

# Research in support of Action for Children's 'As long as it takes' campaign

Daniel Clay and Anna Ludvigsen,  
Action Research Limited, [www.actionresearch.ltd.uk](http://www.actionresearch.ltd.uk)

## 1 Summary of research design and method

### 1.1 Background to the research

Daniel Clay and Anna Ludvigsen were commissioned by Action for Children in May 2008 to undertake a review of policies, initiatives, funding streams and legislation that had been introduced since 1987 and which have had an impact of children, young people and families. Action for Children commissioned this research to inform an upcoming campaign called 'As long as it takes', which is to be launched as part of the rebranding of Action for Children.

### 1.2 Research aims and objectives

The overarching aim of this study was to measure the extent of policy churn over the past two decades, counting the number of policies that have been announced in that time and recording the length of new funding sources in order to highlight the effect that it has had upon groups of Action for Children service users.

The specific objectives were:

- to identify the number of new services, government policies or funding initiatives that have been launched during the lifetime of someone who is now 21 years old
- to identify the average lifespan of each initiative, highlighting any policies that have lasted the entire period
- to explore the structural changes that have been introduced and the length of time services and commissioning structures have remained stable

- to identify agencies that have been created and/or closed down during this period, and whether the picture is consistent across the UK

This research covers the whole of the UK, with consideration given to the impact of devolution upon the policy and practices of the UK nations.

### 1.3 Methods

The proposed research involved a detailed review of the appropriate literature on government policy and practice related to children and young people between May 1987 and May 2008. This includes:

- White Papers
- Green Papers
- legislative acts
- government strategies and initiatives, such as Sure Start, On Track, Respect
- national funding schemes, such as the Parenting Fund and the Big Lottery Fund
- evaluations of interventions

In conducting our search for relevant literature we were mindful that Action for Children needed the research to pay particular attention to initiatives and policies relevant to their core groups of service users. These include:

- disabled children and young people
- children in care (or looked-after children)
- children whose families need support, including:
  - children who have experienced neglect or abuse (including children in need and those on the child

protection register)

- children whose parents are separating
- children having difficulties at school
- children returning to live at home
- young people with caring responsibilities
- families whose tenancy is at risk because of anti-social behaviour
- families at risk of breakdown
- children and young people facing severe difficulties, including:
  - children and young people involved in the criminal justice system
  - young people leaving care
  - children in alternative education

We then conducted systematic searches of the following sources of data, which were agreed with Action for Children.

#### Central government websites:

- Office of Public Sector Information ([www.opsi.gov.uk](http://www.opsi.gov.uk))
- Directgov ([www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk))
- The Welsh Assembly Government (<http://new.wales.gov.uk>)
- The Scottish Government ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk))
- The Northern Ireland Executive ([www.northernireland.gov.uk](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk))

#### Government department websites:

England

- Department for Children, Schools and Families ([www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk))
- Department of Health ([www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk))
- Home Office ([www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk))

Wales

- Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dcells/?lang=en>)
- Department for Health and Social Services (<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dhss/?lang=en>)
- Department for Social Justice and Local Government (<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/departments/dsjlg/?lang=en>)

Scotland

- Scottish Government ([www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk))

Northern Ireland

- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister – The Children and Young People's Unit ([www.allchildrenni.gov.uk](http://www.allchildrenni.gov.uk))
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety ([www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk))
- Department of Education ([www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk))
- The Northern Ireland Office ([www.nio.gov.uk](http://www.nio.gov.uk))

#### National umbrella organisations:

- Children in Wales ([www.childreninwales.org.uk](http://www.childreninwales.org.uk))
- Children in Scotland ([www.childreninScotland.org.uk](http://www.childreninScotland.org.uk))
- Children in Northern Ireland ([www.ci-ni.org](http://www.ci-ni.org))

#### Other online sources, including:

- Childlink ([www.childlink.co.uk](http://www.childlink.co.uk))
- Every Child Matters ([www.everychildmatters.gov.uk](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk))

#### Voluntary organisation websites, including:

- British Association for Adoption and Fostering ([www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk))
- Family and Parenting Institute ([www.familyandparenting.org](http://www.familyandparenting.org))
- Contact a Family ([www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk))

To supplement the internet search strategy we also conducted searches within the Policy Research Bureau library and the British Library for journals and secondary sources that may provide details of initiatives or policy documents and which had not been identified in the initial search. Databases were then emailed to the appropriate Action for Children policy and public affairs officers for a final verification.

