.3.8 Research

Funding for workforce development and research to contribute to evidence-based practice has been increasing. Organisations supporting and developing this work include the CWDC, Research in Practice (RiP), Making Research Count and the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). However, there is limited understanding of how findings from workforce research/evidence are translated and used in practice.

2.3.9 Participation of children and young people

The participation of children and young people has been a developing feature of children's services since the Children Act 1989 and the UK ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. This has been further encouraged through the *Learning to Listen* action plan (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006) and the *Every Child Matters* outcome of 'making a positive contribution'. In many areas children and young people make a significant contribution within the workforce – as volunteers or workers themselves, as members of advisory or shadow boards or through contribution to organisational processes such as recruitment.

2.4 Workforce change and the use of evidence

Overall, it is apparent that this is a time of considerable change for the children and young people's workforce. This change is signalled in national policy documents and guidance, but managers and practitioners engaged in the process have the task of making it a local reality. The process can be visualised as a journey where it is not always clear:

- where one might be going;
- which road maps are available;
- which route might be the best to follow;
- what transport to use;
- which tools and resources might be helpful along the way;
- how one might recognise the destination on arrival.

This journey is further complicated by the different starting points of participants and the multiple perspectives they may have on routes, tools, resources and destinations. In addition, there will in reality be many intersecting journeys, which may complement each other, run in parallel or in some cases interfere with each other and lead to hold-ups.

This small study aims to test out methodology designed to investigate whether and how evidence and research can help people negotiate these complex journeys. If it can help, then which evidence is helpful, how is it used and how might it lead to individual, team and organisational learning? This report therefore outlines the processes used within the study and offers some illustrations of the workforce development journey for participating organisations.

3. Methodology

The project aims were best addressed by adopting a qualitative research approach. This research approach is most useful when looking at research questions around experiences, beliefs and perceptions. Researchers working within qualitative research approaches use interactive methods of data collection, participants may be involved in verifying data interpretation and findings can be presented as descriptions, themes, theories and frameworks or models for practice (Moule and Goodman, 2009). In this research using a qualitative approach allowed the team to gain in-depth information about the context and underpinning strategies involved in the selection and implementation of evidence and research findings to support workforce issues. The timescale for the project was very short (three months from inception to completion) and the project therefore essentially constituted a pilot study in which methods for addressing the project aims were tested.

3.1 Research design

The research design selected had been used with positive effect in previous scoping research undertaken by members of the team (Moule et al, 2008). The design included two phases, as set out in Table 1. Both phases were planned in order to gain a picture of how findings from research/evidence were used in a variety of organisations.

Table 1 Research design

Phase 1	An initial scoping survey in order to establish whether or not and how organisations were using workforce research or evidence to underpin their operational practices.
Phase 2	Case studies to allow further in-depth enquiry relating to the topic under investigation.

The initial survey provided breadth to the study, facilitating access to a wider group of staff, and informed the development of a sampling framework that, though not used specifically in this pilot study, provides a useful tool to support the sampling of case study sites in any future related

research. Data collection in the case study sites yielded in-depth data about the processes and the effects of using findings from research/evidence in practice. The combination of the two phases therefore provided both breadth and an opportunity to achieve depth in the study.

3.2 Study instruments and data sources

Following consideration of the literature and discussion among the team, a schedule was developed for the Phase 1 survey, through which interviewees were asked about the following areas:

- what workforce research/evidence is used in the organisation and how?
- who makes decisions about what and how this research/evidence is implemented?
- what training and development opportunities and processes related to workforce research/evidence are there for staff within the organisation?
- what impact does the use of workforce research/evidence have on the operation of the organisation and on service delivery?
- are children, young people and families involved in learning, research or evaluation activity? If so, how?

The interviewees were also asked for information about the profile of the organisation (size, location, scope of practice). The full interview schedule can be found in Appendix I.

The interview schedule was also used to explore issues in more depth with staff members in the case study sites. Further questions were developed in light of initial answers to this schedule, such as:

- Who decides what training is offered to staff, and how are those decisions made?
- In what way does research/evidence inform the training and development opportunities for staff?

As is the convention in qualitative research, the interview schedule in each case study site continued to develop during the period of data collection, in response to the specific context of research/evidence use in the organisation (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996).

3.3 Ethics

The project was approved by a UWE research ethics sub-committee and was conducted in accordance with the university guidelines for ethical research. Data collected were managed and stored in line with the 1998 Data Protection Act. The researchers sought informed consent from each participant in both the survey and case study interviews. The findings are presented so as to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. The link person in each of the case study sites was provided with a summary of the analysis for their organisations, and had the opportunity to comment before the submission of the final report to the CWDC.

3.4 Sampling

In view of the short time frame for the study, sampling for Phase 1 involved using a convenience sample of nine organisations, including those from the public and voluntary sectors, but limited to two local authorities. Sampling focused on the South West of England in the first instance, to maximise recruitment through using the research team's existing contacts. The project team also employed administrative support for the recruitment phase and an online search was undertaken to identify additional potential participants. The online search strategy was based on identifying organisations with staff that had specific roles and responsibilities in research and development, training and workforce development. The use of dedicated administrative support was crucial to the success of the sampling strategy, as it required considerable time firstly to identify suitable individuals to approach within organisations, and then to arrange data collection.

In total nine staff were interviewed during this phase, including those in workforce development, director and integrated workforce manager roles (see Table 3 on p18 for further information). Of these, five were recruited from organisations based in the South West of England, while four came from organisations located in the South East and the North of England.

The data from the scoping survey were used to inform the development of a sampling framework for Phase 2 (Appendix II), through which to select case study sites. However, due to the limited time available, the framework was not used in the pilot study. A convenience sample of three case studies was drawn from the South West and the South East of England, using research team members' pre-existing contacts. Urban, coastal and rural localities were represented across the three sites.

3.5 Research typology

In order to aid a systematic exploration of the types of research and evidence about the workforce utilised within different organisations, the research team devised a research typology through which different forms of evidence could be categorised (Table 2).

Table 2. Research typology

	Published/accredited academic research	Reflection on action	Self-learning
Type of evidence	Randomised controlled trial (RCT) Quasi-experimental Quantitative surveys Qualitative studies Systematic review Literature review	Action research Participatory evaluation Narrative methods Anecdotal accounts	Reflection on own experience Academic courses Work-based training Professional development Conference presentations Journal articles News
Possible perspectives represented	User Professional Staff/employee Organisational learning	User Professional Staff/employee Organisational learning	User Professional Staff/employee Organisational learning
Sources for information about evidence	Governmental policies Institutional policies and guidelines Practice frameworks	Governmental policies Institutional policies and guidelines Practice frameworks	Personal experience Academic courses, publications and events Professional courses, publications and events General media

This typology was used in analysing the types of research and evidence used in the organisations and formed part of the case study presentations.

