

Learning from the Best Practice Overseas Seminar: An update report

July 2018

INTRODUCTION

1. This report provides a summary of the seminar on preventing and responding to child sexual abuse by learning from best practice overseas, which the Inquiry held on 12 April 2017.
2. This document is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all the views expressed at the seminar. Its purpose is to summarise the discussions and to highlight key areas and themes for the Inquiry.
3. The Chair and the Panel of the Inquiry were present at the seminar. Proceedings were convened and facilitated by a member of the Inquiry's legal team. The seminar did not constitute a formal evidence-gathering session.
4. The seminar was attended by academics, professionals, practitioners, and victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. The Inquiry would like to thank all those involved in the seminar, particularly participants and members of the public gallery who volunteered their time to attend and contribute to the discussion.
5. The seminar was informed by a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), commissioned by the Inquiry and undertaken by academics at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The REA summarised existing published literature on the role of institutions in jurisdictions outside England and Wales in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse, and reflected on what can be learned from the approaches used by other jurisdictions. The REA covered four broad areas:
 - Primary prevention – ensuring child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation does not happen.
 - Identification – better identification, disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation, and improved responses to such reports and disclosures.
 - Management of perpetrators – controlling and managing perpetrators, in particular ensuring that they are not able to reoffend.
 - Support services (response) – supporting victims and survivors, aiding recovery and addressing and acknowledging the harm done.
6. The first three themes were explored in detail as part of the debate. The fourth theme on support services was addressed and considered at a seminar on victims' and survivors' experiences held on 4–5 July 2017.
7. The seminar was streamed live (with a brief delay) on the Inquiry's website.¹

¹ Videos and a transcript of the seminar, along with the agenda, a list of participants, the full REA report and summary report (English and Welsh versions) are available at: www.iicsa.org.uk/research-seminars/preventing-and-responding-child-sexual-abuse-learning-best-practice-overseas

Session 1: Prevention and identification of child sexual abuse

8. The seminar began with a presentation of the REA by the authors of the report (Professor Lorraine Radford, Professor Nicky Stanley and Dr Christine Barter). The main considerations of the report were:
 - What can be learned from other jurisdictions, including (but not limited to) Australia, Norway and Sweden, in relation to primary prevention of child sexual abuse and exploitation?
 - What can be learned from other jurisdictions in relation to identification of child sexual abuse and exploitation?
9. Professor Radford noted the limitations in this type of study, particularly in relation to the difficulties that institutions in all jurisdictions experience and the distinct circumstances of each one.
10. This formed the basis for discussion and prompted participants to reflect upon and consider the wide-ranging implications of child sexual abuse.
11. The key issues arising from the REA are:
 - Child sexual abuse (including child sexual exploitation) is a very complex issue and it is impractical to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. However, there is some robust research and promising evidence from other jurisdictions that could be developed further to inform this area of work in England and Wales, such as:
 - Adequately resourced, comprehensive, well coordinated, multi-sector approaches which aim to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation are likely to be most effective.
 - Effective responses are most likely to be those that: specifically address the diversity in nature and impact of child sexual abuse; are age appropriate; recognise the differences and similarities in experiences of different forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation across different settings and relationships.
- The REA affirms the conclusions of other research, in that the evidence on preventing and responding to all forms of child abuse and neglect is underdeveloped and limited in many respects. Specific limitations and gaps in research on responses to child sexual abuse include:
 - A lack of focus on outcomes and robust evaluations of impact.
 - A lack of research that has evaluated the effectiveness of packages of coordinated responses rather than single interventions in one service, such as a treatment programme.
 - An inability to compare and monitor trends over time, and the impact of policy in the UK and across different jurisdictions, due to lack of data, especially on prevalence and incidence rates.

