

# Call for Evidence

## Submission Template

### How to complete and submit

- **Save** this word document to an appropriate place on your computer.
- Enter your responses into the text boxes provided.
- Once complete, email this document with the subject heading “**Call for Evidence Response**” to:

[observatory.scoping.study@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:observatory.scoping.study@lancaster.ac.uk)

### Introduction

In Section A, you are required to complete participant and organisational details and to confirm consent in order to comply with Lancaster University’s ethical clearance procedures.

Questions are then divided into two sections; use of research evidence in policy and practice (section B) and priority functions and audiences for a new national observatory (section C) as shown below. We would welcome detailed responses to all sections but understand that participants may not feel able to complete all questions. Section D provides space for additional comments.

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## Section A: Participant details and consent

### A.1 Your details

Your name	Dr Jenny Driscoll
Name of your organisation	BASPCAN – the Association of England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for Child Protection
Primary function(s) of your organisation	<p>BASPCAN is a registered charity and the leading multi-disciplinary Association for professionals and volunteers who work with children and families. The Association, established in 1979, supports individuals and organisations working to protect children from abuse and neglect, and in turn assists them in their support of families at times of crisis and need.</p> <p>A prime objective of the Association is to provide high quality opportunities for learning and professional development through regular conferences, the triennial Congress and the publication of the internationally renowned journal 'Child Abuse Review'. For over 8 years, BASPCAN ran a research awards programme with funding made to successful applicants (usually 2 awards of up to £5,000). Future plans are to support young researchers to attend congress to disseminate their research.</p>
Your role within the organisation	Trustee
Your own research experience/formal research training	PhD (King's College London); MSc Social Research Methods (University of Surrey). Research into outcomes of care leavers; academic commentary on case law and policy in relation to safeguarding/child protection; forthcoming research into role of schools in safeguarding (ESRC).

Describe primary roles and functions of your employees/members

BASPCAN is a membership organization open to all with an interest in the welfare of children, particularly professionals of all disciplines working in the field of child protection. We are open to individual and organizational membership and membership is drawn from the fields of social work, medicine, psychology, nursing, education, legal and law enforcement, child care, probation and academia.

### A.2 Consultation within your organisation

Please describe any internal consultation that has taken place within your organisation to inform this call for evidence (e.g. internal meeting, seminar, email discussion).

Teleconference for available trustees followed by wider email discussion.

If no specific consultation has been undertaken, please indicate what has informed this response to our call for evidence?

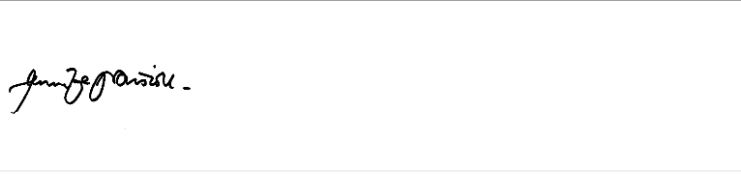
### A.3 Attendance at the dissemination event

We will run a dissemination event in Spring 2017 to share findings from this call for Evidence. If your organisation would like to attend this event, please nominate yourself or another member.

Attendee name	Dr Jenny Driscoll
Job title	Lecturer in Child Studies
Telephone number	07976 659070
Email	Jenny.driscoll@kcl.ac.uk

### A.4 Consent Form

Please sign to indicate that you have read the background document provided with this call for evidence and that you make this submission with full agreement of your organisation. By signing you also agree that your submission will be retained electronically, in accordance with Lancaster University guidelines, which stipulate that data must be kept for a minimum of 10 years after the end of a research study.

Signature	
Date	31 <sup>st</sup> October 2016

### A.5 Publication of submissions

We intend to publish submissions to this call for evidence online in the spirit of transparent consultation. Unless indicated below, we assume that you agree to your full response being published via the websites of Lancaster University and the Nuffield Foundation.