3.6 Data collection and analysis

The nine Phase 1 interviews were arranged at times convenient to the participants, each lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. Six were conducted by telephone, while three were carried out face-to-face. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio recorded. Individual researchers listened to the interviews, and recorded relevant data within a template developed specifically for the project (Appendix III). This template facilitated the recording of responses in a format that allowed team analysis. The survey responses were analysed by two team members working individually to identify key findings and messages. These were used as a basis from which to develop the sampling framework for case study sites (Appendix II).

Within Phase 2, the itinerary for case study visits was pre-arranged and agreed with a local manager or research lead to maximise the opportunities for data collection within a two day visit. Participants fulfilling a range of roles and levels reflecting the areas of research and development, training and workforce development were included. Examples include research leads within agencies and service leads in mental health, social work and public health nursing, as well as family support staff and early years workers. Details of individuals interviewed are not provided in this report, in order to maintain anonymity. In each site, between five and seven face-to-face interviews were conducted in the workplace setting over a 30 to 50 minute time period. They were audio recorded, following an informed consent process, and transcribed verbatim.

Case study data were analysed thematically by the team members leading the case study visit. An initial account of each case study site was compiled, drawing on both the interview and public sources such as organisational websites. These were structured around three areas, namely, the context of the case study site, key emergent themes from the data and identified evidence of areas of good practice.

This structure also informed the cross-case study analysis completed by five team members, three of whom had not engaged with the initial visits, in which particular themes were explored across the three case study sites. Data from across the case study sites were examined to determine

what and how research/evidence was commonly being used, its perceived impact on the organisation and/or practice, and relevant issues identified about the use of workforce research/evidence.

4. Survey findings

Nine interviews were conducted for the survey. These comprised one interview with a senior level manager from each of the participating organisations, this person being asked to comment on the learning environment for all staff. As there was no verification of these views some findings are necessarily tentative.

The organisations were of varying size. Two were local authority organisations (LAOs), and seven were voluntary sector organisations (VSOs). One small VSO was based in an urban setting, while the other eight organisations covered both rural and urban settings. One VSO worked with vulnerable families, one focused on early years (0-5 years), and another two focused on youth support; the remainder of the sample provided a variety of services for children and young people covering a range of ages. One VSO also offered workforce development training to other organisations within both the voluntary and public sectors. Another VSO had a long history of involvement in shaping national policy concerning the structure and operation of services for children and young people. Eight of the organisations used all three types of evidence identified in the Research typology on p14. See Table 3 below for information about the sample in terms of interviewees' roles; organisational sector, setting and size; scope of practice; and type of research/evidence used. When considering the findings, it should be remembered that this was a pilot study, and the findings have emerged from a small evidence base.

4.1 Workforce development and training

Some organisations had individuals in post with explicit responsibility for workforce development (Table 3), while in others the director/manager had responsibility for this area. Each organisation in the sample provided in-house training for their staff. These included induction programmes and team-building, as well as training to equip staff with basic skills concerning safeguarding, domestic violence and equality and diversity issues. In-house training commonly also focused on ensuring that staff kept up to date with policy directives and governmental agendas concerning safe practice. Two of the VSOs had local LAO support for, and contribution to, these programmes. Conversely, one VSO delivered or contributed to in-house training for LAOs. One LAO conducted

in-house training for service users as well as for staff, and also was involved in multi-agency training initiatives.

Table 3. Interviewee role, organisation sector, setting and size, scope of practice, and type of research/evidence used.

Interviewee role	Sector	Setting	Size (number of employees)	Scope of Practice	Type of research / evidence used
Director of Children's Services	Voluntary	Urban and rural	500 +	Multiple services	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Head of Organisational Development	Voluntary	Urban and rural	500 +	Vulnerable families, mental health needs	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Integrated Workforce Development Manager	Local authority	Urban and rural	500 +	Multiple services	Published/accredited academic research Self-learning
Director of Learning and Workforce Development	Local authority	Urban and rural	500 +	Multiple services	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Workforce Development Manager	Voluntary	Urban and rural	300 +	Youth support	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Chief Executive	Voluntary	Urban and rural	300	Family centred services Shaping policy	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Business Development Manager	Voluntary	Urban and rural	100 +	Multiple services Workforce development training	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Centre Manager	Voluntary	Urban and rural	25-30	Early years (0-5)	Published/accredited academic research Reflection on action Self-learning
Executive Director	Voluntary	Urban	8 + volunteers	Youth support	Self-learning

All the organisations were involved in disseminating good practice and learning through various media, the most popular being conferences. In one of the LAOs, findings from an in-house consultation with children and young people about what they wanted from service workers served as the basis for a DVD which was subsequently used for in-house staff training. One of the large VSOs hosted a Young Carers' festival planned by children and young people, offering play, media activities and opportunities for voice. Two other large VSOs were involved in conducting research studies, and findings of these were disseminated through their websites.

A common factor among four organisations (three VSOs and one LAO) was a clear and active link with Higher Education institutions (HEIs). In the VSOs, this took the form of developing work-based and foundation level degree training for emergent managers and support staff, many of whom did not have professional qualifications. In the LAO, staff at junior managerial level and below were encouraged and supported to undertake postgraduate diplomas and degrees. In one large VSO, individual staff were also supported to study at postgraduate level, and a Knowledge Transfer Partnership was being jointly conducted with its HEI partner.

The HEI links had also been used to support organisations to engage in their own research activity. For example, one VSO providing youth support had won a successful bid from the CWDC in partnership with a university to develop a Foundation Degree and also reported opportunities to bid for money for small research based projects for various funding sources.

A significant factor in the interviews was the amount of learning present across organisations. Examples were given of supported progression routes for practitioners, starting with NVQ and leading on to Masters level qualifications. Most organisations also described processes to share practice and information and the cascading of training and learning within teams. The learning engendered through these means was reported to contribute to practice development and innovation.

4.2 Research use and activity

The survey fulfilled the objectives of identifying agencies which supported the adoption of workforce research/evidence, and of facilitating exploration of how agencies apply workforce research/evidence to the development of everyday professional practice. Where present, adoption and application of research/evidence took a variety of forms. Written research strategies were not the norm within the sample and indeed one respondent commented that *'you can have as many strategies as you like but culture eats strategy for breakfast'*. However, several organisations approached research from a strategic perspective and saw it as a central tool to enable their practice and workforce development. For example, research data were used to support funding bids and to investigate potential practice. Organisations described linking their own local contextualised research evidence with more generalised evidence from other sources. They also developed projects strategically across the organisation if pilot activity appeared to have impact for the workforce. Self-generated findings were reflected upon and tested out within organisations alongside evidence from elsewhere and respondents described an interplay between the needs of the local environment, policy directives, the views of users and practitioners and published research.

A clear link with the CWDC and with Research in Practice (RiP) was evident in one LAO and three VSOs, but in the remainder of the sample there was no demonstrated awareness of these (or any other comparable) organisations and their functions. National policy and local evidence were prominent in informing practice and sometimes these would act as a catalyst to extend the evidence base used by the organisation. In one of the VSOs, the implementation of workforce research/evidence appeared to operate implicitly, in that staff were only offered external training with a sound evidence base, for example, the 'Parents Involved in Children's Learning' (PICL) course (Pen Green Research, 2010).

