

Mapping expenditure in children's services: a method and findings from one region

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Background

- Across Europe many states are experiencing severe pressures on public services, both from escalating need and from diminishing budgets
- As a result, there is increasing interest in understanding how much is spent on services for children, and, importantly, to what effect
- Article 4 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires states to establish a children's budget
- Fund-mapping offers a way to do this and has previously been used with local authorities in England and Scotland
- This is the first time it has been done at a regional level (Northern Ireland, one of four countries in the UK)



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Aims of the research

1. To map the totality of annual government expenditure on services for children and young people
2. To assess the extent to which services are seeking to prevent or intervene early in the development of difficulties in children's lives
3. To chart expenditure on evidence-based programmes and practices

Method

- Undertaken March 2014 – June 2015, focusing on financial year 2012-2013
- Expenditure on services for children aged 0-17
- Concerned with expenditure primarily for children and families (i.e. excludes wider range of services that children benefit from, such as police, GP services, infrastructure)
- Involved all government departments and some non-profit organisations
- Respondents asked to complete a series of fact sheets, and responses followed up by phone to clarify data
- EBPs defined as those approved by Blueprints (respondents were sent a list of these) or similar (i.e. RCT/QED evaluation, positive results)
- Used 6-fold categorisation of level of intervention: (1) promotion; (2) universal; (3) selective; (4) indicated; (5) treatment; (6) maintenance
- Analysis for each department shared with relevant respondents to check accuracy

Northern Ireland context

- 1.8 million people living in Northern Ireland
- 432,000 (24%) aged 0-17
- 24,000 babies born each year
- Child population increasing
- 2% child population from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups
- At any one time, 2,000 children on the child protection register and 2,800 children in care
- There are efforts sponsored by government and philanthropy in Northern Ireland to boost investment in prevention and early intervention, including evidence-based programmes

Results (1)

[£1 = €1.39]

- Total public expenditure £15 billion: £5 billion for social security benefit provision and £10 billion for services
- £2.28 billion invested in children (22% of government spend)
- Average annual investment per child of approx. £5,175. Unit costs ranged from £79 for health visiting to £36,730 for youth custody
- Expenditure spread across 10 departments, with majority overseen by the Department of Education (DoE: £1.64 billion, 72%) and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS: £0.48 billion, 21%)
- Remaining 8 departments responsible for £0.16 billion (7%)
- 64,000 people work face-to-face with children and families across all services, including some volunteers. 60,000 in DoE (inc. 19,400 teachers and 23,000 in youth services), and 2,670 in DHSSPS (only includes social work, health visiting and school nursing staff)

Government expenditure on children and young people (2012/13)

Executive Departments	Total resource DEL £m	Spent on children £m	Departmental spend as %
Agriculture & Rural Development	218.77	1.34	0.1%
Culture, Arts & Leisure	115.44	18.10	0.8%
Education	1,888.57	1,632.56	71.7%
Employment & Learning	1,010.85	103.40	4.5%
Enterprise, Trade & Industry	199.23	-	0.0%
Finance & Personnel	179.88	-	0.0%
Health, Social Services, Safety	4,495.32	483.99	21.3%
Environment	130.96	3.10	0.1%
Justice	1,248.04	15.30	0.7%
Regional Development	486.57	7.67	0.3%
Social Development	464.53	8.50	0.4%
First and deputy First Minister	76.98	1.82	0.1%
	10,515.14	2,275.78	100.0%



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Costs per beneficiary (i)

	Intervention level	Number of children benefiting	Unit cost
Road Safety	2 (5%)	335,325	3
Sport NI: Active Communities Programme	2	77,236	33
School Nursing	2	117,233	53
Health Visiting	1	119,454	79
Libraries	1	116,682	98
Youth activities	1,3,4	148,533	203
Early years provision	1,3,4	55,508	326
Social Work - Children receiving services at home	5	26,245	336
Health - Community Midwives	1	26,793	471
Local Employment Intermediary Service	5	532	839



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Costs per beneficiary (ii)

	Intervention level	Number of children benefiting	Unit cost
Sport NI: Special Olympics	5	529	1,146
CAMHS	2,3,5	4,112	3,299
Pre-school play education: Nursery schools delegated budget excl targeted element	1	4,943	3,409
NIGALA	5	1,048	3,872
Care to Learn (NI)	3	84	4,874
College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise	1	240	5,575

NB. Neither the unit nor average cost of a school place – nursery, primary and post-primary – was available from the Department of Education

Costs per beneficiary (iii)

	Intervention level	Number of children benefiting	Unit cost
Youth Justice Agency: Youth Justice Services	5	1,039	6,374
Social Work - Aftercare (Programme of Care 3 only)	5	1,388	6,468
Special education for children with emotional and behavioural problems and for children with disabilities	5,6	8,724	7,088
Pupil Behaviour Management Team - Education Other Than At School	5	647	8,131
Disabled Facilities Grants	6	66	11,656
Special schools	5,6	4,653	18,657
Children Looked After	5	2,807	35,722
YJA: Custody - Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre	5	211	36,730

Results (2)

- Over half (57%) of expenditure for all children regardless of need (Levels 1 and 2) – mostly (92%) in Department of Education
- 13% invested in targeted early intervention (Levels 3 and 4)
- 19% invested in children with clearly identified high, and often complex, needs (Levels 5 and 6) – mostly social care activities (96%)
- 11% of expenditure could not be disaggregated by intervention level

Spend by intervention level

Executive Departments	Levels 1-2 £m	Levels 3-4 £m	Levels 5-6 £m	Not disaggregated £m
Agriculture & Rural Development	1.34			
Culture, Arts & Leisure	17.39	0.65		0.05
Education	1,193.99	212.41	0.97	225.24
Employment & Learning	48.95	54.41	0.03	
Enterprise, Trade & Investment				
Finance & Personnel				
Health, Social Services, Safety Environment	29.35	17.00	424.08	13.57
Justice		0.80	14.90	0.03
Regional Development	7.67			
Social Development		7.71	0.77	
First & deputy First Minister		0.25		1.57
Total	1,301.75	293.28	440.75	240.46
Percentage split	57%	13%	19%	11%

Results (3)

- Not able to say what was invested in evidence-based programmes in 2012/13 because Departments were unaware of what was being spent on them
- There were a few exceptions, including FNP and a community project in west Belfast
- Likely to be near zero but increasing owing to Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP)

Implications for policy

- Investments in children need to be aligned to children's developmental outcomes and, ideally, based on epidemiological intelligence on current patterns of need
- It is essential that effort is focused on securing the greatest possible benefit from existing resource
- This should comprise two strategies: (i) de-commissioning services that are ineffective or not cost-beneficial in order to release resource for re-investment; and (ii) re-deploying a proportion of staff time to more effective activities (e.g. 5% of teaching staff time)
- With investment in EBPs at near zero, it might be prudent to set a target (e.g. 0.5% within 5 years)

Implications for research

- It is vital to secure the support and involvement of all key individuals, for them to have time to gather the data, and for people in government to coordinate
- Ideally the work would be set in the context of a broader strategic initiative with a clear understanding of how the findings will be used
- It would be valuable to change the way budget information is categorised and aggregated within departments
- Departments know broadly *what* is spent but less about *how* it is spent, which requires involving those with delivery responsibility
- The analysis yields greater insights when it can be compared with similar analyses from other jurisdictions, as this helps policy makers to appreciate what might be possible and how to achieve it.

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