

Research Briefing N° 4

Supporting young people on the edge of entering public care: cross national perspectives

This research examines public care and support services for young people at risk of entering care in other European countries and the lessons that can be learnt for England's care system.

Key words: public care; care system; young people; child welfare; children in need



Key findings

- Denmark, France and Germany all have a greater proportion of children looked after away from home than does England. However, such comparisons are limited by differences in how the statistics are collected and which groups of children are included. There was no clear evidence from the interviews that thresholds for care entry were lower in other countries than in England.
- Young people in the care system in England are not a homogenous population. In particular, young people aged 10-15 years form quite diverse groups and there are important differences between those who enter care for the first time (aged between 10-15) and those who re-enter at this age with a previous history of care.
- Research in all the countries highlighted the potential for therapeutic approaches to support young people and families in order to prevent out-of-home placement.
- The continental European countries appeared to have a wider range of options when children did need to live away from home, which included part-time, respite and shared-care arrangements. Innovative models were found in England too, but the study highlighted a need to develop further a differentiated array of placement choices.
- In all four countries, interviewees emphasised the importance of engaging young people and their families in the process of planning for placement.
- The workforce supporting children and families in the other European countries had higher levels of qualification than in England.

The research suggested that placement away from home could usefully be seen as one option for supporting young people experiencing difficulties and their families, whereas the English policy notion of young people being on the edge of care implies a discontinuity between those 'in' and 'out' of care.

What we did

This study aimed to learn from experience in Europe about how entry to public care for young people (aged 10 or over) could be either prevented, or planned and supported, through support for young people and their families. It examined local and national policies in Denmark, France and Germany compared to England.

The study considered: the types of support available; the process of making decisions about care entry and placement and the extent to which young people and their parents were involved in this; the professional qualifications of the workers (with a particular focus on social pedagogy); and the nature and extent of multi-agency working. The fieldwork was carried out in 2007 and 2008

and funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

How we did it

The research had three main components:

- an 'expert report' prepared by a research partner in each of the three European countries;
- a comparative analysis of statistical data on children in public care across the countries (including a detailed analysis of the English Government's data on young people aged 10-15 in the care system); and
- over 100 face-to-face interviews carried out in the four countries with policy makers, service managers and practitioners, in both urban and rural areas.

Further information

See ['Working at the 'edges' of care? European models of support for young people and families'](#) for a more detailed research summary (pdf 0.7mb)

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