The research/evidence used by the organisations was drawn from a number of sources (Table 3), albeit generally not systematically. The use of evidence appeared in some cases to depend on the extent to which individuals in strategic posts within the organisation were aware of issues

surrounding research/evidence. For example, the interviewee from one VSO was a member of a national research board and another agency had a prominent researcher on their own management board. It was apparent that all evidence drawn from external sources needed to be contextualised within the local environment.

The most structured use of research evidence was apparent in the LAO linked with an HEI, in which a system had been set up to facilitate the implementation of workforce research. In this case, staff members were supported to undertake postgraduate research degrees, for which they agreed a research topic with senior managers. The results of their academic work were then fed back into the organisation to inform practice and staff development through dedicated staff training events. The manager interviewed in this case stated that knowledge from wider sources of evidence was channelled back into the organisation through staff's academic outputs.

In contrast, more 'organic' approaches to research seemed to reflect the 'messiness' of the practice environment. In these organisations, the process was not systematically managed but research appeared in parts of the organisation as part of reflective learning activity where people took up opportunities to share ideas and practice, identify issues, read about them, have debates, test ideas out in practice and listen to feedback.

Not surprisingly, it seemed that practitioners tended to use research to support their current context, one that for all the organisations in the survey appeared to be driven by a move towards integrated working. It was hard for practitioners and managers to think outside this context even within an educational environment, especially when much of the available research and evidence reflected a similar policy environment.

4.3 Support for research use

It appeared that commitment from senior level managers supported the use of research/evidence. In the LAO mentioned above, senior managers were responsible for embedding the system of using the results of individual's academic studies to inform workforce development and

practice. In that organisation, the establishment of a transparent and supportive organisation culture was also thought to encourage staff members to source and implement research findings. Similar perceptions about the importance of the culture of the working environment in this regard were also voiced by interviewees from two VSOs. Ideas such as learning sets, space for reflection and debate and working and learning in multi-agency settings were frequently mentioned. The culture of the organisation was thought to be particularly relevant where research findings could be seen to be criticising established processes. Interviewees stated that it was necessary for the organisation to be willing to examine its own processes, and to support staff in changing attitudes and/or ways of working where necessary, in order for findings to be implemented constructively. Links with HE institutions were thought to make it easier for organisations to access relevant research/evidence.

Factors supporting the use of workforce research/evidence in organisations:

- **Commitment from senior level managers – encourages use of research/evidence as part of ‘normal’ processes.**
- **Supportive and transparent culture – allows examination and alteration of established working processes.**
- **Spaces for reflection – allow consideration of possibilities for change.**
- **Links with Higher Education institutions – facilitate access to, and interpretation of, relevant research/evidence.**

4.4 Barriers to research use

In four of the organisations sampled, interviewees suggested that lack of time had a detrimental impact on the capacity of staff to access or implement evidence and research, and three also mentioned the effect of a restrictive financial climate. In three cases, the difficulty of feeding back research results which could be seen as criticising the organisation was cited as being potentially problematic, needing careful handling. For example, if individuals disagreed with the findings of a

study that required them to change their practice, considerable time and sensitivity could be required to support these individuals in both emotional and practical ways. Conversely, if people were involved in the generation of knowledge or learning then they were likely to be enthused and motivated. The way that research/evidence was reported could also cause difficulties. One organisation mentioned their reliance on external bodies such as CWDC or the Office of Public Management to translate and report research findings in a user-friendly form that identified relevance and importance.

Barriers to using workforce research/evidence in organisations:

- **Lack of time/funding – can restrict staff’s ability to access or implement relevant findings.**
- **Lack of capacity (skills/knowledge/ability) - can restrict staff’s ability to access or implement relevant findings.**
- **Non-supportive culture – can make it difficult to implement research/evidence where individual staff members disagree with the findings.**
- **Complex or overly academic presentation of research findings - can make it difficult for practitioners to identify their relevance or translate them into practice.**

4.5 Involvement of children and young people

Seven organisations routinely included children and young people’s views in workforce development programmes. In some cases, this took the form of consultation about services, training needs of staff and service provision. In one of the large VSOs this consultation was extensive, involving canvassing over 1600 children and young people for their views about what sort of services and workforce were required. Feedback from some of these activities was used in staff training events, as exemplified by the production and use of the DVD within the LAO mentioned in 4.1 above. Two VSOs included young people on recruitment panels for new staff and on a board of Trustees. One LAO was training them as ‘mystery shoppers’ in order to evaluate

some of their services. This meant that, as well as completing any routine evaluation forms about the service, these young people would be asked to conduct a more in-depth evaluation. At the time of this activity, staff might know that 'mystery shoppers' would be using the services, but would not know who they were, or when they would be visiting. One of the VSOs was training parents as 'mystery shoppers' for their services targeting very young children.

Ways of involving children and young people in workforce development:

- **Embedded in routine processes – children and young people represented on boards of Trustees and recruitment panels for new staff.**
- **Feedback in staff training events – findings from consultation events with children and young people used to inform relevant staff training.**
- **Innovative roles – enabling children and young people's involvement as evaluators of the services they use, for example, training them to be 'mystery shoppers'.**

4.6 Impact of research use on practice

None of the organisations in the survey were able to measure systematically the impact of workforce research on outcomes for children, young people and families to any great extent. However, impact for the workforce was reported, in the form of new skills, confidence, morale and relationships, which, in turn, were expected to affect service delivery and reception. In some cases, particular service developments could be linked to the use of evidence, for example, the introduction of generic multi-agency induction for all staff in one of the large LAOs. However, it was generally thought that, given the complexity of the service delivery context, it would be very difficult to reach any definitive conclusions about the impact on practice of any particular set of research findings or evidence.

5. Case study findings

In this section of the report, findings from the three case study sites are presented. Each case includes exemplar projects, categorised according to the Research typology on p14.

5.1 Case Study 1 – Local Authority Children’s Services in a Children’s Trust

5.1.1 Context

The local authority in which the Children’s Trust was situated covered a large area with urban, rural and coastal localities. A commissioning model of workforce planning had been introduced for in-house and contracted services for a ‘whole workforce’ approach, and to tie workforce development directly to the achievement of targets in the Children’s Plan. A commissioning board with membership of lead managers from each area of Children’s Services used standard questions to identify job roles and activities for each target, to plan workforce capacity and development needed to deliver these activities. This commissioning model was viewed as a significant move away from performance management and a separation of training and practice. There was a strong commitment to the development of a learning culture and critical best practice, through using appreciative inquiry models and the development of reflective practice, and by encouraging links with Higher Education providers.

5.1.2 Themes

A research culture

“The whole culture of the workforce is actually the most important resource we’ve got.”