- Limited evidence on specific topics, which highlights a need for more evidence in relation to:
 - The circumstances that lead to different types of abuse, in particular child sexual exploitation, online abuse and peer-on-peer sexual abuse.
 - Protective factors for sexual abuse and exploitation.
 - Effective strategies and responses to peer-on-peer sexual abuse.
 - Compensation schemes for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse.
 - Safeguarding practices within institutions working directly with children and young people.
 - Effective practices to overcome barriers to disclosure among younger children, boys and children sexually abused from an early age.
 - Financial implications of different identification and prevention strategies and approaches (including the relative cost effectiveness of different responses).
12. In terms of primary prevention specifically, the REA identified that:
- On a cultural level, education, social marketing and media campaigns are all helpful from a preventative perspective, but approaches need to address demand as well as focus on protective factors, and need to involve a broader range of audiences.
- In terms of prevention, tackling systemic factors such as privacy-related issues and opportunities for child sexual abuse to occur in organisations, is likely to be the most immediately effective response. It is also important that preventative interventions are underpinned by accessible services for those who disclose.
 - Much more information is needed on the effective use of financial and other resources to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and exploitation.
 - Professional guidance, leadership and training are all key effective prevention strategies.
13. It was noted that with regard to identification, disclosure and reporting of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation and the immediate child protection response across the range of organisations considered, proactive approaches and community engagement can improve reporting, especially where cultural barriers exist. Participants commented that drawing on the experiences and good practices of other jurisdictions (for example, Australia) would be a helpful area to explore, particularly in respect of communities where there may be resistance to reporting and identification.
14. It was noted as part of the discussion that mandatory reporting can increase rates

of reporting for child sexual abuse, but it was acknowledged that evidence on the benefits remains mixed, particularly in light of the limited research around cost effectiveness. Participants commented that if mandatory reporting was introduced, it is very likely that additional resources would be required to deal with the increased reports and screening procedures that would result.

15. It was concluded that ongoing training is required to ensure guidance is implemented and practices adjusted to remove barriers to reporting. Resources are a fundamental part of improving the professional response.
16. Particular mention was made of the Barnahus (Children's House) model from Iceland, which is being piloted in England. This model involves co-locating the various services involved in responding to disclosures of child sexual abuse, including the provision of an environment in which victims can give recorded evidence that may be used in subsequent court proceedings. The presenters also commented that there is promising evidence that the approach of child-friendly interviewing and investigation techniques has increased willingness to report sexual abuse. The pilot scheme will be assessed and evaluated by the NSPCC.
17. Participants made the point that many studies do not consider the outcome for or long-term impact on children who were sexually abused. They commented that results need to be assessed from that perspective to provide an overall picture. A number of participants remarked that a 'children's rights approach' to dealing with child sexual abuse and exploitation in the UK would be very helpful, and provide an immediate framework for implementing responses.
18. In concluding the session, participants commented that despite a plethora of research, evidence gaps remain in certain areas. These include: lack of information on financing and costs of the different approaches discussed during the session; language constraints when assessing evidence from other jurisdictions; limited information about the circumstances that lead to child sexual abuse; the limitations on measuring results when work is undertaken by non-state actors and voluntary organisations; limited information relating specifically to whistleblower protection. These were all identified as useful areas for future research.

Session 2: Primary prevention and identification, disclosure, reporting and response

19. Six broad topics were covered as part of the general discussion arising from the presentation in Session 1:
 - school programmes and programmes in the wider community
 - online safety resources
 - pooling of experiences by those working in the field
 - structural and organisational barriers outlined in the REA
 - whistleblowing
 - mandatory reporting
20. Participants engaged in a discussion about support systems in schools and gave examples of the ways in which their particular organisations dealt with teachers, schoolchildren and caregivers in this context. It was agreed between participants that those in education services should receive additional and ongoing training, and a support system is needed for teachers and children to provide help or information following a disclosure of child sexual abuse. As identified in the REA, it was observed that early referral systems and formal child protection processes need to be consistent and part of a wider network. The point was made that non-school settings and those linked to school, such as breakfast clubs and childminders, are opportunities for raising awareness and prevention that are often overlooked. A word of caution was expressed by one participant that, in expanding primary prevention programmes, an undue emphasis should not be placed on disclosure by the child who was the victim of abuse.
21. The discussion was expanded to include an assessment of online safety educational resources and how these could be accessed by caregivers, and translated into a classroom setting. Again, the general consensus was that teachers need ongoing training and that there should be consistency across the country, between different areas, schools and organisations.
22. Using a phrase mentioned during the REA presentation, it was agreed between participants that there should be a 'spiral' of learning, reinforced and expanded throughout a child's life and education.
23. It was noted that robust data is lacking for evaluating the outcomes of interventions. There was broad consensus among the participants about the importance of 'soft data', in terms of experience sharing and data pooling between agencies and organisations such as those present at the seminar. Professor Radford addressed this matter in her closing remarks. She referred to the tension between the length of time required to obtain high quality evidence from objectively evaluated projects and the need to inform policy quickly in a fast changing environment in which child sexual abuse and exploitation is continuing. She suggested that academics and practitioners need to work together to seek to resolve this tension.
24. The UK's position as a world leader in tackling online child sexual abuse was discussed. The point was made that there

has been success in this area due to the multi-stakeholder environment and collaborative partnership working. Again, the need to engage the wider community – including providers, police and society was emphasised.

