

Department of Education

Public Seminar

Monday 13th June 2016

Monday 4.30 – 6.00pm

Seminar Room A

15 Norham Gardens



The findings of an RCT evaluation of the effectiveness of the Letterbox Club in improving reading and number skills of foster children ages 7-11 years old



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The poor educational outcomes of children in care are a significant concern internationally. Whilst there have been many interventions developed to address this problem, very few of these have been rigorously evaluated. This paper presents the findings of a randomised controlled trial that sought to measure the effectiveness of a book gifting programme (the Letterbox Club) that aims to improve literacy skills amongst children aged 7–11 years in foster care. The programme involves children receiving six parcels of books sent through the post over a six-month period. The trial, which ran between April 2013 and June 2014, involved a sample of 116 children in Northern Ireland (56 randomly allocated to the intervention group and 60 to a waiting list control group). Outcome measures and findings are discussed. The accompanying qualitative process evaluation that sought to determine foster carer/child attitude towards and engagement with the parcels are also considered. In light of the combined quantitative and qualitative findings it is recommended that the logic model/theory of change underpinning book gifting schemes might benefit from being more clearly defined and that it might help if a clearer role for foster carers was delineated.

Karen Winter is a lecturer in social work at Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests include children and young people in care; children's rights; communication and positive relationships with children; vulnerable families. She has been involved in a number of research projects funded by local government, the ESRC and the voluntary sector. She has published extensively in her area of expertise. Karen is a Board member of the European Social Work Research Association. Outside of work she is also the Chair of the advisory group for Fostering Network Northern Ireland and a non-executive member of the Board for the Northern Ireland Guardian ad Litem Agency where she is also chair of the social care governance committee. Prior to a career in academia Karen worked as a qualified social worker, team manager in child protection and as a Guardian Ad Litem in a career spanning over 16 years.

This seminar is convened by **Professor Judy Sebba** on behalf of the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education