The development of a learning culture had been strengthened by the location of workforce development within the commissioning team. Research was highly valued by participants as a basis to determine effectiveness, an evidence-base to inform criteria for contracts and to help parents to make choices. However there was no formal research strategy; research use was mainly dependent on individuals’ commitments and support from individual line managers. The following factors were influential in building a learning and research culture:

- Research reports that were context relevant (for example, CWDC, RiP, Local Authority Research Council (LARC) and Office of Public Statistics reports).
- Extensive use of One Children’s Workforce Toolkit (CWDC, 2010c) and consultation exercises with all involved.
- Planned responses to OFSTED outcomes (for example, induction and programme for newly qualified social workers).
- Involvement in LARC and RiP (events, seminars, web access to research, funds for small projects).
- HEI partnership links (qualifications and continuing professional development (CPD), service evaluations, joint funded PhD post, library access).
- CWDC One Childrens’ Workforce Toolkit in group discussion (for example, values and vision, common language, the ability to safeguard children).
- Integrated training sharing learning cultures (for example, supervision and journal clubs).
- Personalised supervision contracts to include learning and access to a range of training options.
- The involvement of children and young people.

A wider culture of reflection across senior management was sought for quality assurance to be more meaningful. It was suggested that quality assurance needs to be a cycle that involves the people who have provided the information. Stronger links were wanted with HEI to secure opportunities and funding for students and academics to undertake research in priority areas.

Research use as a change process

Research – *“the thing that actually shifts the focus”*.

Research use was valued as a process that could facilitate change in practice through critical and comparative analysis independent of customary practices. Remodelling of services and a process of wholesale cultural change was taking place to bring the staff to early intervention, from a previous focus on specialist statutory services. For example, pupil referral units were being replaced with multi-agency hubs and centres delivering personalised alternatives to the

curriculum to young people. Researchers were working on a project bringing indicators together from different strategies to inform the remodelling of social care and social work, to reduce the highest levels of vulnerability and support through earlier intervention with children and young people. An action research project to develop Core Skills had been designed to build integrated working through locality based group activities that engaged participants in the skills of networking, play and case study discussion. Hay Group research studies (Hay Group Holdings, Inc, 2010) had informed the development of leadership and the requirement to build a resilient workforce. Directors were consequently required to ensure that indicators for such a workforce were embedded in the change processes. This development was viewed as recognition of the value and potential fragility of staff and the need for support at emotional and personal levels.

Research for transformative practice

“It’s not that you have done the review within the six days you had, it’s what you learn from doing that review and how that will, how that is really facilitating that child in that situation.”

Reflective practice was recognised as a necessity to maintain the child at the heart of professional practice. Practitioners with higher degree qualifications developed skills in critical appraisal of research. It was part of consolidation and post-qualifying training, evidenced in observation of practice and in assignments. Students were also taught to seek feedback from children and young people and to understand the tensions involved in their roles. Action learning sets were provided for newly qualified social workers to review practice and develop their critical thinking.

Participation in a Masters programme had provided a group of managers with experience of learning sets that had been the inspiration for a major project outlined below. Opportunity for in-depth conversation for specialist practitioners was considered vital to analyse a complex situation, review effectiveness of strategies and adjust the course of action accordingly. However, time for this was severely constrained due to workload, which was compounded by staff shortages, illness and recruitment problems. There was recognition that support workers faced some of the most difficult issues and were the least trained.

The involvement of children and young people

The involvement of children and young people included consultation, selection and recruitment. The Hear by Right (undated) research based framework had been applied to identify participation throughout the Trust. A two year evaluation of participation led by a senior academic had received funding from the National Youth Agency:

“It opened my eyes to the use of research ... to have a really clear steer on direction for where we go next and that shaped my part of the Children’s and Young People’s Plan so our measures are influenced by external research.”

Participation was consequently at a stage to make progress on depth, continuity and impact.

Recent initiatives had included:

- Young researchers supported to investigate specific issues through their own networks.
- Training for young people on how to work with adults in adult environments effectively.
- A joint HEI project creating a web site presenting and tracking children and young people’s priorities to avoid inaction or reinvention.

Integrity in research application was considered key to ascertain the benefit for children and young people, to challenge research presenting young people in negative terms and to avoid bombardment of opposing directives.

5.1.3 Exemplars

Emotional well being of children and young people (*reflection on action*)

An independent provider was commissioned to provide an action research programme in 40 infant, primary, secondary and special schools and pupil referral units to improve the emotional wellbeing of children and young people. The project included children, staff and parents in a process of identifying behaviour that was found difficult, and looked into roots of the behaviour and its meaning for the child. Home strategies with parents and school strategies with staff were produced that linked directly to CAF. The framework drew on transactional analysis and neuroscience, attachment and child development theory. The company agreed to accredit staff as trainers to extend and sustain the approach and an independent evaluation was planned.

Integrated supervision project (*reflection on action, self-learning*)

The project aimed to develop team leaders' supervision skills in response to Social Care Task Force recommendations for improving safeguarding practices. The approach drew on appreciative inquiry and neuroscience to increase staff resourcefulness. It helped people learn by looking at what had worked so far and at what was missing and could be brought to the situation to help change. It focused on ways of working in partnership using social emotional skills on a practical level to develop abilities in integrated working, such as relationship building and networking. Independent evaluation and dissemination through conferences and publication were planned.

5.1.4 Assessing the impact of research use

All interviewees regarded the identification of the impact of workforce research/evidence in terms of outcomes for children and young people as a challenge due to the complexity of their needs. It was also difficult due to the different stages staff groups had reached with respect to integrated working. However, there was a strong commitment to tracking impact as part of the commissioning cycle in order to review the benefit of services for children and young people. The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) impact measure was to be used in readiness for OFSTED inspection, to show the whole story in the involvement of children and young people in terms of communities of interests, themes and gaps.

The following practices were illustrations of impact in terms of implementation of research outputs:

- Materials produced by children and young people were used in recruitment and practice meetings (CAF experience DVD, illustrated statement cards about valued practitioner behaviour).
- Practitioners' applied appreciative inquiry methods to support families' resourcefulness.
- Team leaders had successfully changed to a formal standard form used in youth justice in order to adopt a strengths-based framework.

Limited impact was illustrated by degrees of engagement. It was acknowledged that social work was under considerable pressure of work and was least able to contribute to integrated learning opportunities.

Key Messages

- **A research culture in the organisation promotes within it the influence of children and young people, as well as more in-depth understanding of their needs.**
- **Resources for appreciative inquiry and reflection support innovation and encourage transformative practice with children young people and their families.**
- **Workforce research contributes to the achievement of targets identifying staff development and capacity needed to improve the lives of children and young people.**

5.2 Case Study 2 – Large national voluntary organisation

5.2.1 Introduction

This case study concerns a large national ‘outward facing’ voluntary organisation that delivers a range of services to children and young people of all ages. It is also concerned with policy development, support and advocacy. The organisation is committed to a reflective ‘virtuous circle’ of policy and practice where delivery informs policy development and vice versa. It works across the country and has 23 children’s centres, six nurseries and five After School Clubs. It also employs consultants who offer support to local authorities.