To identify literature relevant to the research objectives we used a variety of key words, which included a combination of the following terms: 'parents', 'children', 'young people', 'White Paper', 'Green Paper', 'initiative', 'policy', 'legislation', 'intervention', 'funding', and 'evaluation'. In addition, we searched under key terms relevant to each of the core groups of service users identified by Action for Children.

## 1.4 Limitations

As the research method relied largely on the internet as a source for information, there are likely to be some records that were missed. While policy and legislative documents are usually well recorded, not all strategies, initiatives and funding streams are easily identifiable. This is compounded by the fact that during the last Conservative Government the internet was not the resource it is now, and relatively few of that government's publications were directly accessible using the internet. We attempted to address these shortcomings through the use of secondary sources and journal searches; however, we cannot be entirely certain that every relevant initiative, policy, and funding stream has been incorporated.

Due to the time-limited nature of the research and the large number of relevant documents identified, it was not possible to identify how many new services had been established over the past 21 years or to validate the exact length of every action proposed within strategies.

Defining what is and what is not an initiative can be a matter for debate. We have taken an 'initiative' as being a programme of action for addressing a particular issue.

There may be a number of actions within each initiative; for example, within the government's Excellence in Cities initiative there were at least seven strands of action. We have not counted each of these actions individually, but counted the overarching programme as one initiative.

This research did not consider national or regional initiatives that have been developed and run by the voluntary and community sector. Therefore it is possible that some initiatives that have been developed with the support of government resources were not included in the findings.

## 2 Findings

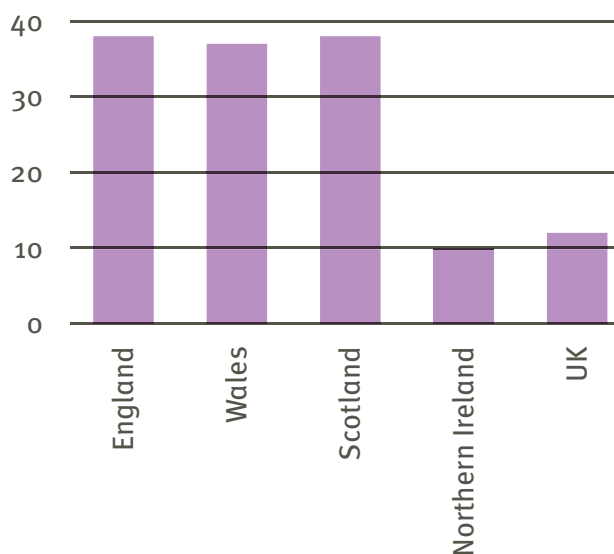
In mapping out the number of structures, initiatives, strategies, funding streams and legislative acts that have occurred over the past 21 years across the UK, we have identified over 400 relevant records. This is equivalent to more than 20 records for every year since 1987. What is more, the 'churn' is increasing rapidly. Half of the records identified were established in the past six years. Three-quarters have come in the past 10 years.

## 2.1 Legislation

Since 1987 there have been 98 separate Acts of Parliament, which make bills (or proposals) law, across the UK. This is equivalent to over four Acts every year for the past 21 years.

As shown in Chart 1, most of these relate to England, Wales or Scotland; however, a large number have application across three or more of the countries within the UK.

Chart 1: Number of pieces of legislation



Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have varying degrees of legislative power, which means that many of the Acts passed by the UK government also apply in these countries, as well as in England.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the groups of children and young people who the different pieces of legislation relate to.

The majority of legislative acts are relevant to all children and young people.

The most substantive are the Children Act 1989, which made radical changes to the law regarding children and families, and the Children Act 2004, which provides the legal basis for the government's Every Child Matters strategy in England.

