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## UK Resilience programme evaluation: Second interim report

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### Introduction

There are increasing concerns about children's well-being in the UK, their behaviour, and the low academic attainment of a large fraction of the population.<sup>1</sup> Recently, the potential and duty of schools to promote pupils' well-being has been stressed as part of the Every Child Matters agenda. In September 2007, three local authorities (South Tyneside, Manchester and Hertfordshire) piloted a programme with Year 7 pupils in 22 of their schools, with the aim of building pupils' resilience and promoting well-being: the UK Resilience Programme. More schools have since begun teaching the programme.

The evaluation aims to investigate whether the programme (previously trialled in small samples) can be delivered at scale; whether it has an impact on children's well-being; and if so, whether this will have an impact on behaviour, attendance and academic attainment.

The first interim report was published in April 2009 and gives an overview of the UK Resilience Programme and its implementation, describes the evaluation, and offers preliminary findings about programme impact. The report also contains a bibliography and descriptions of previous research on the Penn Resiliency Program (the curriculum on which UKRP is based), and describes the curriculum in detail. In this second report we frequently refer to the first report<sup>2</sup> for background information and previous findings, and it can be found online at:

[http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR094%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR094%20(1).pdf)

while the corresponding four-page research brief can be found at:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RB094.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the recent UNICEF report "An overview of child well-being in rich countries" which puts the UK at the bottom of a list of 21 advanced countries:

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc7eng.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Referred to as Challen et al. (2009). The first and second interim reports are by the same authors.

## Key findings at second interim stage

- The quantitative work found a significant short-run improvement in pupils' depression symptom scores and school attendance rates. There was also an impact on anxiety, but this was smaller, and concentrated in a few groups of pupils: boys, particularly boys with SEN or FSM entitlement, and lower-attaining girls.
- The size of the impact varied by how workshops were organised. Weekly workshops showed a larger impact than those timetabled fortnightly.
- The impact also varied by pupil characteristics, and was larger for pupils with Special Educational Needs (when the outcome was anxiety or depression); for pupils entitled to free school meals (anxiety and attendance); for pupils who had not attained the national target levels in Key Stage 2 exams (depression, anxiety and attendance); and for pupils with worse initial scores for symptoms of depression or anxiety (depression and anxiety).
- On average the effect of the workshops lasted only as long as the academic year, and had faded by the one-year follow-up questionnaire in June 2009. However, there was still an impact for certain groups at follow-up, particularly for pupils who had not attained the national target levels at Key Stage 2 in English or maths.
- Return visits to nine of the case study schools revealed that seven of the nine schools were continuing to deliver the UKRP to all Year 7 pupils.
- Facilitators were extremely positive about the ideas underlying the programme and about the training they had received. Most reported that they used the skills themselves.
- Facilitators found the curriculum materials didactic and thought they could be improved. Many felt that some pupils struggled with the programme content and materials.
- Pupils were generally positive about the programme. Interviews for the First Interim Report suggested that pupils had applied UKRP skills in real life situations, and some interviewees showed a good understanding of elements of the programme.
- Future quantitative analysis will examine the longer-run impact on attendance, academic attainment and psychological well-being.
- The final report will be available in early 2011.

## Background

The UK Resilience Programme is the UK implementation of the Penn Resiliency Programme (PRP), a curriculum developed by a team of psychologists at the University of Pennsylvania. The PRP's original aim was to prevent adolescent depression, but it now has a broader remit of building resilience, and promoting accurate thinking, adaptive coping skills and social problem-solving in children, with the aim of improving psychological well-being - and potentially also behaviour, attendance and academic outcomes. Previous research<sup>3</sup> suggests that PRP can be effective in helping protect children against anxiety and depression, and some studies have found an impact on behaviour. It is thought that the skills taught in the PRP could be applied in many contexts, including relationships with peers and family members, and achievement in academic or other activities.

PRP is a manualised intervention comprising 18 hours of workshops. ("manualised" means that no additional materials or resources are required to lead the workshops.) The curriculum teaches cognitive-behavioural and social problem solving skills. Central to PRP is Ellis' *Activating-Belief-Consequences* model which postulates that beliefs about events mediate their impact on emotions and behaviour. PRP

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/prpsum.htm> for details of PRP research, and further background on the programme

participants are encouraged to identify and challenge inaccurate beliefs, to employ evidence to make more accurate appraisals of situations and others' behaviour, and to use effective coping mechanisms when faced with adversity. Participants also learn techniques for positive social behaviour, assertiveness, negotiation, decision-making, and relaxation.