5.2.2 Context

The organisation is funded by contracts from DCSF, from local authorities and through its delivery of front line services. It contributes to policy development through campaigns, takes on commissioned research projects and carries out its own research in areas of policy and practice that are of interest. It develops campaigns around practice and workforce themes that are informed by the research of others, the research that takes place within the organisation and the conversations that take place with practitioners and policy makers. Through direct delivery the organisation has an opportunity to demonstrate how the ideas advocated within it work in practice. It was acknowledged that there can be a tension between the different roles of the organisation – for example, producing research that is reflective but that still fulfils the needs of the organisation for publicity or lobbying activity.

5.2.3 Themes

Reflective cycles of engagement with ideas

“We have used our own research to identify issues of concern, done desk research and analysis of other people’s research to find out more about what is going on to find best practice and we have supplemented that with further conversations and then once we have decided that we think [it] should be mainstreamed and used everywhere then we would go out and campaign on that basis.”

It was reported that the organisation consciously used its own research and learning from practice to feed into its policy and advocacy activity in the belief that its assertions would bear significantly more weight if they were backed up with evidence from delivery. At the same time, the organisation's delivery model was based on their conclusions from research and policy development that services for children, young people and families were more effectively delivered as a continuum. The ideas of those in the workforce – both the internal workforce and the external workforce – were taken into account alongside the views of children and parents.

"We see the workforce as being very important how they feel about their job, their morale - all those issues that are workforce issues that are very central to the experience that children and families have"

Those within the organisation were encouraged to make connections between policy and practice – for example by ensuring that Head Office staff visited settings and met staff, parents and children within those settings.

Research as an ongoing process

"There is a lot of feedback comes back that is not what you would call classic research but it is jolly useful information and it is perfectly valid."

There was a sense within the organisation that research could take a number of forms. There were large formal studies taking place alongside small evaluations of partnership practice. There was also intense interest in policy development, debate with internal and external colleagues and in research and evidence that was being generated elsewhere. All of this added up to a sense of *'forensic interrogation wherever we go'* – the organisation describing itself as constantly on the lookout for examples of innovative research and practice.

Constant learning and sharing

"I buy lots of books – I read lots of different books – I don't necessarily use the web – I tend to be a book person more than anything and I have a library here – I've created a library – I always say that everyone must have a book being read of some kind."

The organisation provided opportunities for a wide range of learning. This included conferences, regular meetings to discuss strategic and practice issues, training and briefing sessions for

frontline staff, partnership working where skills were exchanged, the cascading of information and learning from courses, collaborative responses to consultations and a culture of open communication.

“.....is a group of passionate people involved in everything – there is not enough time to think. I love the days with the consultants looking at current research and legislation and their impact.”

All frontline staff and managers were supported to undergo NVQ and Higher Education undergraduate and post graduate qualifications as appropriate and staff members were encouraged to take note of and participate in the organisation’s own research and campaigns.

A belief in the importance of culture

“You can have as many workforce strategies as you like but if the culture is one of anxiety and not having the confidence to be able to operate that’s what leads people to risk averse places where they are not really maximizing their potential.”

Senior personnel within the organisation had clear beliefs about what works for children and young people and families. Personnel interviewed had an equally clear conviction about the need for change and the need for knowledge generation to support this change. They were putting together a five year plan which included research targets and had developed their delivery arm in order to ‘*put our reputation where our mouth is.*’ They described themselves as looking for ‘*solutions*’ at all levels of the organisation and had embedded this philosophy within job descriptions and selection processes. The organisation had increased in size with the development of the delivery arm but there was a desire to retain a personal approach and a sense of creative dynamism.

5.2.4 Exemplars

Collaborative health project (*reflection on action*)

The Head of Children’s Services was part of a collaborative project with the local PCT. The project had three parts to it:

- A breastfeeding project to train mothers to be peer supporters
- A one stop shop where health services were delivered within children’s centres

- A workforce integration project

The breastfeeding project had resulted in one third of the parents saying that they breast fed for longer than they would have done otherwise. Health visitors, mothers and peer supporters had all benefited from the development of the new service. Health visitors were able to achieve targets with less input, parents preferred the support of other mothers and the peer supporters felt that they learned through the experience.

The one stop shop had resulted in health visitors spending time in children's centres twice a week and also had introduced a facility for parents to weigh their babies themselves outside of formal clinic times.

The workforce integration project identified shared targets between health practitioners and children's centres, leading to duplication of work. They were then able to work out how they might reduce this duplication.

Family support workers (*published research, reflection on action*)

The organisation had produced interim findings of a large scale research project looking at the experience and support needs of families. The research included surveys, focus groups and study visits talking to families and professionals working with them. This project had highlighted that there was a set of families that were not in crisis, but who were only just coping. These families would have liked support from people that they could trust but who would also offer some challenge; a description that fitted with the model of outreach worker that the organisation was developing and testing out within its own centres.

Prior to this, the organisation had carried out externally funded research into the expectations and skills base necessary for outreach workers. Findings from the research were being taken forward by the funders. Meanwhile the organisation had applied learning from the project to the development of the outreach role within their own centres and was now reviewing how the role

played out in practice. They had therefore been able to verify that this was a central workforce role but that there was a need for more work to assess properly the support and training needs of such workers. This provided an example of evidence from a variety of sources coming together to demonstrate a workforce need.

Targeted team (*reflection on action, self learning*)

The children's centre teams included outreach workers with a case load. These were supported by a central targeted team with particular professional specialisms in drug and alcohol misuse, special educational needs, parenting and domestic abuse. The targeted team members worked alongside the outreach workers with the families and delivered training to them as a group to increase their general awareness. This resulted in an up-skilling of the outreach workers who remained the constant presence for the family. This approach had helped to identify that there were gaps in services, for example, a time delay between diagnosis of particular conditions and support being available for a family. The outreach worker and the targeted worker could then jointly develop a programme of support.

Key messages

- **Attention to organisational culture is important in the development of a vibrant and creative learning environment. A culture that encourages innovation, sharing and interrogation is more likely to respond to and to generate research.**
- **Reflective activity that highlights issues, draws upon existing evidence, encourages spaces for debate and tests and evaluates ideas in practice, will contribute to a virtuous cycle that connects research, policy and practice.**
- **Stakeholders from across the organisation have a contribution to make to the generation of evidence and the search for solutions. This can be encouraged through active involvement and support and access to appropriate and collaborative learning opportunities.**

5.3 Case study 3 – Sure Start Children’s Centre

5.3.1 Context

This Sure Start Children’s Centre (SSCC) offers services to children between 0 and 5 years in both urban and rural communities, including some in which indicators of need are below national and county averages. The SSCC is operated by a national charity which has been commissioned by a County Council to run a number of Children’s Centres. At a national level, the charity produces research concerning issues affecting children’s wellbeing, as well as evaluations of individual centres. At the local level, staff are employed by the charity, but there is considerable dovetailing and co-operation with the Council, which also offers a range of children’s services through local authority organisations and Children’s Trusts.

There are approximately 25 members of staff working within the SSCC, making up four teams with different foci: Health Care, Family Support, Early Years and Administration. Health Care is the smallest team with only one part-time individual, while Early Years is the largest, with approximately eight full-time equivalent members of staff.