A substantial percentage of legislation is related to children whose families need support. Typically this legislation has been around child maintenance and support; however, in recent years there has been a greater focus on parents whose children are deemed at risk of anti-social behaviour

Table 1: Groups of children and young people legislation relates to

	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK
Legislation relevant to all children and young people	54%	55%	51%	36%	27%
Legislation relevant to children in care	5%	5%	10%	7%	13%
Legislation relevant to disabled children and young people	21%	16%	18%	14%	20%
Legislation relevant to children whose families need support	31%	32%	15%	28%	25%
Legislation relevant to children and young people facing severe difficulties	13%	13%	13%	14%	7%

Legislation affecting children and young people facing severe difficulties has typically focused on children and young people who are involved in offending behaviour. The crucial piece of legislation, which has impacted on current government strategies and practices, is the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

From the 1990s onwards there has been an increased tendency to use legislation as a means of influencing the behaviour of individuals, with the aim of addressing underlying social problems such as offending and family breakdown.

## 2.2 Green Papers and White Papers

A Green Paper is a consultation document that the government may write if it wants to gain public views and opinions on a particular strategy. A White Paper, which sometimes follows from a Green Paper, clearly sets out government policies or strategies relating to a particular topic. It signifies a clear intention to pass new legislation.

A total of 12 Green Papers were issued in the UK since 1987. Almost all of these (83%) were issued by the UK government in relation to England.

Of the 10 Green Papers issued in England:

- 50 per cent were relevant to all children and young people
- 40 per cent were relevant to children whose families need support
- 20 per cent were relevant to disabled children and young people
- just one Green Paper was relevant to young offenders

A total of 28 White Papers were issued in the UK since 1987. Nineteen White Papers relating to England were issued by the UK Government; five were issued by the Scottish Government; one each by the Welsh and Northern Irish Governments; and finally two White Papers covered the whole of the UK.

Over half of all White Papers issued were relevant to all children and young people (54%).

In England, White Papers were issued that related to:

- children whose families need support (26%), including children having difficulties in school (11%)
- children and young people facing severe difficulties (16%), including young people who have offended (5%) and young people leaving care (5%)
- children in care (11%) and disabled children and young people (5%)

In Wales, just one White Paper was issued, which related to all children and young people.

In Scotland, five White Papers were issued. Of these:

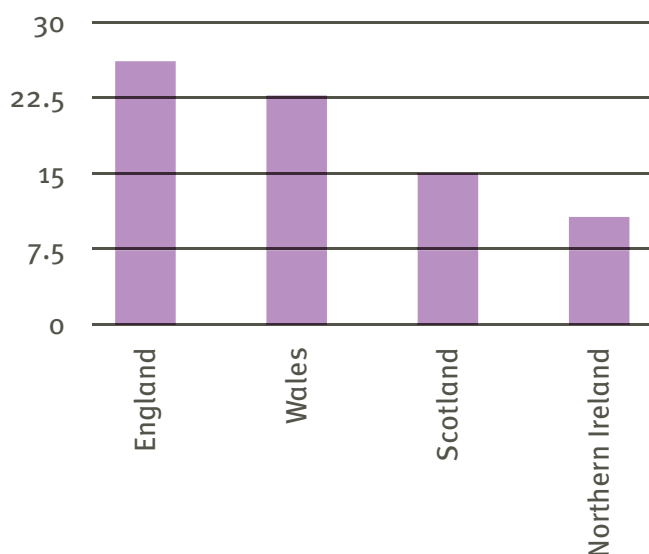
- over half related to all children and young people
- 40 per cent also had a particular focus on children whose families need support and children involved in offending behaviours
- two White Papers were issued with a UK remit, one focusing on children in care and one on disabled children and young people

## 2.3 Strategies

A strategy is a plan of action that a government, or a government department, may write to address a particular problem (such as planning to help care leavers who want to go to university).

Across the UK there have been 82 separate strategies developed over the past 21 years relevant to children and young people (see Chart 2 for a breakdown). This is equivalent to around four every year.

**Chart 2: Number of strategies**



Almost two-thirds (62%) of these strategies were relevant to all children and young people. Strategies in Wales were particularly all-encompassing.

Thirty per cent were relevant to children whose families need support. These include strategies relevant to separated families, children having difficulties at school, young parents, poverty and substance misuse.

All countries had strategies to deal with youth offending: 10 per cent of the total number of strategies were around youth offending and anti-social behaviour. In England, there have been three strategies that have attempted to tackle the issue of youth offending in the past 10 years.