The manualised nature of the PRP and UKRP curricula and the intensive training required before delivery allow facilitators to be drawn from a wide range of professions and agencies, including teachers, learning mentors, teaching assistants, psychologists and health professionals. The training takes around 8-10 days, with the first half of the course focusing on teaching trainees adult-level Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) skills, and the second week on familiarising them with the students' curriculum and practising how to communicate it to pupils.

## Evaluation design

The research consists of three main parts: **quantitative analysis** based on a controlled trial design; **surveys of teacher and pupil satisfaction** with the programme; and a **qualitative case study** element.

Findings from all three strands were reported in the first interim report. Please see this report for more detail on evaluation methodology. The second interim report details further results from the quantitative and case study investigations.

## Findings from quantitative analysis at second interim stage

The first UKRP workshops were delivered to Year 7 pupils in 22 participating schools in 2007-8. In the first interim report (Challen et al., 2009) we provided an assessment of the short-run impact of the workshops (to July 2008), finding that on average they had a small but significant impact on pupils' depression and anxiety scores. We also found differences in the size of the effect of the programme based on the timing and frequency of the workshops (weekly workshops starting at the beginning of the academic year had more of an impact), and by pupil characteristics (lower attaining and more disadvantaged pupils gained more, as well as pupils who started the year with worse symptoms).

In this follow-up quantitative analysis we look at the same cohort of pupils and examine the impact of the programme at the one-year follow-up point in June 2009, comparing this to the impact seen in the first year of the workshops. We also improve upon the method of analysis we used in the 2009 report. We use two samples of pupils: the full sample of all UKRP and control pupils who were in Year 7 in 2007-8, and a subsample of these in which programme and control pupils are well matched on a variety of characteristics. We use both in our analyses, and obtain similar results.

We find an average improvement in pupils' depression symptom scores and school attendance as a result of the workshops, although this has faded by one-year follow-up for the depression score (we have not yet been able to examine this for attendance as the data are not yet available). There was also an impact on anxiety, but this was smaller on average, and more concentrated in only a few groups of pupils: boys, particularly boys with SEN or FSM entitlement, and lower-attaining girls.

As we found in the 2009 report, we find important differences in the effects of the workshops in terms of how they were organised, with weekly workshops starting at the beginning of the academic year showing more impact.

The impact of the programme also varies by pupil characteristics: in general, lower attaining and more disadvantaged pupils appear to gain more from the workshops (as we found in the previous report), and in some cases the programme impact has not faded for these groups by the one-year follow-up.

The average improvement in absence rates appears to be similar across different ways of organising workshops, and is also similar for most groups of pupils. It is equivalent to an improvement of about 1.8 more school days attended over the course of the year.

### **Findings from qualitative case studies at second interim stage**

The quantitative findings reported earlier all relate to the first cohort of Year 7 pupils who attended UKRP sessions in 2007-08 and were subsequently followed up. 2007-08 was the first year in which the programme was delivered. In this section we report findings from the qualitative element of the research project. Here we focus on how the UKRP had been implemented in schools and how the programme was operating in schools in its third year of delivery (2009-10). It is important therefore to regard the quantitative and qualitative elements of the evaluation as discrete elements of the research project.

Ten UKRP schools were visited in 2007-08 to collect qualitative interview data to supplement the quantitative analysis that forms the core of the UKRP evaluation. Findings from these visits were reported in the previous interim report (Challen et al., 2009). Nine of the ten case study schools were visited again in the autumn term of 2009-10 to examine how the implementation of the UKRP had progressed in those schools.

In 2009-10 the UKRP was being delivered to 100% of the Year 7 cohort in seven of the nine case study schools visited. At one of the other schools a decision had been taken to discontinue delivery of the programme and at the other delivery in 2009-10 had been postponed, perhaps indefinitely.

In three schools the UKRP was being delivered primarily by teachers and in the other four schools it was delivered primarily by non-teachers (for example, teaching assistants, cover supervisors or learning mentors). The schools in which the UKRP was delivered primarily by teachers all had impressive track records in promoting pupils' academic progress. One interpretation would be that this may have enabled teachers to focus on pupils' well-being, through the UKRP, rather than focusing more exclusively on attainment.

At schools where more non-teachers delivered the UKRP it appeared that pay and holiday arrangements, workloads, and non-teachers seeing the UKRP as a good career development opportunity may have contributed to this drift to non-teachers.