25. The discussion moved on to the themes that the research had identified as organisational barriers: rigid, hierarchical, closed organisations; a lack of accountability or openness to scrutiny; failure to implement existing policies; failure to provide a safe space for disclosure. One participant stated that these barriers are consistent with his professional experience, but that there has been some progress. It was noted that there are unmonitored and unregulated community programmes with easy access to children, such as sports clubs, drama clubs, childminders, fashion and photography clubs and programmes. The Child Protection in Sport Unit, which is an NSPCC initiative, was cited as an example of current good practice. It was explained that the NSPCC works with a number of sports governing bodies to help them put in place policies and procedures to safeguard children taking part in sport at a local level. It was confirmed that such assistance is not mandatory.
26. The debate shifted to focus on whistleblower protection. There was strong consensus that this is an area that need to

be addressed. Ideas were exchanged about what need to be done to encourage and support whistleblowers. It was thought that mainstream media could be useful and that clearer processes would help. However, reflecting the lack of evidence UCLan had found during the REA, no participant was able to identify a particular model or study which help to show an effective whistleblowing procedure or process.

27. Mandatory reporting was discussed in the context of the awaited publication of the results of the government's consultation on whistleblowing.² The participants presented their organisations' positions. There were clear opposing views relating to mandatory reporting, reflecting the results of the REA that the evidence of its impact was mixed. There was, however, general agreement that information sharing within and between organisations is of critical importance to ensure that an effective response is given to reports.
28. Concluding the morning session, one participant summed up the discussion, quoting from the presentation that 'cross-government and multi-sector working structures at national and local levels are crucial to preventing conflicting policy responses'. One overriding message from the discussion was that there should be effective and sustained multi-agency approaches to safeguarding in particular.

² Reporting and acting on child abuse and neglect: Summary of consultation responses and Government action, HM Government, March 2018, available at: http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2018-0224/Reporting_child_abuse_and_neglect_-_response_to_consultation.pdf

Session 3: What we can learn from practice overseas about the control and management of perpetrators of child sexual abuse

29. Dr Barter (UCLan) began the afternoon session by presenting the third theme assessed in the REA: the control and management of adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse and young people exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour.
30. The presentation highlighted that:
 - Community involvement can strengthen disruption strategies within the community and cultural and age-specific responses are needed for young people displaying harmful sexual behaviours.
 - A focus on high-risk convicted child offenders has dominated research. Evidence on the efficacy of treatment is mixed, but the more effective responses to child sex offenders are those that address offender risk, needs and responsivity.
 - There is little work on the financial implications of different treatment programmes and limited information on such programmes for young people.
 - More research on effective responses to peer-on-peer sexual abuse is required.
31. Following the presentation, it was noted by participants that evidence on perpetrators of child sexual abuse is limited in a number of areas, including female perpetrators. There is a failure in much of the research to identify whether projects involving offender rehabilitation and management deal with child sexual abuse that occurs within or outside a familial setting. The point was also made that research examining the prevalence of reoffending does not focus on the types of crimes committed, notably failing to distinguish between sexual offences and general crime. All of these matters were identified as potentially important areas for further exploration.
32. The session moved on to a discussion concerning young offenders, younger potential offenders and peer-on-peer abuse, which covered:
 - the importance of precision and sensitivity in language when discussing these matters
 - punitive programmes versus rehabilitation programmes
 - victim-perpetrators
 - perpetrators who are not reported/convicted
 - rehabilitation of young perpetrators
33. It was agreed by participants that care should be taken with language used, especially in reference to restorative justice and rehabilitation programmes. One example given was in respect of references to 'promising results' or comments that schemes 'do not work'. The views of policy makers or perpetrators as to what amounts to a positive outcome may not be shared by a victim. As a result, in this type of discussion, language needs to be framed precisely and the subject of the discussion clearly referenced.
34. Building on the outcomes addressed in the REA, it was agreed that punitive measures for offenders negatively affect community

reintegration and fail to reduce recidivism for crimes generally. One participant saw no reason why this principle would not extend to sexual offences. There was general agreement on this point by participants.

35. This led to a more in-depth discussion of rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators. Circles of Support and Accountability, run by The Lucy Faithfull Foundation, was mentioned. It was observed that although there is no large-scale solid data in support of such a principle, integration into society is clearly more likely to occur if offenders have some support networks after leaving prison. This in turn was said to reduce the risk of reoffending. It was observed that the attitude of the press directly affects people's perceptions and that this has a direct impact on access to rehabilitation programmes and their benefits.