Eighteen per cent of English strategies focused on disabled children and young people.

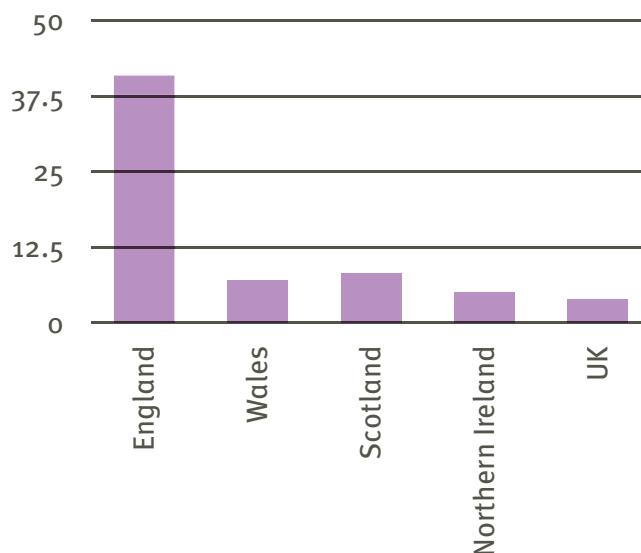
Only Scotland and Northern Ireland published strategies on children in care, while none of the countries published strategies on care leavers.

## 2.4 Initiatives

An initiative is a programme established to address a particular problem. (For example, the government may establish a scheme to help young people having problems at school because of bullying or bad behaviour.)

Across the UK there have been 77 separate initiatives over the past 21 years relevant to children and young people. That is equivalent to between three and four initiatives every year. As Chart 3 shows, the majority of these have been in England.

**Chart 3: Number of initiatives**



In England, there have been 46 initiatives launched since 1987. Twenty-eight of these initiatives are still running.

These initiatives have lasted an average of 3.9 years (ranging between one and 10 years).

Over 60 per cent of these initiatives have begun in the past four years.

The longest-lasting initiatives are free part-time education for four year olds, and the New Deal for Lone Parents (each lasting 10 years).

Eighteen of these initiatives have ended.

Those that have ended lasted an average of five years (ranging from two to nine years).

The longest lasting initiatives (among those that have ended) were the Quality Protects/Choice Protects programmes (10 years between them), On Track (nine years), and Sure Start (seven years).

Almost nine in every 10 initiatives have been evaluated (that is, research has been carried out to see whether they work or not).

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, there have been fewer initiatives launched since 1987 than in England, and a higher percentage that have ended.

However, initiatives that are still ongoing in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have lasted on average 2.2 years longer than those in England.

The longest lasting ongoing initiatives are On Track in Wales (nine years), Sure Start in Scotland (10 years), and the New Targeting Social Need Policy in Northern Ireland (10 years).

Sure Start, one of the key initiatives supporting children aged under five, has been altered radically since its first introduction. It was originally meant to be a support centre run by local communities and voluntary organisations with a strong emphasis on meeting local needs. Only in Northern Ireland does this ethos remain; in each of the other countries, Sure Start has been dismantled in everything but name and taken back into local authority control.

The longest lasting ongoing initiatives are actually UK-wide programmes for all young people: Modern Apprenticeships (13 years) and National Traineeships (11 years). While these have undergone a variety of revisions since they were established, they continue to focus on the training and development of young people to prepare them for work.

The majority of initiatives across the UK are established to support all children and/or young people (see Chart 4).