Senior management backing for the UKRP was clearly very important to its successful implementation and could vary substantially. Management backing could be shown through financial support and through giving the UKRP relatively high priority when deciding on the school timetable.

The UKRP was accommodated in the curriculum either as a stand-alone subject, timetabled once per fortnight or timetabled weekly in conjunction with another subject. For example, in some schools the UKRP was delivered during English lessons, PSHE lessons or as part of a PLTS programme.

Interviewees were generally positive about their experience of the programme. Evidence from interviews indicated that the emotional content of UKRP sessions could vary substantially. Pupils could sometimes raise upsetting issues during UKRP sessions. In keeping with the previous report (Challen et al., 2009) interviewees spoke positively about the quality of UKRP training though some expressed reservations about the quality of the teaching materials.

## Policy and delivery implications

Here we list potential policy and delivery implications of the results presented in this report and the findings of last year's report. Many of these points are considerations rather than recommendations, but they do highlight issues around implementing the programme.

- 1) It is essential that the programme has the backing of senior management within schools.
- 2) A preferred model of delivery for the UKRP, based on the recommendations of the course developers and the findings of this study, might involve 18 weekly sessions delivered to groups of no more than 15 pupils. Only two of the nine case study schools were delivering the UKRP in accordance with this preferred delivery model. It is clear there are pressures on the UKRP within schools, and these may arise from financial or timetabling demands or from pressure to improve pupils' levels of attainment.
- 3) There is a drift evident in some schools towards the programme being delivered by non-teachers, in part because of the pressures noted above. Such a drift may reduce the pool from which potential trainees may be selected.
- 4) It is important that school staff delivering the programme know how the school's child protection arrangements work, and are aware that the programme may lead to disclosure of serious problems by pupils. Staff need to be adequately prepared for and supported throughout the programme in order to deal with these issues.
- 5) The UKRP was intended to be a universal programme, but some schools have chosen to target pupils for inclusion in workshops. It is not clear which model is preferable, and this will probably depend on the situation of each school. However, the following points are worth bearing in mind:
  - Based on the quantitative analysis, certain groups of pupils appeared to benefit more from the workshops, particularly those who did not achieve the national targets at Key Stage 2, pupils with SEN, and pupils who started the school year with higher levels of depression or anxiety symptoms.
  - However, the measured impact on these pupils is the impact of the programme delivered to 'universal' or mixed workshop groups, not of groups consisting entirely of targeted pupils. One cannot therefore assume that the same impact would be obtained if workshop groups were targeted.
  - Some schools that did run workshops entirely with targeted pupils reported these as being very difficult to manage and not very successful compared to more mixed groups.
  - The same applies to levels of academic attainment: many facilitators commented that SEN groups or lower set groups did not go well, or that the presence of more able or more literate pupils aided the success of the lessons.
  - Although facilitators and other school staff often appeared to assume that higher ability pupils were naturally more resilient, or had fewer problems, almost all facilitators claimed to use the UKRP skills themselves. It therefore seems unlikely that higher ability pupils or those with better psychological well-being would be unable to benefit from the skills.
  - Even if pupils were to be targeted for inclusion in workshops, it is important that they should be targeted appropriately. Previous research suggests that school staff tend to identify pupils with behaviour problems rather than those with emotional difficulties, yet the programme is primarily designed to address the latter. The process of targeting would also need to be carefully considered.
  - Participation in programmes perceived to be targeted and remedial can attract stigma for those who participate. Universal programmes avoid this.

- The measures used in the evaluation are sensitive to differences in the severity of symptoms of depression and anxiety, but are not good at distinguishing between children who have few or no symptoms. For instance, they would not be able to detect any improvements in well-being for pupils who showed no initial symptoms of depression, although this would not necessarily mean that these children did not benefit.
- The skills pupils used most (as reported by both pupils and facilitators) were the interpersonal skills around negotiation and assertiveness, and techniques for self-control. Since all pupils are likely to experience conflict and problems around everyday social interactions it is likely that all pupils could benefit from the workshops, at least in these areas.

### **Continued evaluation**

The UKRP evaluation will continue until December 2010. It will develop analysis of the controlled trial element of the study and continue to examine the extent to which impact of the UKRP is sustained over time, and whether participation in the programme also has an effect on academic attainment, behaviour and other outcomes. The final report will be available in early 2011.

### **Additional Information**

The full report (DCSF) can be accessed at [www.education.gov.uk/research](http://www.education.gov.uk/research)

Further information about this research can be obtained from  
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Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.

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This research report was written before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.