

Personalised services

Outline of a research project
funded by the NIHR School
for Social Care Research



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

What services will be important for the personalisation of social care, and what are the implications for providers?

The 'personalisation' of social care and support aims to address an individual user's needs and preferred outcomes through the provision of a range of traditional and innovative services. The use of personal budgets is an important part of this approach, empowering and enabling individuals and families to choose and obtain the services they want.

For this policy to succeed, a wide range of options must be available to the service user. This is likely to involve opening up access to services already available to the general population as well as developing innovative specialised and peer/user-led services. To ensure that appropriate services are on offer, it is important to understand what services are valued by users and their carers, and to establish what personalised and innovative services are already available and appear successful.

This project

- will identify approaches to personalisation that merit evaluation and further research in order to promote the commissioning and development of cost-effective options for service users.

It aims to

- identify the outcomes that people find it most difficult to address in care support plans
- establish the types and characteristics of interventions people want to purchase with their personal budgets but which are not widely available
- identify the characteristics of service interventions where local councils have an important role to play in ensuring that they are available for personal budget holders to purchase
- explore the types of services facing reduced demand as a result of the move to personalisation, and the consequent challenges this presents to both commissioners and service users
- describe innovative interventions (including user-led services) which are regarded as current models of good practice, and then investigate whether these services demonstrate the characteristics specified by services users.

Research project outline

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

Social care policy currently emphasises the importance of ‘personalisation’. This approach ensures that people have the necessary choice and control to enable them to obtain the care and support that suits them best, and achieves their preferred outcomes. Putting People First set out a broad context for this increased choice and control.

On the ground, the introduction of personal budgets has given individuals and their families the opportunity to plan and manage their own care and support, where they wish to. Under this policy initiative, service users know what resources and options are open to them, and are offered a range of deployment possibilities, ranging from self-organised services to having local councils (or other agencies) manage the support they want.

Putting People First

An approach to adult social care that supports people’s choices so that they:

- Live independently
- Stay healthy and recover quickly from illness
- Exercise maximum control over their own lives and (where appropriate) those of family members
- Participate as active and equal citizens both economically and socially
- Have the best quality of life, irrespective of illness or disability
- Retain maximum dignity and respect

(HM Government 2007)

For this vision to be achieved, however, there must be a wide range of service options on offer, embracing innovative approaches that go beyond traditional services. This should include the use of new specialist services, as well as

broader access to facilities available to the mainstream population. It is also important that this more innovative approach to service provision is relevant to all users.

During piloting of the forerunner to personal budgets (individual budgets) it was found that take-up tended to be restricted to younger service users and focused mainly on leisure activities.

As personalisation moves to the mainstream, two trends are expected to result from the increased flexibility of personal budgets:

- There will be greater demand for more diverse specialised and peer/user-led services.
- Some services are likely to face reduced demand. For example, day centre attendance may fall if some users prefer the options of visiting friends or attending mainstream venues and events, such as swimming pools and football matches.

These trends pose questions about how financially viable the new specialised services will be (especially at outset), and also whether declining popularity of some existing services threatens their continuing viability (even though some users will still want to use these services).

A commissioning challenge

Commissioners of social care services will thus face many new challenges in deciding how to deploy public funds. What services should local councils invest in? What is the relative cost-effectiveness of the different options? Who do they work best for?

Currently there is little evidence to facilitate councils and providers in commissioning and developing cost-effective options for service users.

Research project outline

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

This scoping study seeks to identify the aspects of care and support where individuals have difficulty in achieving their desired outcomes, while also highlighting examples of successful innovative personalised services and identifying the types of services that are likely to face reduced demand.

The intention is for this work to identify a range of potential future research projects that together will build a solid evidence base in this field over the next five years.

The study has three stages.

STAGE 1: Initial scoping

This work will have three strands.

- An analysis of the data that was collected as part of the Individual Budgets evaluation (IBSEN), including the content of support plans for about 100 individuals and whether they met the specified aims and objectives.
- A review of the academic and practice literature (and other sources) to identify the challenges encountered in early attempts to meet the personalisation agenda. This will include available information about the costs and effectiveness of interventions.
- Consultations with user-led organisations, policy makers, provider groups and those responsible for practice development (up to 20 in total). This will explore the challenges already identified and any promising innovations, including those in need of evaluation.

Initially, all service user groups and carers will be included, although this may become more focused as the project proceeds.

STAGE 2: Fieldwork

A national survey of local councils with social care responsibilities will be carried out to gather information on existing successful flexible personalised interventions, services they are decommissioning (or plan to), and service outcomes that are particularly difficult to address.

The project will seek agreement from four local councils to take part in more in-depth study. A range of types of councils will be selected, but all will already have made some progress in implementing the personalisation agenda. For these in-depth studies, the project will use focus groups and interviews with service users groups, social care staff, commissioners and other stakeholders to investigate perceived gaps in provision, and to gather information on existing innovative/flexible service approaches that are considered successful.

This stage aims to identify areas for future research that could have wider relevance for implementing the personalisation agenda in social care practice in England. These are expected to include aspects of service outcomes, improving the flexibility of service options, addressing barriers to personalisation, and approaches to decommissioning services.

STAGE 3: Validation and identification of way forward

This final stage will draw together the evidence from the earlier stages to identify:

- The core problems and barriers that need to be addressed.
- The degree to which the study has identified approaches already available for addressing them.
- Areas in need of evaluation.
- Gaps in provision.

Project publications

The principal output will be proposals for future work for the SSCR. After the first stage, an interim report will identify initiatives for which there is already sufficient evidence that they appear to merit further research. The in-depth second stage is expected to produce proposals for further research with the four participating local councils. On completion of the project, a peer review journal article will be submitted on the key challenges of personalisation, focusing on achievable outcomes and service developments. Summary findings will be provided to all participants, and the results covered in one of the regular SSCR items in *Community Care*.

Research project outline

HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

The current evidence base in the area of personalisation of social care services is limited so this scoping study will identify a number of areas for potential future research that will provide a foundation for greater understanding and knowledge in this field. These areas for further work will be relevant for several of the SSCR's programme areas. For example, improved personalisation is closely related to empowering users of social care services, and users will benefit from understanding what interventions have been shown best to achieve their preferred social care outcomes.

From the viewpoint of local councils and commissioners, it is important that there is an understanding of demonstrably effective and cost-effective approaches to personalised service interventions and delivery arrangements. Social care staff, third sector organisations and unpaid carers will all be in a stronger position to support the personalisation agenda if there is better evidence of how best this can be done.

The NIHR School for Social Care Research

The School for Social Care Research was set up by the National Institute for Health Research to develop and improve the evidence base for adult social care practice in England. It officially launched on 1 May 2009 with funding of £15 million over five years.

The School conducts and commissions high-quality research across five overlapping programme areas:

Prevention and reduction – How can we best prevent or reduce the development or exacerbation of the circumstances that lead to the need for social care?

Empowerment and safeguarding – How can we best empower and safeguard people who use social care services?

Care and work – How can we best equip and support people – practitioners, volunteers, informal carers – to provide optimum social care? How can we ensure that people who use social care and their carers are enabled and supported in paid work and other types of meaningful activity?

Service interventions, commissioning and change – What interventions, commissioning and delivery arrangements best achieve social care outcomes?

Resources and interfaces – How can social care and other public resources best be deployed and combined to achieve social care outcomes?

Further information about the NIHR School for Social Care Research is available at www.sscr.nihr.ac.uk

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Personalisation of services –
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