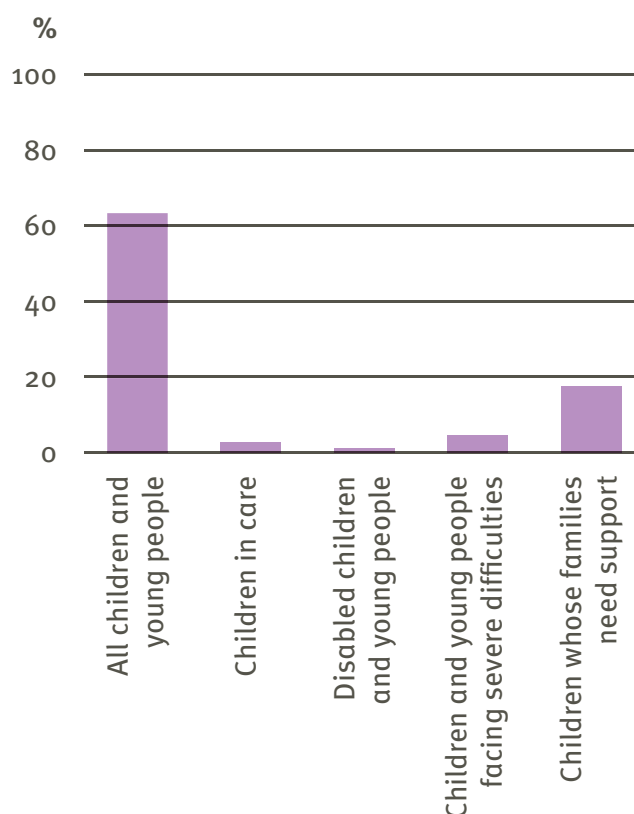
England had the most diverse range of initiatives targeting different groups of children and young people with different needs.

Relatively few initiatives were directed at disabled children and young people or children in care, particularly within Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Of those initiatives focusing on young people facing severe difficulties (most of which are in England), all target young offenders.

Of those initiatives focusing on children whose families need support (which accounted for 18% of all initiatives), almost half (ie 8% of all initiatives) provided support to parents or support to children having difficulties at school.

Chart 4: Focus of initiatives



Often the government will ‘pilot’ or test an initiative for a period of time in a particular area to check that it works before rolling it out across the UK.

Over the past 21 years, the UK government has piloted 29 initiatives in England.

The average length of a pilot initiative was three years.

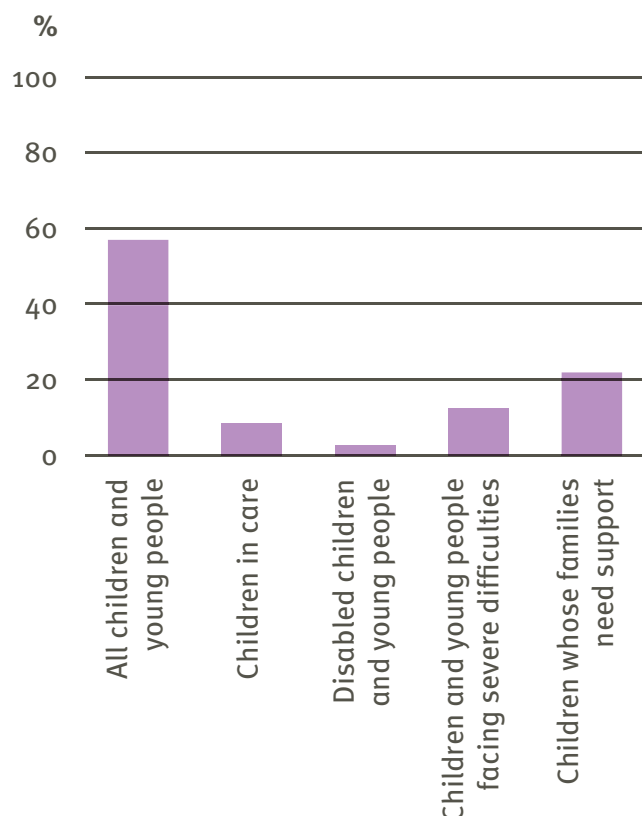
Less than half of these pilot projects (45%) led to programmes being rolled out across the UK.

Chart 5 shows that children and young people generally were the main target group for pilot initiatives that were rolled out across the UK.

Another group targeted by successful pilot programmes were children in families who needed support, most of whom were having difficulties at school (14%).

All the successful pilot programmes that focused on children and young people facing severe difficulties targeted young people involved in offending.

Chart 5: Focus of successful pilot initiatives



### 2.5 Funding streams and grants

A grant or funding stream is a sum of money, or a source of money, that the government allocates for a particular purpose (eg Choice Protects was a five-year grant that local authorities could apply for in order to improve their services for children in care).

Across the UK, there have been a total of 51 grants or funding streams relevant to children and young people generally.

