

**Proposed Director of Studies:** Professor Di Bailey

**Project Title:** Has the early help agenda for children and families' in social work, worked?

**Expected REF Unit of Assessment:** C22/A04

**Summary of project:**

Local authority children's services operate with the aim to make children and families lives' safer and happier by focusing on opportunities for permanency and healthy development and wellbeing. Within government policy in the UK there is an increasing emphasis on early help services (Children and Families Act 2014, and Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children DH, 2011). Early help strategies are targeted at promoting healthy development and wellbeing generally as well as early help for children and young people with specific needs such as mental health issues (Future In Mind, NHS England 2015).

Within Nottinghamshire we know that in terms of children and young people:

- over 70% of initial assessments are completed within the required timescales and this performance is better than comparable Local Authorities
- there are lower numbers on Child Protection Plans for 12 months or more compared with comparable Local Authorities
- there are comparatively more children on repeat plans than comparable authorities or in England generally.

In terms of adoption in Nottinghamshire we know that:

- children are being placed for adoption in a timely way with the average time between a child entering care and moving in with an adoptive family being lower than comparable authorities and also lower than the average time for England generally.

This data suggests that Nottinghamshire is performing well in terms of offering help to children and young people at a relatively early stage and in a timely manner. However what remains to be established is whether good intentions as embodied in government policy and implemented through early help initiatives and targets really works in respect of promoting positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

**Project Aims:**

The aim of this project is therefore twofold:

1. to explore whether early help services in Nottinghamshire are contributing to better outcomes for children and young people
2. to enhance our understanding of what these positive outcomes look like from the different perspectives of policy makers, practitioners, children, young people and their families in order to influence an evidence informed approach to service delivery/configuration and the timing of early help

**Research Design**

The nature of the research requires a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches be used to gather a range of data including locally held statistics, as well as the use of Participatory Action Research to capture narratives from children and young people, practitioners and policy makers. Through a process of abductive analysis (theorising from the data as it emerges) it should be possible to explore the effectiveness or not of early help services for children young people and their families. It is expected that the applicant will tailor the research design to the project aims and objectives as these are refined and

developed in the early stages of the study and with agreement from the Local Authority who have agreed to act as the fieldwork site for this study.

**Specific qualifications/subject areas required of the applicants for this project (e.g. First degree in specific subject area):**

UK 1<sup>st</sup> Class / 2.1 Bachelor's degree (or UK equivalent according to NARIC) and /or UK Master's degree with a minimum of a merit/commendation in a relevant subject area either psychology or social work.

**Application deadline: 5pm (UK time) on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

**Funding notes**

This studentship competition is open to applicants who wish to study for a PhD on a full-time basis only. The studentship will pay UK/EU fees (currently set at £4,195 for 2017/18 and are revised annually) and provide a maintenance stipend linked to the RCUK rate (this is revised annually and is currently £14,553 for academic year 2017/18) for up to three years\*. The studentships will be expected to commence in 2017.

\*Applications from non-EU students are welcome, but a successful non-EU candidate would be responsible for paying the difference between non-EU and UK/EU fees. (Fees for 2017/18 are £12,900 for non-EU students and £4,195 for UK/EU students)