

Social Care Regulation: Resource Use

PSSRU

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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JULY 2004

INTRODUCTION

Social care regulation aims to:

- monitor and enforce service standards;
- protect service users from abuse or neglect;
- promote quality of care; and
- provide information about the care sector.

The Burgner report (1996) recommended that regulation be financed mainly from providers' fees, which should relate closely to the actual costs of regulation. Fee levels and resources set for the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC), which came into operation in April 2002, drew on studies of the costs of regulation conducted by the Personal Social Services Research Unit in 1998/99 (Netten et al., 1999; 2000). In 2003 the NCSC commissioned the PSSRU to undertake similar research into resource use under the new system.

The NCSC introduced a national system of regulation, using new minimum standards for service provision and national methodologies for registration and inspection by 71 area offices. Regulatory responsibilities included:

- Care homes and adult placement schemes
- Children's homes

- Independent fostering agencies
- Boarding schools, residential special schools and FE colleges
- Independent health care establishments
- Nursing agencies, domiciliary care agencies and family care centers, from April 2003.

Frequency of inspections varied: care homes, adult placement services, and children's homes twice yearly; residential family centers, independent fostering services, boarding schools, residential special schools and local authority fostering yearly.

RESEARCH AIMS AND METHOD

The aims of the research were to:

- identify and investigate the resources used by the NCSC to undertake regulatory functions;
- compare these with the resource use by the previous registration and inspection units; and
- compare these resource requirements with the current arrangements for organisation and funding of the NCSC.

The number of services, inspections and complaints, and the levels of staffing were identified centrally. Postal questionnaires were sent to

all NCSC area offices to identify:

- levels of area activity in 2002–03 (registrations, variations to registration, de-registrations and enforcement action);
- time use of inspectors and business services staff during a sample week (in May 2003); and
- resources used in a sample of recent regulatory activities related to adult and children's services.

Ninety-three per cent of the area offices provided information. Responses to each questionnaire varied, ranging from 48 to 93 per cent, which was unsurprising given the variation in services across the country.

Sixty-six per cent of the inspectors asked to complete a time use diary responded, which represented about 40 per cent of inspectors. Eighty-one per cent of business services staff contacted responded, about 50 per cent of business services staff in area offices.

FINDINGS

Services regulated

21,825 care homes, 2,033 services for children (including 1,182 children's homes), and 927 independent healthcare establishments were registered with the NCSC at 31 March 2003.

The Research Team

The PSSRU staff who conducted this study were Ann Netten, Jacquetta Williams, Janet Wiseman, Jane Dennett and Andrew Fenyo at the PSSRU, University of Kent. The project secretary is Lesley Cox (01227 823963; email L.A.Cox@kent.ac.uk).

Activities undertaken

Central data indicated that the NCSC conducted 38,280 inspections of adult services and 3,154 of children's services. This compares with 41,540 adult services and 3,050 children's homes and boarding schools inspected by local authority and joint R&I units in 2000-01 (Department of Health, 2001).

The NCSC investigated just over two thirds of the 8,848 complaints about services received compared with investigation of just over a quarter of the 13,900 complaints received by R&I units in 2000-01.

Responding areas reported receiving nearly 5,000 new registration applications for care homes and 1,066 applications for children's services. 716 care homes and 308 children's services were registered. On average each responding area registered 13 care homes and six children's homes.

Area offices made 745 major variations to conditions of registration for care homes and 87 major variations to children's services. 426 care home re-registrations were made due to a change in owner and 31 children's services were re-registered.

Central data indicated that 2,389 care homes closed. Four of these were due to enforcement action. Sixty children's homes closed.

Staffing

Nearly two-thirds of NCSC staff were inspectors. Just over a quarter of the staff were business services staff and one-eighth management. There was some regional variation. At the end of the first year about 5 per cent of inspector and manager posts were vacant and 8 per cent of business services staff posts.

The majority of responding inspectors had worked in regulation for more than five years. The average hours inspectors worked per week

was similar to that in the past, although hours worked varied widely. Nearly half of the business services staff said the training on internal systems was less than adequate.

Time use

Overall patterns of activity suggest a reduction in specialisation. More inspectors who had responsibility for children's services also had responsibility for adult services than in the past.

A smaller proportion of inspectors' overall time was spent on regulating children's services: 24 per cent of the sample week compared with 39 per cent among inspectors responsible for children's services in 1999.

Inspectors reported spending a higher proportion of time on inspection during the sample week than in the past. Among inspectors with responsibility for adult services the proportion of time spent on inspection rose by 15 per cent, from 43 per cent in 1998 to 58 per cent in 2003.