36. The participants representing victim and survivor support groups discussed the potential difficulties of supporting perpetrators who were also victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation. There is no common approach and it was acknowledged that this is a difficult area for both volunteers and organisational management to deal with.

37. An observation was made that offender management appears to focus only on those convicted of offences, but it was emphasised that there are perpetrators, particularly in familial settings or certain marginalised communities, where the

abuse may not get reported or result in a conviction. It was agreed that this is an existing gap that requires further consideration and action.

38. It was further observed that conversation tends to focus solely on adult perpetrators and avoids young offenders, young potential offenders and peer-on-peer abuse. The following areas were explored with regard to young people:

- the link between prevention and rehabilitation
- self-generated online content
- education

39. One participant raised the link between the prevention agenda and the rehabilitation agenda, especially for young perpetrators or potential perpetrators. In particular, the point was made that once young perpetrators exhibiting harmful sexual behaviour enter into the criminal justice system they are put on the Sex Offender Register, their life chances are hampered and their prospects of rehabilitation reduced. The Welsh government, through a programme called 'Taith', is investigating the effect of adverse childhood experiences in early intervention programmes. In discussion, the point was made that this is not only an example of a multi-organisational approach, but is also a project that has sought to provide: early assessment; early prevention, identification and assessment of risk; a treatment strategy. This type of programme is targeted

at much more basic prevention, looking at primary risk factors which means that individuals can be targeted early, before they commit sexually harmful or other harmful behaviour.

40. The shortfalls when investigating and prosecuting individuals for sexual offences against children were also raised. The point was made that the criminal justice system tends to focus on the leaders of criminal enterprises without a wider investigation into the rest of the chain of offenders. It was argued that this approach risks missing the causes of demand and the financial gains being made from abuse. One participant also noted the links between online abuse and organised crime.
41. This led to a discussion of the importance of trafficking legislation and the need for greater recognition among frontline responders in the police and health service of the National Referral Mechanism.
42. The discussion focused briefly on the internet and online material. The increase in self-generated internet content was emphasised, along with the evident complexities relating to this type of material. The view was reiterated that education is paramount, whether it is for young children or 16 and 17-year-olds:
 - younger children need to be educated; the families of younger children need to be increasingly educated on supervision of internet-connected devices; older children need to be aware of mechanisms in place for them to remove pictures of themselves online.
43. These insights brought the seminar back to education and its fundamental role in all areas of safeguarding. It was agreed by participants that it is more important to continue to support teachers and sustain information sharing rather than to run high-profile initiatives; the challenge is to ensure that education and support are maintained for children, caregivers, schools and communities. A 'spiral' of education was again part of the discussion. An observation was made by one participant that it is imperative that young people with learning difficulties are catered for as part of this education programme. There was also debate on the need for education and discussion to be specific and appropriate to age, gender and other relevant factors.
44. The seminar concluded with Professor Radford responding to some of the matters raised in the discussion, particularly in the context of the REA.

Future work

45. In her closing remarks, the Chair placed on record her thanks to Professor Radford and her team, participants and members of the public for attending.
46. The seminar provided invaluable insights for the Inquiry's work and identified several areas for future reflection. Further consideration will be given to the issues discussed and additional work may be undertaken, particularly where gaps have been identified.

Annex: Background to the Rapid Evidence Assessment

After a competitive tender exercise, the University of Central Lancashire was commissioned to undertake the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) to inform the work of the Inquiry. Professor Radford and her team outlined their approach in the following terms:

The purpose of an REA is to identify and assess existing research on a particular topic but within a more limited time frame and with restrictions on the breadth of literature included.

The research was conducted between March and October 2016, which involved undertaking a desk-based literature review using recognised methods for assessment similar to those applied in systematic reviews.

An REA is not intended to be a comprehensive overview of all potentially relevant materials. This would not have been a practicable exercise in light of the timescale involved and the breadth of the research questions posed. These were:

- What can be learned from jurisdictions outside England and Wales about the role of institutions, including accountable state and non-state organisations with responsibility for children, in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse and exploitation?
- What does the evidence show is best practice for institutions in the prevention, identification and response to child sexual abuse? Is the UK adopting this approach? If not, are there examples of best practice being implemented where case studies could be provided?

The full REA includes further details of the methodological approaches used and is available at:

www.iicsa.org.uk/research-seminars/preventing-and-responding-child-sexual-abuse-learning-best-practice-overseas