5.3.2 Themes

The concept of ‘workforce research’ appeared to be quite abstract for most of the interviewees, and they found it difficult to relate it directly to the way that they worked, or the way that the organisation operated. There was no explicit strategy for implementing workforce research. However, the data showed that the way that the workforce operated was evidence-based, due to a strong focus on training and development; and the quality of training selected ensured that relevant research findings underpinned the way that individual practitioners worked. There was also evidence of knowledge transfer and generation within the organisation and an emphasis on partnership working, including the involvement of parents.

Training and development

Staff were offered formal training and development either because it was mandatory within the charity, such as training about basic safeguarding or domestic violence; or because it was considered that staff needed to attend a course in order to equip themselves with necessary skills and information. These choices were guided by both national and county agendas, as well as concern to provide staff with evidence-based training:

“County is saying that it wants all its staff to work with parents to have national standards, so I’ve put two members of staff through that course County has a targeted mental health in schools project initiative and ... one of the arms of that is this programme called Thrive ... our staff have just done the early years model of Thrive¹ ...we choose some of the training because obviously there’s government guidance ... the government is saying it wants its children’s centre leaders to have NPQICL² ...we always try and validate by making sure that we’re choosing a programme that’s got validity, it’s got experience, has already got its evidence-informed outcomes, so that we know that we’re investing in something that makes sense.”

Staff had undergone training with recognised models for early years working, such as the Solihull approach (Solihull NHS Care Trust, 2009), PICL (Pen Green Research, 2010) and the Webster-Stratton ‘Incredible Years’ (The Incredible Years, 2009) programmes, which was thought to equip them with skills in line with both relevant research findings and current agendas concerning early years workers. Two interviewees had completed the NPQICL, and it was felt that this had enabled them to use relevant evidence to ‘develop the work of the Children’s Centre’.

Knowledge transfer and generation

There was evidence of individuals transferring knowledge from one context to another, using what they had learned and applying it to their own particular set of circumstances, as well as teaching other colleagues where appropriate:

“Our Early Years is very much framed around Pen Green..... because very much their research has been all around how they’ve worked with parents and children together and that’s key to the Children’s Centre really... also we have been quite influenced by Reggio Emilia³... about the environment and how we see the child ... it was really important right at the beginning, as a

¹ Fronting The Challenge Projects Ltd (2009)

² National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership

³ Learning and Teaching Scotland (2006)

whole team we owned that philosophy if you like, so we did quite a lot of in-house stuff and soon I delivered a lot of that. “

Informal learning played a significant role among the SSCC staff, as it was expected that individuals who attended courses would cascade their learning to their colleagues. This was not restricted to staff within the SSCC: for example, negotiations were under way with local private childcare providers to enable SSCC staff members who were undertaking the Early Years Thrive training to disseminate their learning to workers in those settings.

Knowledge was also generated in the SSCC through reflection, both at an individual and collective level. All members of staff received regular supervision (a mandatory condition of employment), and a prime purpose of this was for individuals to reflect on their practice and on their working conditions, so as to address any problems, to enhance the way that they worked and to identify training needs. Regular team meetings were also held, during which the staff had the opportunity to reflect on how the SSCC was functioning as an organisation.

Partnership working

The SSCC staff liaised with a number of different agencies and organisations, including health care, social services, schools and police. There was acknowledgement that some of these relationships had been difficult at times, particularly that with health care staff, and some of the interviewees spoke about having to ‘*chip away*’ at this problem. With the exception of the individuals who had completed the NPQICL, most of the interviewees were not aware of evidence relating to partnership working. However, a few of them mentioned how their relationships with the local health visitors had improved due to the latter having recently started to share office space with them on occasion, and one interviewee spoke about how she was learning from the health visitors because of this new arrangement. Another interviewee reported that, within the SSCC itself, the members of the different teams had developed much better relationships since re-organising their open plan office so that they no longer sat in ‘team’ blocs. These examples of development and learning from experience correspond closely with research findings concerning the benefits of physical proximity between different professional groups (Pollard et al, 2008; Tagliaventi and Mattarelli, 2006), and illustrate how informal learning can enhance workforce capacity.

Working in partnership with parents was considered a key feature of the way that the SSCC operated. When the centre was being built, parents had been consulted about the physical environment, including materials for floors, walls and furniture. Parents helped to facilitate La Leche breastfeeding groups (La Leche League Great Britain, 2009), and a few had done the 'Incredible Years' course (The Incredible Years, 2009), and so had been involved with facilitating groups within the SSCC. They were also being recruited as 'mystery shoppers' to help evaluate a range of services offered by the SSCC.

5.3.4 Exemplars

Supporting families with mental health problems (*reflection on action*)

At the regional level, discrete projects conducted by the charity, including some action learning sets, generated knowledge. A project was described which was being undertaken in another Children's Centre run by the charity to support families with mental health problems. This involved that Centre's staff and the local mental health worker working together. It was anticipated that, should the outcomes of that project be positively evaluated, the model could be rolled out to other Children's Centres in the area, including the SSCC. This would entail staff needing to bring their specialist skills to bear within a new framework:

"It involves ... elements of the family therapy work that the mental health worker does combined with the family support work that the Sure Start member of the team does with play workers working alongside. So it's a sort of next move on from the targeted family support that we've been delivering but with an even more targeted and specific focus."

Multi-agency partnership training (*self-learning*)

One interviewee was currently enrolled in a multi-agency partnership training course, run by *County*. In this course, which had only recently been set up, and was led by an individual with experience of neuro-linguistic programming, individuals from different agencies were being encouraged to share reflections on their own practice with each other. This interviewee was enthusiastic about what she was learning, and the opportunities which she was being given through the course:

“I’ve really sort of like tuned into this....about training and I’m finding it really good. So I’ve made an appointment to actually do a ‘shadow’ visit with one of the PCSOs⁴.”

5.3.4 Impact

With any attempt to implement research findings in practice, impact is of prime interest. However, as there was little explicit emphasis on workforce research within the organisation, concern with impact was focused on evaluating services themselves, rather than on the way in which evidence or research concerning the workforce impacted upon them. As the SSCC selected and adhered to training for staff that was invariably evidence-based, it was thought that evaluation was only significant where it concerned families’ responses to the services based upon it:

“We don’t need to prove to you that that course works, that’s already been proved [over and over again]. I need to prove to you what difference it’s making to my local families ... one of the ways that we evaluate is by using systems that work and having staff who are trained in doing it ... we don’t water it down.”

Key messages

- **Selection of training courses with a proven evidence base can help ensure that staff have the skills they need to deliver services effectively.**
- **Learning derived from one context can be transferred and adapted to specific circumstances in a way which enhances staff capacity to deliver services effectively.**
- **Informal learning that agrees with formal knowledge about workforce issues can help to develop workforce capacity.**

⁴ Police Community Support Officers

6. Cross-case analysis

The case study site agencies emerged from the data as knowledge-based organisations. The dual challenge of service integration and understanding children and young people's lives created a need to expand their knowledge base.

