



Department
for Education

Analytical associate pool

**Summary of recent small-scale research
projects**

November 2020

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Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) uses high quality evidence and analysis to inform policy development and delivery to achieve [our vision](#) - to achieve a highly educated society in which opportunity is equal for young person no matter what their background or family circumstances.

Within the DfE there is an analytical community which comprises statisticians, economists, social and operational researchers. These specialists feed in analysis and research to strategy, policy development and delivery.

While much analysis is undertaken in-house and substantial projects are commissioned to external organisations, there is often a need to quickly commission small-scale projects.

We have therefore created a pool of Analytical Associates who can bring specific specialist expertise, knowledge and skills into the department to supplement and develop our internal analytical capability.

In June 2014 we invited applications from individuals to join the pool. We received an overwhelming response and, after evaluating the expertise of everyone who applied, we established the Analytical Associate Pool.

Over 200 independent academics and researchers are in the pool, and they can be commissioned to carry out small-scale data analysis, rapid literature reviews and peer review. They also provide training, quality assurance and expert advice on an ad-hoc basis. Most projects cost less than £15,000, and more than 180 projects have been commissioned since the pool opened in September 2014.

Summary of projects

At DfE we aim to make analysis publicly available and we follow the Government Social Research (GSR) [protocol](#) for publishing research. Much of the analysis undertaken through the Associate Pool is only small in nature and we are publishing a summary of findings here to ensure that they are shared. More substantial work is published in stand-alone reports throughout the year. See page 7 for details and links to projects already published.

Research on fees paid by local authorities for children's homes in England

Associates: Dr Stephen Boxford, with Colin Horswell and Eleanor Southern-Wilkins (Cordis Bright)

The research

The Department for Education (DfE) is committed to supporting local authorities to meet their statutory duty to provide suitable accommodation and care to all looked-after children. As of 31 March 2019, there were over 2,200 registered children's homes in England providing over 9,500 open registered placements (secure homes and residential special schools excluded).

Anecdotal evidence from a range of local authorities has suggested that the residential care market has experienced issues such as a lack of sufficiency and an increase in high cost placements. Between 2017-18 and 2018-19, local authority expenditure on children looked after increased, as did expenditure on residential care. The 2016 review of residential care carried out by Sir Martin Narey highlighted the need to improve the commissioning of these residential placements to ensure improved value for money can be achieved.

To help support local authorities to accomplish this, the DfE wanted to establish a robust understanding of the fees being paid by local authorities for residential care placements and to explore which factors contribute to these fees.

The research examined weekly fees paid by local authorities for looked after children accommodated in open registered children's homes. The study excluded secure and unregulated provision.

The research examined whether correlations exist between fees paid and characteristics of: (a) the child; (b) the children's home provider; and (c) the commissioner.

All local authorities in England were asked to participate by completing a questionnaire requesting information about all children placed in open registered children's homes on 1

September 2019. The questionnaire requested information about characteristics of looked after children, (such as age); placement characteristics , (for example, fee per week), number of weeks accommodated; commissioner characteristics (such as the mechanism used to commission the place); Ofsted Unique Reference Number (URN) for the home. The Ofsted URN was used to draw-in other data provided by Ofsted about home characteristics. This enabled the analysis to also examine any connections between fee and characteristics such as size of home or location.

Seventy-eight local authorities responded to the survey, representing between 34% and 67% of local authorities in each region. Data was provided on 2,464 looked after children.

Key findings

Overview of fees

- The overall mean average fee for children's homes in this study is £3,962 per week.
- There is a wide range of fees, with outliers ranging from £350 per week up to the most expensive costing £14,030 per week
- Excluding outliers, 95% of fees fall within the range of £1,170 to £6,542. Half of all fees fall within £3,183 and £4,530.

Explanations for variations in fees

This study found there was no correlation with fees in the following areas:

- Gender of the child
- Presence of an Education Health Care (EHC) plan (which sets out a child's special educational, health and social care needs and what help the local authority will provide to meet those needs).
- Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Services (CAMHS) provision being accessed by the child.
- How the place was commissioned.

There is some or mixed correlation with higher fees and the following:

- Age of the child. Average fees were higher for younger children.
- Ethnicity. Average fees were highest for children from Black/African/Caribbean/Black British and Other ethnic groups.
- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) score. Average fee increased slightly as SDQ score increased.
- Disability. Average fees are similar for children who were registered disabled to those who are not but the range of fees are wider.
- Number of factors present (of EHC, CAMHS and disability). Those having all 3 factors had highest average fee.
- Whether healthcare, mental health care and other support were included. These were associated with slightly higher average fees.
- Ofsted registration date. Recently registered or re-registered had slightly higher average fees.

- Ofsted rating of the home. Outstanding homes had the lowest average fee.

There is clearer correlation in relation to:

- Time accommodated in the home. Shorter time accommodated had higher average fees.
- Size of the home. Homes with 1 bed and 2 beds had higher average fees.
- Location of home. South West region had higher average fees.
- Distance from the child's own local authority. Those more than 20 miles away and outside 'home' local authority boundary had higher average fees.
- Whether education was included as part of the fee. Those providing education had higher average fees.
- The number of dimensions of care included (of social care, healthcare, education, mental health care and other support). More dimensions of care had higher average fees
- The location of the commissioner. South West and East of England had higher average fees.
- The number of commissioners placing in each home. More commissioners had higher average fees.

Conclusion

Our analysis suggests that characteristics of the home, the placement and the commissioner are more likely to affect fees than characteristics of the individual child.

Published full project reports

In addition to these summaries, some Associate Pool projects have been published as a full report on the [GOV.UK/DfE](https://www.gov.uk/dfE) or on Associate's own websites. See below for more information on these publications.

Table 1 Associate Pool Published Reports since July 2019

Date	Title	Description
19 July 2019	School improvement systems in high performing countries	This report was a review of the practices and processes used by 5 countries with high-performing school systems. It reviewed published evidence on school improvement activities in Estonia, Finland, Germany, Singapore and Taiwan.
12 February 2020	Use of unregulated and unregistered provision for children in care	This research was carried out to understand the increase in use of unregulated and unregistered provision for children in care and care leavers, and concerns about quality.
27 February 2020	Approaches to Supported Internship delivery	Qualitative research on the delivery of supported internships in England.
14 July 2020	Higher technical education consultation - analysis	This was an independent analysis by York Consulting of responses to the Department for Education's (DfE) consultation on higher technical education.

Further information

If you would like any further information about the Associate Pool or the projects included in this summary please email us on: associate.pool@education.gov.uk



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