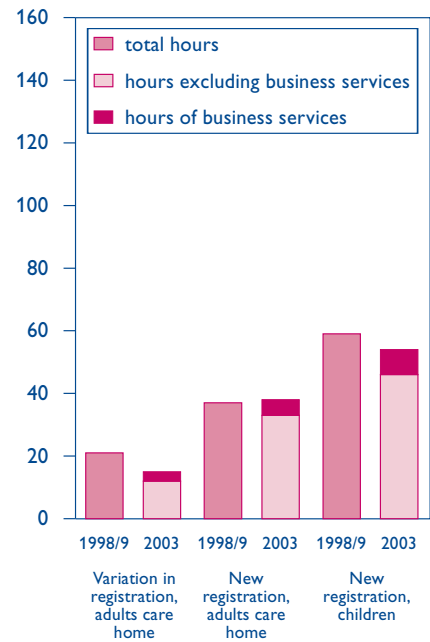
Less time than in the past was spent on management and administration, enforcement activities, and development activities not directly related to registration, inspection, complaints or enforcement.

Business services administrators and senior administrators reported spending half their time on registration and inspection or inspection-related activities.

Resources used by activities

Figure 1 compares the resources used to conduct registration activities in 2003 with those used in 1998/9. Time spent in hours is shown excluding and including business services staff input, which was measured for the first time. In the 1998/9 studies support staff input was incorporated in the cost-ing process.

Figure 1 Hours spent on registration activities in 2003 and 1998/9



Fewer inspector hours were spent on new registrations and variations than in the past, although the overall time spent on registration activities changed little. Business services staff spent between three and eight hours on average on registration activities per week. The variation in time taken was less than in the past.

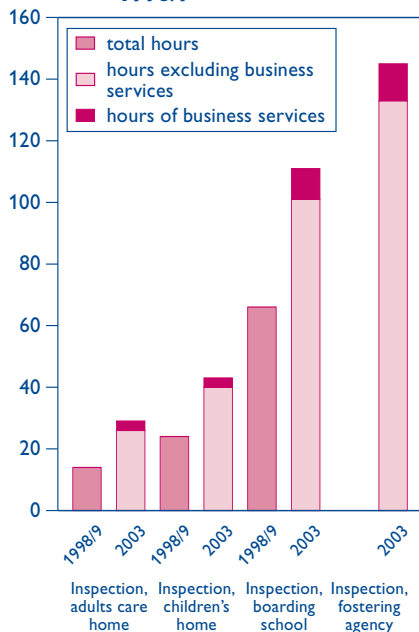
Figure 2 compares the resources used to conduct inspection activities in 2003 with the resources used in 1998/9.

More inspector hours were spent on inspections of care homes, children's homes and boarding schools than in the past.

Allowing for the balance of announced and unannounced inspections, the average time taken to inspect a care home had increased by 55 per cent, or by 71 per cent when the input of business services staff is included. The time taken to conduct announced inspections of care homes increased by more than double that of unannounced.

Similarly, the average time to inspect a children's home had increased since 1999 by 44 per cent, or by 56 per cent when the

Figure 2 Hours spent on inspections in 2003 and 1998/9



input of business services staff is included. The average time taken to inspect boarding schools had increased since 1999 by 70 per cent including the input of business services staff or 55 per cent excluding business services staff.

More time was taken to inspect fostering agencies than any other type of establishment: 140 hours on average, 129 hours excluding business services staff.

More time was spent on inspecting local authority fostering agencies than independent agencies.

There was greater variation in the time spent on announced inspections of care homes, inspections of children's homes and inspections of

boarding schools than in the past. However, there was no increase in the variation in time spent on unannounced inspections of care homes (all children's home inspections are announced).

Shorter inspection times for care homes were associated with unannounced inspections, smaller homes, homes classified as low risk and inspections with satisfactory outcomes. Shorter inspection times for children's homes were associated with smaller homes, homes classified as low risk, and homes that provided for children with alcohol dependence or prepared children for permanent placement. Shorter inspection times for boarding schools were associated with smaller schools and the number of inspection methods used. Shorter inspection times for fostering agencies were associated with those agencies that supported children ending their time in care and those that offered shared care.

There was some evidence that the time taken to inspect children's homes reduced over the course of the year although there was no evidence of a similar 'learning effect' in relation to care home or boarding school inspections.

KEY MESSAGES

Overall there was a substantial increase in the time taken to undertake most of the regulatory activities for which the NCSC was responsible with a consequent rise in the associated costs.

Changes in the process of regulation were such that an increase in time spent on inspection was anticipated. What was less expected was the increase in the variation in time spent on regulatory activities. As procedures were more standardised it might have been expected that this variation would have decreased.

REFERENCES

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Further Information

This summary and the full report are available at the PSSRU website, www.pssru.ac.uk.

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Acknowledgements

We should like to thank members of the National Care Standards Commission who participated in this project. Responsibility for the report and this summary is the authors' alone.

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