6.1 Types of research/evidence used

Information about the types of research/evidence (as set out in the Research typology on p14) used in all three case study sites is provided in Table 4:

Table 4. Types of research/evidence used in all the case study sites

Type of research/evidence used	Comments/details
Published/accredited academic research	Individuals were undertaking HE studies, including qualitative and quantitative studies and literature reviews. However, in one site, how this work informed the organisation was not clear. External evidence also included research disseminated by national bodies and through policy and published literature.
Reflection on action	All sites engaged with a process of action learning or research. There was evidence of ongoing or planned participatory evaluation in a variety of formats, usually focused on children and young people or parents of very young children. Outcomes of these evaluations were used to inform the organisations, but not necessarily in a systematic fashion.
Self-learning	Reflection on own experience appeared to be a particular strength in all three organisations. This took a variety of forms, including staff training, supervision, team meetings and briefings and practice analysis.

All the organisations engaged widely in professional development through formal education and training, including academic courses. Integrated working processes were used to promote integrated working.

6.2 Use of research/evidence in practice

6.2.1 Change contexts

A consistent theme running through the data was change as a context for research. While there was a sense of struggle and occasional scepticism, there was no sense of resistance to change. This observation has to be qualified by the fact that we spoke often with people carrying change responsibilities (strategic leads, research officers, trainers). However, the use of research in the change process appeared to allow people to find meaning in and respond to changes. Where change agendas were perceived as having a purpose, relevant workforce research was valued as making a useful contribution to support practitioners, through enhancing their capacity to deliver innovative and effective services to children and young people.

Across all the case study sites, leadership responsibility for engagement with research, whether explicit or implicit, appeared to be pivotal. Individuals in management and workforce development posts regarded this responsibility as an integral part of their role, which in turn enhanced their own effectiveness as managers. They displayed evidence of innovative thinking and willingness to consider new ideas. This strong leadership fostered and supported enthusiasm among other colleagues for change and in-depth learning.

6.2.2 Research and learning culture

All the organisations displayed features that supported engagement with research and learning. This was evidenced through a range of activities such as action learning sets, supervision, team-building and formal learning opportunities, such as those provided by HEIs. Where strong links had been developed with HEIs, this appeared to facilitate access to and interpretation of relevant workforce research and evidence.

The success of research engagement within the organisations did not depend entirely on key individuals responsible for workforce development, working in isolation. Some indicated that they had ongoing relationships with professional and national research bodies, through which they were supported in their own learning and ability to make decisions about workforce research implementation.

Although individuals in strategic roles appeared key in all the organisations, there was wider engagement with research amongst the organisations. For example, through personal reflection and self-learning, individuals fulfilling different roles initiated their own learning to inform their practice, which appeared to increase their job satisfaction, despite an often stressful working environment.

Relationships between staff members within individual organisations were important for research dissemination. A culture of openness and transparency promoted spaces for debate and receptiveness to new ideas and ways of working.

6.2.3 Partnership working

A strong finding emerging from the data was the commitment to involving children and young people or parents as partners in development of the workforce. The practitioners were keen to engage them in a continuous process of evaluation and reflection on the service, with a focus on improving practice. This included consultation about what sort of workforce the children, young people and parents thought was appropriate.

Through participatory approaches, the aims of practitioners and children, young people and parents appeared to be knitted together and resulted in a closer relationship between the organisations and those for whom the services were designed.

There was a strong commitment to partnership working with individuals from other agencies and other disciplines, even though in some cases this was seen as a political necessity rather than a

philosophical choice. Nevertheless, there was evidence of willingness to learn about other disciplines and agencies, to develop necessary skills and to engage in effective multi-agency training and integrated working.

6.3 Emerging issues

From two of the case studies, it appeared that, although strategic decisions were often being made about the use of workforce research/evidence, there was little explicit strategy in place concerning research use. In some cases, the effect of a particular individual in a specific role seemed to be the pivotal factor (see 6.2.1 above). This meant that, despite statutory obligations in this regard, these organisations appeared to be potentially vulnerable to changes of personnel. Where there seemed to be greater organisational awareness about the use of workforce research (Case study 2), it is notable that a degree of flexibility was built in to the organisational processes, which enabled a rich and varied research culture to flourish.

Despite the positive culture outlined in all the case study sites, there was little confidence in measuring the impact of engagement with, or implementation of, workforce research/evidence. All offered examples of change in practice, but were generally unable to draw a direct link between research/evidence, these changes and outcomes for children and young people. The chief contributing factor to this situation appeared to be the complexity of the issues being explored. On the other hand, it was this very complexity that appeared to provide the richness of the working experience and learning that was taking place for many practitioners. Many people appeared to see the challenges of the working environment, coupled with space for learning and reflection, as an opportunity rather than a barrier.

7. Lessons learned and key messages

7.1 Methodological lessons

This pilot study's primary purpose was to test methods for addressing the project objectives. A number of key methodological lessons have been identified:

- The two-phase design enabled the team to collect data with some breadth and depth and could be employed within a full study on a national scale.
- The use of an initial survey allowed identification of those organisations supporting the adoption of workforce research/evidence to develop professional practice. The survey also facilitated exploration of how agencies apply workforce research/evidence to the development of everyday professional practice.
- The use of an initial survey enabled the collection of data that informed the more in-depth case study visits.
- The survey interview question schedule (Appendix I) and template for recording data (Appendix III) offer formats for collecting and recording national data on how research/evidence on workforce issues has been used to inform services for children and young people.
- Good administrative support was essential for identifying, locating and helping to recruit participants for both phases of the pilot study.
- A wider national survey conducted over a realistic timeframe (at least twelve months) would provide more robust data to allow the identification of indicators for research engagement. Pilot data collected here suggest there are a number of factors that might influence research engagement, such as strategic Higher Education links, key staff roles

with a remit to disseminate research and access to external resources such as CWDC grants. Other areas include: access to internal and external research, training, opportunities for action learning, supervision models and opportunity to engage with children and young people using the services.

- The sampling framework (Appendix II) developed within Phase 1 of this pilot study could usefully inform a strategy for national case study sampling, allowing an informed approach to a sample selection.
- As was to be expected with a convenience sample, not all the case study sites met all the criteria set out within the sampling framework. In the opinion of the researchers, this limited the amount and quality of data which could be collected in at least one case. In particular, this made it impractical to attempt to detail where particular initiatives had been developed as a result of existing research/evidence about workforce issues. However, this does raise the possibility that the sampling framework could be used in future research not only to identify organisations where good practice in engagement with workforce research/evidence could be explored, but also those where the focus might be on exploring a context where such engagement was either difficult or only implicit.
- A considerable amount of time was spent in gaining access to case study sites. This often depended on key contacts within organisations. Once access had been granted in principle, there was still often a lengthy wait while suitable arrangements were made for data. In a larger study, it would be imperative to build in enough time to ensure and arrange access to appropriate agencies.