Please remove the name of my organisation from the published response.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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## Section B: Use of research evidence in policy and practice

### Question B1: Research use in organisations

Research evidence can play an important role at the case-level in the family justice system, by helping practitioners evaluate a range of options and arrive at the best decisions for individuals, children and families. Research can also play an important role in informing local and national policy, by providing insights into the performance of the family justice system or the effectiveness of new legislative, policy or practice initiatives.

**B1.1** How do individuals within your organisation currently use research evidence - for what purposes?

**B1.2** Can you provide one or more examples of the direct application of research in the work of your organisation (e.g. at the case-level or in service development)?

**B1.3** Can you provide one or more examples of how research has had a broader conceptual impact (e.g. has changed thinking about the nature of problems or solutions)?

B1.1 BASPCAN, as an organization, supports both the generation and dissemination of research. Members are from a variety of disciplines and work in many different roles. Their use of research evidence is therefore varied, but membership of BASPCAN is itself indicative of value being attached to credible research evidence. Health professionals report using research to inform the commissioning and delivery of services as well as changes in routine practice.

B1.2 As an organization, BASPCAN does not apply research directly, save in e.g. response to consultations.

B1.3 Recent work in relation to outcomes for care leavers has helped to elucidate whether poor outcomes are primarily attributable to children's pre-care experiences or their in-care treatment – a critical issue for the Family Justice System. Research in the Family Drug and Alcohol Court has provided evidence that holistic and intensive work with families can reduce the need for long-term care for some children.

## Question B2: Access to research evidence

A wealth of research is reported in a variety of formats. For example:

- Government departments publish findings in open access reports and executive summaries.
- Universities and other research centres publish peer-reviewed articles in academic journals as well as more accessible formats.
- Organisations specialising in knowledge mobilisation summarise research and promote the uptake and implementation of findings in policy and practice (e.g. Research in Practice).
- Conferences, seminars and training events are important vehicles for research dissemination as can social media.
- Social networks and personal contacts can play an important role in enhancing knowledge exchange, bridging the worlds of knowledge producers and knowledge users.
- Knowledge can be immediately available in house, where researchers, policy makers and/or practitioners work together to co-produce knowledge at a generate knowledge 'bottom up'.

**B2.1** How do individuals within your organisation access research evidence? Can you identify any preferred sources or methods?

**B2.2** Does your organisation, or do individuals within your organisation, subscribe to any journals, associations, or evidence intermediaries (such as Family Law, Association of Lawyers for Children, Research in Practice)? Please state which ones and comment on their usefulness.

**B2.3** Does your organisation fund attendance at annual conferences or seminars? Please state which ones and comment on their usefulness.

**B2.4** What does your organisation consider to be the most pressing barriers regarding access to research?

B2.1 BASPCAN do valuable and proven work in providing access to research evidence for members. We focus particularly on bringing together practitioners from various disciplines and academics to promote shared learning. Planning of conferences and training events is responsive to suggestions for future events from those attending current events. We use other formats such as websites, newsletters and reading matter for immediate access, however face-to-face meetings and discussions cannot be replaced, as evidenced by the popularity of BASPCAN's triennial Congress, which brings researchers, policy makers and practitioners together from many different disciplines (Congress will be biennial from 2018).

B2.2 BASPCAN produces Child Abuse Review (*CAR*), now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year. *CAR* provides a forum for all professionals working in the field of child protection, giving them access to the latest research findings, practice developments, training initiatives and policy issues. The Journal's remit includes all forms of maltreatment, whether they occur inside or outside the family environment. Papers are written in a style appropriate for a multidisciplinary audience. The Journal maintains a practice orientated focus and authors of research papers are encouraged to examine and discuss implications for practitioners: it is the Editors' aim to promote practice-relevant research and to facilitate the use of research findings, to enhance good practice and influence policy. Each issue includes a mix of refereed research and practice papers, training updates, case studies, brief communications, book reviews and a calendar of future events. Correspondence from readers is much welcomed.

