

Nuffield
Family Justice
Observatory

Supporting better
outcomes for children
through research



Foreword

I am delighted to be Chair of the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and I am determined to drive forward its ambitious research programme. For far too long the family justice system has been operating in the dark – we need data and research evidence to inform decision-making.

There is much we don't know. Why, for example, are increasing numbers of children involved in care proceedings and coming into care? Why has the number of children involved in private law proceedings also increased? And what factors are driving the marked regional differences in the number of children in the family justice system?

We need to have a much fuller picture of the context in which children and families come before family courts. This is essential if we are to identify more effective ways to resolve conflict and enhance parenting capacity.

Another significant gap in our collective knowledge is children's outcomes. What are the consequences of the decisions we make about their futures? How do children who have experienced the family justice system fare later in life?

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory has a bold agenda to examine and illuminate these issues and others, for all those working in and around the family justice system.

It is also a collaborative endeavour. We welcome the opportunity to work with others to ensure that insights from data and research reach those who are making such difficult and important decisions about children's lives.

Sir James Munby, Chair

About us

The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (Nuffield FJO) supports better outcomes for children in the family justice system in England and Wales by improving the use of data and research evidence in decision-making.

The Nuffield FJO is an independent organisation established and funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The context

The family courts operate on the principle that the welfare of a child is paramount, and everyone working in or around the family justice system wants to secure the best possible future for children. Decisions taken in both public and private law cases can be momentous and life-changing for children and their families. A child's sense of identity, their well-being and their future prospects are likely to be influenced by such decisions, in both positive and negative ways.

We believe that research evidence and national administrative data can support and enhance decision-making by improving understanding of why children come into the family justice system, their experience of it, and their outcomes. In establishing the Nuffield FJO, we have sought to understand the needs of those working in family justice – judges, social workers, Cafcass guardians and others. We will also seek to engage with children and families who have first-hand experience of the family justice system.

How we make a difference

- **Supporting** the analysis of national data and linking data from different sources to better understand the experience of children and families in the family justice system.
- **Researching** issues facing children and families and collaborating with others to bring about change in practice.
- **Enabling** decision-makers to access the latest data and research evidence.



Looking ahead

Our work in 2019/2020 will include:

- An accessible summary of what we do and don't know about children in the family justice system from national data.
- The first ever national profile of children and families in private law proceedings.
- Development and testing of evidence-informed guidance to inform practice when infants are taken into care at birth.
- Exploring the mismatch between what children need from ongoing contact with family members and how this works in practice.
- A spotlight on emerging best practice in supporting adolescents coming into the family justice system.
- Synthesis of the latest research evidence for judges, social workers and others in the wider family justice system.

Find out more about our work at:
nuffieldfjo.org.uk



Governing board

The work of the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory is overseen by a Governing Board. Members of the Board are:

Sir James Munby

Chair, former President of the Family
Division of the High Court of England and Wales

Noel Arnold

Director of Legal Practice and Solicitor,
Coram Children's Legal Centre

Sally-Ann Jenkins

Head of Children's and Families
Services, Newport City Council

Sophie Kershaw Miller

Head of Safeguarding and Quality
Assurance, Camden Council

Her Honour Judge

Lesley Newton

Senior Circuit Judge, Designated
Family Judge for Greater Manchester

Carey Oppenheim

Independent consultant and former
CEO Early Intervention Foundation

Andrew Webb

Former President of the Association
of Directors of Children's Services

Teresa Williams

Director of Strategy at Cafcass

Professor Karen Broadhurst

Principal Academic Advisor
to the Governing Board

Stakeholder Advisory Council

The purpose of the Stakeholder Advisory Council is to ensure that the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory is rooted in the experience and expertise of professionals working in the wider family justice system and children and families who experience it first-hand.

Visit nuffieldfjo.org.uk for a full list of members of the Council.

Our history

2016

The Nuffield Foundation commissions a consortium led by the Centre for Child and Family Justice Research at Lancaster University, to carry out a 12-month scoping study, including consultation with stakeholders, to explore the feasibility of establishing a Family Justice Observatory and its potential functions.

2018

The Nuffield Foundation announces up to £5 million funding for the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and commissions a team led by the Centre for Child and Family Justice Research to develop further its infrastructure and operating model.

2011

The Family Justice Review identifies the need to make better use of research evidence and administrative data in family justice decision-making.

2015

Following consultation with people working in the family justice system, the Nuffield Foundation announces its intention to improve the generation and application of research by establishing a Family Justice Observatory

2019

The Nuffield Foundation appoints a permanent team to lead the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory during its pilot phase to 2023.

Contact us

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About the Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being.

It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare and Justice. It also provides opportunities for young people to develop skills and confidence in science and research.

In addition to the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory, the Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Ada Lovelace Institute.

nuffieldfoundation.org

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