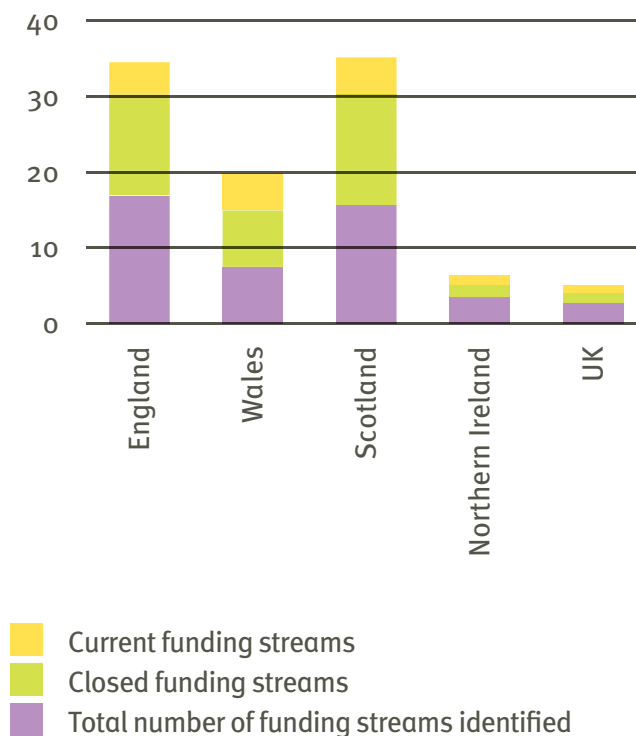
Of these 51 funding streams, over two-thirds (69%) no longer exist. That means that at present there are just 17 dedicated sources of government funding for children and young people.

Just one-fifth of these funding streams have been evaluated to check they have done what they intended to (20%).

As shown in Chart 6, England and Scotland have had the greatest number of funding streams (19), followed by Wales (11), and Northern Ireland (3).

The UK as a whole has had two major sources of funding, which both emerged from the establishment of a National Lottery. One of these was the New Opportunities Fund, which is now the Big Lottery Fund.

Chart 6: Funding streams



Current funding streams have lasted, on average, just under five years. Funding in England and Wales has typically lasted longer than that in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Furthermore, more general funding streams (ie those aimed at supporting children and young people generally) tended to last longer on average.

As Chart 7 shows, funding streams can be for local authorities, and/or voluntary and community organisations.

Current funding streams across the four countries typically support the voluntary sector in providing services.

Only in Northern Ireland are there no funding streams for the voluntary sector.