B2.3 BASPCAN holds free events usually at local level via branches; sponsors students to attend our national events; and sponsors our Board members to attend events held by others in order to feedback at meetings and inform our work and communications to members. Congress 2018 will have a particular focus on service users (experts by experience) and their input and attendance (by way of low cost break-even fees) will be encouraged.

B2.4 Funding pressure has reduced opportunities for practitioners to attend events and access research findings e.g. staff in one NHS trust we know of are only able to attend one funded event per year and must fund any other events themselves. Often practitioners are unable to get release from clinical/other duties to attend events. However, revalidation is now more vigorous than previously for some professions (e.g. nurses, social workers) and this may help to reverse this trend. Where opportunities are limited, attendance is likely to be confined to discipline-specific activities e.g. the Family Law Bar Association events are heavily legal (five of six of the autumn series of lectures are exclusively law-based, the exception being non-accidental head injuries).

### Question B3: Research literacy and knowledge co-production

There are a number of possible reasons why research evidence may not sufficiently impact on policy and practice. It could be argued that: a) research can be reported in ways that are difficult to comprehend because academics and researchers are not necessarily focused on the practical application of their work, or b) because practitioners and policy-makers may lack the knowledge and skills to interpret research.

There are long-standing concerns that professional training for lawyers, judges and social workers does not contain sufficient research content, in contrast to professional training for careers in health. It has been suggested that more 'exposure' to researchers and opportunities to co-produce knowledge (research and practitioners working together on projects) through action research, would break down barriers between 'knowledge producers' and 'knowledge providers'.

**B3.1** To what extent does your organisation agree or disagree with the above statements (a and b)? Please give examples to support your view.

**B3.2** Do you think that professionals in your organisation want or would benefit from additional research training? Would any additional research training form part of undergraduate or initial qualifying training, or should this form part of a continuing professional development (CPD) programme?

**B3.3** Has your organisation found opportunities to engage local academics or researchers alongside practitioners to evaluate/understand the impact of your service, or to assist with the implementation of research in policy and practice? Would you value such opportunities?



B3.1 The validity of both of these assertions varies in different contexts. It is important for research to be presented in a way in which practitioners can readily apply the findings in their own practice. Research that is co-produced (a focus of BASPCAN's journal, *Child Abuse Review*) often works well for this purpose.

In our experience, policy-makers are generally committed to engaging with and interpreting research findings, although in some areas there is a paucity of high-quality persuasive research.

B3.2 Members of BASPCAN have not specifically asked for research training but we do include 'translating research into practice' sessions in conferences, e.g. the conference in November 2016 to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of CAR is entitled 'Evidence - Informed Practice, Practice - Informed Research'.

However, we are concerned that there is some danger that the remit of the Observatory will become dilute if it attempts to engage in initial professional training issues and, at least to start, it should focus on the accessibility of the research literature to existing professionals.

B3.3 BASPCAN regularly provides opportunities for researchers, practitioners and policy makers to come together to examine research needs – one example being a Chatham House Round Table event held in Wales with Welsh government policy makers. We have also supported practitioner research through our Research Awards Programme.

## Question B4: Judging the quality of research evidence

The family justice system has been described as ‘adversarial’. One aspect of this is the contestation of research evidence – a lack of agreement about what constitutes reliable research evidence. This creates particular challenges for practitioners and policy makers, particularly where they, or their organisations, lack the skills and knowledge to confidently judge the quality of research evidence. Common methods for assessing the quality of research evidence include:

- A consideration of the researchers – their reputation and standing.
- A consideration of the source of funding – is independence compromised?
- Seeking advice from a knowledgeable personal contact.
- Establishing whether the work has been formally peer reviewed.
- Using national standards or critical appraisal frameworks.

Even where research evidence is considered ‘strong’, the implications for policy and practice may remain contested or recommendations may be ignored because of funding constraints or political priorities.