- Time was also a limiting factor when collecting data in the case study sites. The opportunity to spend more time in a site would allow a wider group of practitioners at different levels to be recruited, which in turn would provide more varied data about the impact of engagement with workforce research/evidence on practice with children and young people.
- Key data missing from the case studies was that drawn from direct observation of practice. This was also due to time constraints, given the preparation which is needed to enable introduction of researchers into settings in which practitioners and children, young people and their families interact. Such direct observation would enhance the quality of findings through triangulation with interviewee responses and reports, and would also allow some evaluation of the impact of workforce research on practice.
- Given the complexity of identifying and measuring impact it is understandable that providing an evidence base that suggests workforce research has impacted on practice outcomes is challenging and requires testing. In this pilot study the participants suggested it was difficult to measure the impact workforce research/evidence had on practice, though our analysis identified some strategic indicators. These included the existence of mechanisms to monitor changes to the workforce and to organisational processes, and specific outcomes and opportunities to share and debate findings with a wider community of practice. A project engaging with a wider national sample might explore the potential for identification and measurement of impact. This might entail a first phase describing and measuring direct impact of the implementation of workforce research/evidence on individuals' skills, roles and attitudes, as well as on organisational processes and protocols. A second phase could involve evaluation of how these factors affect service delivery. Such a strategy would necessarily require longitudinal research, in terms of pre- and post-testing within both phases.

- Given the limited timescale and pilot nature of this study, service user engagement in the research process was restricted to membership of the study's advisory group. In addition, service user members of the group were adult users of health and social care services, as the limited timescale precluded the preparation needed to include children or young people in this capacity. A larger national study might be able to expand this small scale initiative, so as to support children and young people's engagement in the research process from inception to completion.
- A further dimension of a national study could be gained through the inclusion of a Health Economist on the research team. Given that research activity and its dissemination are expensive it would be useful to draw some observations and data around cost-benefit analysis.

7.2 Further key messages

From the data collected, the following key messages emerged:

- Strong leadership and/or dedicated development roles within organisations are essential for comprehensive and constructive engagement with, and implementation of, workforce research/evidence. This finding agrees with what is known about the importance of effective leadership within care organisations (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2009).
- Policy agendas concerning statutory change and reform within children and young people's services are key drivers for the use of workforce research/evidence. It is notable that most of our data support the view that organisations and individuals working within them have embraced, or at least accepted, the need for change, and are committed to developing the services accordingly.
- The value of a supportive culture and clear organisational strategy for the implementation of workforce research/evidence cannot be overestimated. In this context, it should be

noted that the quality of supervision may be pivotal. It is known that where practitioners receive effective supervision, they have a correspondingly positive view of the organisational culture as promoting evidence-based practice (Collins-Camargo and Royse, 2010).

- Individuals are willing to develop participatory activities with both colleagues from other disciplines and agencies, and with children, young people and parents. This includes being prepared to acquire and develop the necessary skills sets.
- When considering the types of research that were used, our data revealed that self-learning was more often employed than other types of evidence. In particular, this may indicate the importance of reflection on own practice as a driver for developing further skills and appropriate knowledge. The importance of supervision in this context should also be noted (Hawkins and Shohet, 2007; Anning and Edwards 2006).
- Workforce research/evidence implementation requires the dedication of sufficient time and resources, as well as capacity in terms of appropriate skills.

7.3 Limitations

As previously stated, the aim of the pilot study described in this report was to test methods for identifying how research on workforce issues is used to inform practice within services for children and young people. A variety of lessons about methodological issues have been drawn from this pilot study, which the research team believes can usefully be applied to future research in this area. Substantive findings reported here, concerning the context, methods and impact of implementing workforce research/evidence in organisations delivering services for children and young people must, however, be treated with caution. They are based on a limited amount of data drawn from a small sample, and consequently require further exploration and testing.

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9. Appendices

Appendix I – Interview schedule

1. Please confirm your role within your organisation and tell me a little about its size, location and the scope of its practice with children and young people?
2. What training and development opportunities and processes are provided for practitioners and managers (and trustees and users?) within the organisation?
3. Are there any other ways in which learning and the use of research evidence are encouraged within your organisation? What do you think are the most effective methods? What barriers have you met with?
4. What research/evidence about workforce issues has been particularly significant in the organisation? Can you identify any key research sources that have informed the workforce development plan?
5. Can you give any examples of how research has informed practice or projects undertaken by managers/practitioners/service users? Can you describe one please?
6. Can you tell us where decisions are made (and by whom) about research use in the organisation? Do you have a research strategy? If so, how can people contribute to this?
7. How do practitioners and managers within your organisation generate their own learning through research or evaluation? Can you describe an example?
8. Do you involve children young people and families in learning, research or evaluation activity? if so, how?
9. To sum up, can you give an example of what you consider to be good practice within your organisation in the use of or contribution to research/evidence? What were the influential factors or conditions that contributed to this example?
10. Do you think the use of workforce research/evidence has had an impact on the operation of the organisation and on service delivery? Do you have methods for identifying impact? Has it supported existing practice and/or changed the workforce? Can you identify the most effective methods for the use of research?
11. Are you interested in developing your use and generation of research and, if so, what would support you to do this?

Appendix II –Sampling framework

Desirable criteria	Explanation
Size of the organisation	Smaller organisations were unable to demonstrate engagement with workforce research and the current evidence base
Engagement with HE institutions	Those engaging with HE were more aware of the importance of an evidence base and were more systematic in their use of evidence
In-house training provided	Those organisations with in-house training provided a practical mechanism for the discussion and implementation of research and evidence-based findings
Key roles for workforce evidence implementation	A leadership role with responsibility for the development and implementation of workforce strategy drove the research agenda in the organisation effectively
Encourage staff reflection on practice	Reflection was identified as a key method for enhancing staff skills and understanding
Dissemination of key messages from research or evidence	Dissemination indicated that the organisation valued the skilling of staff, partners and service users, with relation to the current evidence base
Users engaged in evaluating local practice and deciding practice development priorities	User voice contributed authentically to the development and delivery of the service

Appendix III – Template for recording survey data

Organisation detail	Size (<i>no of workers</i>)	Location & Type (<i>inner-city/ urban/ rural/ sector/ national/local</i>)	Scope of practice	Research strategy? Links/partnerships (<i>HEIs/ research centres/ etc</i>)
Interviewee detail	Title	Role	Decision-maker	If interviewee not decision-maker, who?
Training & development	CPD Stakeholders	Team development Stakeholders	In-house training Type + stakeholders	Other Type + stakeholders
Encouragement for use of research evidence	Support		Barriers	
Research/evidence used in the workplace	Key research 1 Type (<i>research typology</i>)	Key research 2 Type (<i>research typology</i>)	Key research 3 Type (<i>research typology</i>)	Other research Type (<i>research typology</i>)
Research informed practice /project	Description Research base	Rationale	Process (<i>who involved, how implemented</i>)	Benefits Challenges
Impact on practice	Description	How identified	Effect (<i>maintain/change existing practice</i>)	Effective methods for using research

Template for recording survey data (continued)

Involvement of children and young people	Description		Role played by children and young people	
Learning generation	Type, benefits, challenges	Type, benefits, challenges	Type, benefits, challenges	Type, benefits, challenges
Example of good practice				