Chart 7: Recipients of current funding streams

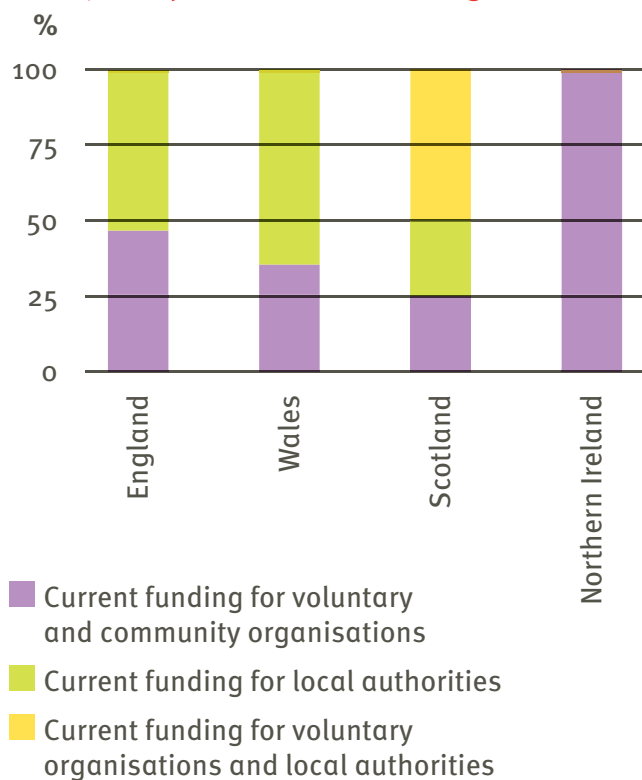
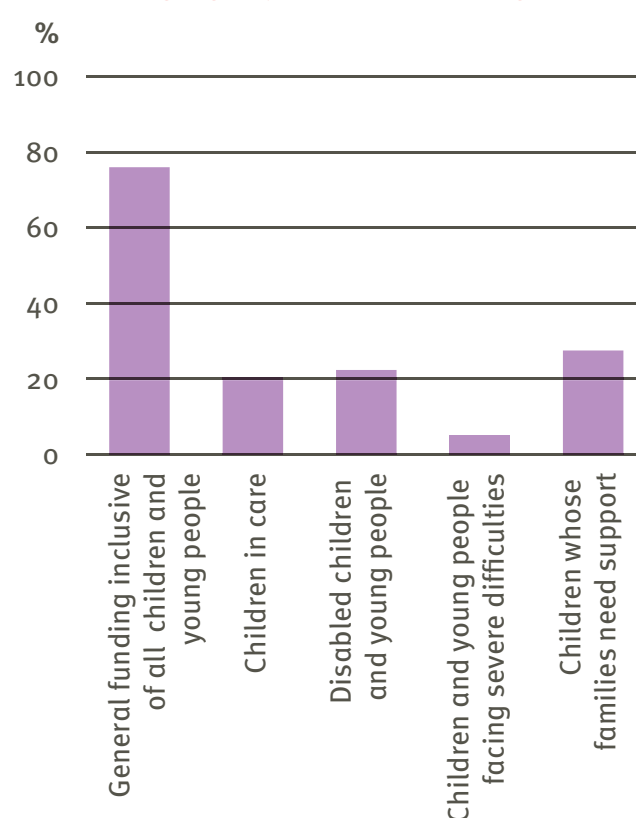


Chart 8 show the target group of current funding streams. It clearly illustrates that children and young people as a general group benefit from the largest number of funding streams across all countries.

Children in care, disabled children and young people, and children whose families need support all benefit from approximately 25 per cent of funding streams across the UK.

Chart 8: Target groups of current funding streams



However, the funding picture differs depending on the different countries.

In England, the majority of funding (80%) is directed at children and young people generally; children whose families need support also benefit from a significant number of funding streams. However, there are no current funding streams for services supporting children in care or those facing severe difficulties.

In Wales and Northern Ireland, the small number of funding streams that currently exist target a wider range of target groups. However, once again services supporting children and young people facing severe difficulties do not have any dedicated funding streams.

In Scotland, three of the four current funding streams are directed at services supporting children and young people generally; the remaining funding stream is for services working with children and young people facing severe difficulties.

Funding streams that have ended lasted, on average, just under three years.

Funding streams in England and Scotland have tended to last longer than those in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Chart 9 shows that the majority of closed funding streams in England, Wales and Scotland were actually in place to support local authorities. This demonstrates a marked change from current funding streams (shown in Chart 8), which typically support voluntary and community organisations.

Closed funding streams for local authorities in England were typically combined into another funding stream (43%), and the remaining funds were either allocated to general local authority budgets (29%) or cut (28%).

The Children, Young People and Families Grant combined five other funding streams.

Within Wales and Scotland, closed funding streams for local authorities were more likely just to be cut.

Closed funding streams for voluntary and community organisations were typically just cut in England (83%), Scotland (100%) and Northern Ireland (100%). The remaining closed funding streams in England were allocated to general local authority budgets (17%).

In Wales, all closed funding streams for voluntary and community organisations have been amalgamated into another funding stream – Cymorth: the Children and Youth Support Fund.