**B4.1** Which topics, if any, does your organisation consider to be the most contested or confusing in regards to the use of research evidence?

**B4.2** Describe research literacy in your organisation, do individuals have the skills to judge the quality of research evidence? Which of the methods listed above, if any, would help individuals within your organisation judge the quality of research evidence?

B4.1 There are many areas in which the use of research evidence remains contested or confusing: examples include non-accidental head injuries (‘shaken baby syndrome’); private law child arrangements hearings where there are allegations of domestic violence; criteria for the appointment of expert witnesses; and emotional abuse/neglect and long-term harm.

B4.2 BASPCAN brings academics and practitioners together in order (*inter alia*) to support professionals in accessing and interpreting research and in incorporating relevant insights into their practice. We consider that responsibility for such activity rests primarily at organizational level and that the Observatory will be most effective if it supports organizations to develop these skills within their workforce.

## Section C: Priority functions and audiences for a new national observatory

The Nuffield Foundation proposes a new national family justice observatory (England and Wales) that aims to improve both research generation and research utilisation. The Foundation indicates that the new organisation could have one or more of the following functions:

- Improving the research evidence-base (e.g. through better use of administrative and survey datasets to establish national patterns and outcomes of the family justice system and regional variation).
- Synthesising and integrating existing research (e.g. authoritative research reviews on key topics).
- Promoting the use of research (e.g. events and dissemination).
- Capacity building (e.g. through secondments, research internships, research training, research design service).

The Foundation also has a vision for a system-wide approach to the generation of new research, so that priority topics are addressed and duplication of effort is avoided. **Choices need to be made to ensure investment has the greatest impact.** A system-wide approach would also need to be informed by agreed quality standards for research specific to the family justice system.

### Question C1: Improving the evidence base

The Nuffield Foundation considers that a key element of the work of a new national observatory would be to support new research, and access to research, that offers robust findings about patterns and outcomes of the family justice system in England and Wales. Currently, we do not make sufficient use of available national datasets, despite some excellent examples of how such datasets can be used. There are only a handful of robust longitudinal studies that follow-up children and families involved with the family justice system. More use of available datasets would also enable recommendations to be made about how national datasets could be improved.

**C1.1** What is your opinion regarding the potential use of national datasets to understand outcomes of the family justice system?

**C1.2** What, if any, is the impact of regional variability in service performance on children and families?

**C1.3** How does your organisation currently evaluate its performance and impact? Would your organisation benefit from support to make better use of in-house routinely collected data?

C1.1 We consider that use of national datasets to understand outcomes in the Family Justice System is an important early step and should be a priority.

C1.2 We know that there is very considerable regional variation in service performance, possibly made greater by local articulation of threshold criteria. This is potentially an area where the Observatory could play a significant role in ensuring minimum standards and addressing variability in performance.

C1.3 Not applicable to BASPCAN.

## Question C2: Priority functions

A new family justice observatory cannot be ‘all things to all people’. In the first inaugural cycle (1-3 years), the observatory needs to focus on priority functions that will enable it to make the greatest impact on the family justice system. Priorities can, of course, change over time.

**C2.1** Please give each of the following nine functions a ranking, with a rank ‘1’ meaning highest priority. Use Section D for any additional comments.

Priority functions	Rank
Improving the research evidence base through the use of national large-scale administrative and survey datasets.	1 =
Support for regional performance and outcomes monitoring, to identify and respond to unexpected variability.	3
Developing national quality standards for research to both improve the quality of research and confidence in its use.	
Commissioning authoritative knowledge reviews to distill key and trusted messages.	1=
A research design service to ensure better quality of new practice or policy pilots, along with robust evaluation.	4
Research internships to strength the links between practice and research.	5=
Research training to improve the skills and knowledge of practitioners to enable better access and understanding of research.	
Events and conferences to improve dissemination of research findings.	5=
Authoritative response to media coverage of service failures/SCRs/current debates by providing balance and context.	