Chart 9: Recipients of closed funding streams

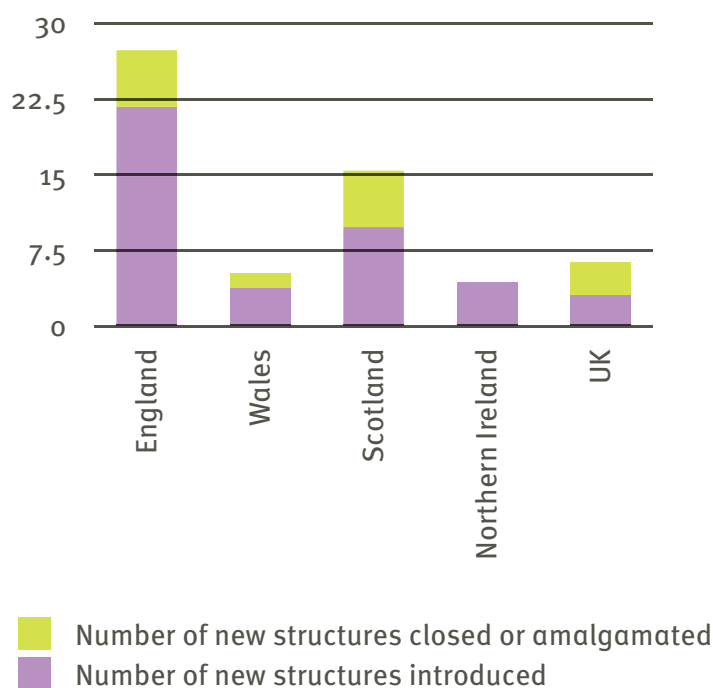


## 2.6. Structures

Governments often set up ongoing or temporary structures to manage a particular strategy or service. These could be a department or position within government, a task force within a department, or an agency separate to central government.

Chart 10 illustrates the number of new structures that have been created since 1987 and the number of times these structures have since been altered.

Chart 10: Structures created and changed across the UK



Across the UK, there have been a total of 49 structures introduced since 1987: that is, two every year.

England has had by far the greatest number of structures and structural changes. The various changes can have wide-ranging effects, as in when adult and children’s social services split in 2005.

The government department responsible for education within England has changed five times over the past 21 years. Over that time it has renamed itself as the Department of Education and Science; the Department of Education; the Department of Education and Employment; the Department for Education and Skills; and most recently, the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

Over the last three years, the UK government has established three task forces with the broad aim of improving outcomes and reducing anti-social behaviour among young people in England. These are the Respect Task Force, The Social Exclusion Task Force, and the Youth Task Force.

Since coming to power the Labour government has established five units that focus on particular aspects of children and young people's lives. These include: the Social Exclusion Unit, the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, the Children and Young People's Unit, the Sure Start Unit, and the Child Poverty Unit. These are typically time-limited structures lasting between five and 10 years before they are absorbed into another unit or department.

## 2.7 Summary of findings by target group

### Disabled children and young people

Disabled children and young people have a significant number of legislative Acts to protect them from discrimination within schools and to provide financial support (16 across the UK). A total of five strategy documents have been released since 1987, focusing on raising standards and outcomes for children with special educational needs in England alone. While strategies often lead to a number of different initiatives and funding streams, this has not been the case for disabled children, with only five new initiatives and funding streams designed specifically for this group announced over the last two decades.

### Children in care

Following the Children Act (1989), a number of pieces of legislation were introduced to support children in care. Over the past 21 years there have been six pieces of legislation directly relevant to children in care. Two key programmes of action in England (and the only

initiatives directly targeting children in care within the UK) Quality Protects and Choice Protects have had substantial influence over policy and practice across the UK. Unfortunately, these time-limited programmes have ended and have not been replaced. In recent years, outcomes for children in care have come to the forefront of the government agenda, which has led to a number of strategy documents and initiatives in both England and Scotland.

### Children whose families need support

'Children whose families need support' is a grouping that covers a range of children and families with a wide range of needs. Of particular interest to Action for Children were children who are having difficulties at school. These children and young people are at particular risk of becoming involved in anti-social and offending behaviours. The government has therefore identified them as a priority group for interventions – this is clear from the research, which identified eight separate programmes targeting these children over the past 11 years in England alone. Nevertheless, both initiatives and funding streams tend to be time limited (on average around three years long).

### Young people facing severe difficulties

Young offenders and young people leaving care both face severe difficulties early in their lives. While young people leaving care often have not had a choice about their situation, the same is not always true for young people who engage in offending behaviours. While our research found a host of legislation, strategies, structures and initiatives for young people who offend, the level of attention paid to young people leaving care is stark in comparison. Only the Children (Leaving Care) Acts, which have applications in all UK countries, make substantial provisions for care leavers.

*as long as it takes*