Note: Those items we have not scored are ones that we consider may not be best carried out by an observatory of the type being proposed. We are concerned that if the observatory is over-ambitious, then it might not carry out any of its functions as well as it could.

### Question C3: Priority audiences

In order to effect change in the use of research evidence within the family justice system, the observatory will could engage with a wide range of stakeholder groups:

- Independent practitioners
- Parties to cases
- The media
- National policy and practice leads (e.g. DfE, MoJ, National Family Justice Board, ADCS)
- Government researchers and analysts
- National organisations
- (e.g. Association of Lawyers for Children, Association of Directors of Children's Services(ADCS), National Youth Advocacy Service(NYAS))
- National evidence intermediaries and educational bodies
- (e.g. Research in Practice; the Judicial College)
- Local family justice boards
- Frontline practice organisations (social work, family law) and the family courts
- Academics

**C3.1** Which groups do you consider to be the **priority audiences because they are best placed to catalyse and steer change**? Please explain your reasoning.

1. Frontline practice organisations (social work, family law) and the family courts
2. National policy and practice leads (e.g. DfE, MoJ, National Family Justice Board, ADCS)
3. National organisations (e.g. Association of Lawyers for Children, Association of Directors of Children's Services(ADCS), National Youth Advocacy Service(NYAS))
4. Academics
5. Local family justice boards

We felt frontline practice organisations and the family courts are the most important to engage because they are the primary focus for change of practice in the use of research evidence. This is less likely to be uniformly effective however without the support of practice and policy leads at national level and national practitioner lead organisations such as ALF, FLBA and ADCS. Engagement with academics to consider the target audience for research, the nature of academic outputs, and the implications for practice of their findings will also be important. Local family justice boards should have oversight of developing practice in their local area. We felt that wider engagement is likely to dilute the work of the Observatory at least in the early phases of its work at potential cost to effectiveness.

## Question C4: towards a system-wide approach to research generation

The Nuffield Foundation envisages a system-wide approach to the generation of new knowledge. Better co-ordination of funding and strategic priorities for new research, would avoid duplication and ensure that pressing topics are addressed.

**C4.1** How would you like to see your organisation involved in setting research priorities? For example; annual consultations; key informant annual workshops; individual communications with the observatory.

**C4.2** What do you think are the risks and benefits to tighter co-ordination of research priorities and strategic investment in funding?

**C4.3** What topics, if any, do you think should be prioritised for new research?

C4.1 BASPCAN has access to a multi-disciplinary audience of organisations and individuals involved in child protection work. We would like to provide a key informant role, e.g. through canvassing our membership base and feeding back and/or through a process of annual consultations. Our board of trustees can also offer a wealth of experience and expertise across a wide range of disciplines and specialisms as a forum for debate to inform the work of the Observatory.

C4.2 We can see considerable potential for the Observatory's role in making the best use of limited funding. We think it is important that the Observatory maintain a level of independence such that the focus of its work is not affected by rapid changes in government policy, and that it is able to keep a long-term view. There is also a risk that the Observatory does not fully reflect the needs of a multi-disciplinary professional base, but we suggest that strong practitioner input e.g. from a multi-disciplinary advisory panel and annual consultation processes will mitigate this risk.

C4.3 Fabricated/induced illness; impact of emotional abuse and neglect; identification and use of expert witnesses within the court arena; outcomes of care; the use of thresholds and risk assessments; abuse in care; recruitment and retention of foster carers; organizational change.

## Section D: Additional comments

Please add any further comments you wish to make regarding sections B and C.

We consider that the Observatory would make best use of resources by acting as a central hub for setting priorities and the co-ordination and facilitation of work already being done by existing organisations rather than attempting to take over that work (e.g. NSPCC / Research in Practice research summaries; SCiE). As a multi-disciplinary membership organization, BASPCAN would be pleased to contribute to shaping the agenda, the dissemination of high-quality research through training and conferences; and the promotion of research-based practice.