



Queen's University
Belfast

Centre for
Evidence and
Social Innovation

RCT EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LETTERBOX CLUB IN IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AMONG CHILDREN AGED 7-11 YEARS IN FOSTER CARE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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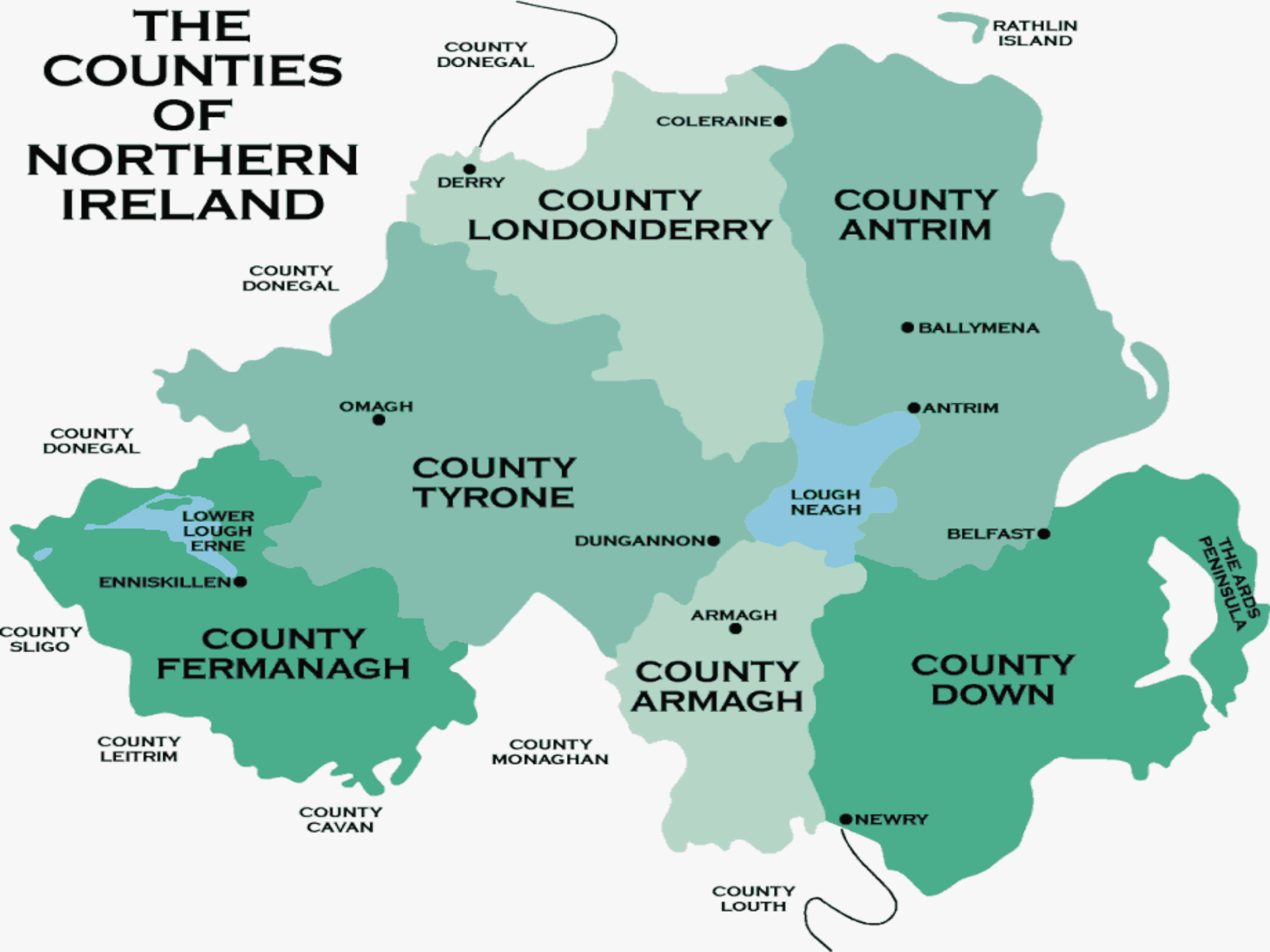
University of Oxford, June 2016

www.qub.ac.uk/cesi

Overview of Presentation

1. 'Looked-after' children in Northern Ireland
2. Educational attainment
3. Interventions to improve educational attainment of 'looked-after' children
4. The Letterbox Club
5. Evidence of the effectiveness of the Letterbox Club
6. Recommendations

THE COUNTIES OF NORTHERN IRELAND



Looked After Children in Northern Ireland

- At 31 March 2015, 2,875 children looked after in Northern Ireland. Highest number since introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995
- Majority of looked after children in Northern Ireland looked after for less than three years, with just under a tenth looked after for ten years or longer
- Three quarters were in foster care placements (76%), 12% placed with parents, 7% in residential care and 5% in other placements.

- Statements of Educational Need (24% compared with 4%)
- Suspension rates (8% compared with 2%)
- Exclusion rates (1% compared with 0%)
- Absenteeism rates (5% compared with 5%)

- Key stage 1 (8 year olds)
 - English Level 2 (63% compared with 95%)
 - Maths Level 2 (70% compared with 95%)
- Key stage 2 (11 year olds)
 - English Level 4 or above (34% compared with 80%)
 - Maths Level 4 or above (37% compared with 81%)

Interventions – Structural Approaches

- Looked After Children Education (LACE) teams
- Personal Education Plans (PEP)
- Extra curricular activities
- Additional funding

Interventions – Direct to Child

- Bursaries
- School entry prioritisation
- Alternative educational provision (AEP)/private tuition
- Schemes to improve literacy and numeracy –book gifting

The Letterbox Club

- Once monthly parcel for 6 months - May to October
- Books, stationery, number games
- Addressed to the child with personalised letter
- Interest level, not ability level <http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk>



Reading materials:

- Range of type of text
- Range of reading purpose
- Reading in a variety of contexts
- Ownership of the reading process
- Using reading to reflect on personal experiences

Number materials:

- Compliment the NI Primary Curriculum
- Focus on number, problem solving and mathematical thinking
- Games and associated materials lend themselves to development of mathematical language and thinking
- Encourage those who might otherwise be reluctant
- Offer a constructive and important role in bridging both educational and social gaps in a child's life

- **Existing research:**

- <http://www.letterboxclub.org.uk/research-and-evaluation/>
- Several evaluation reports
- Most report statistically significant gains in reading and maths for a significant number of enrolled children
- Design – pre and post test, with scores compared with age related and standardised norms

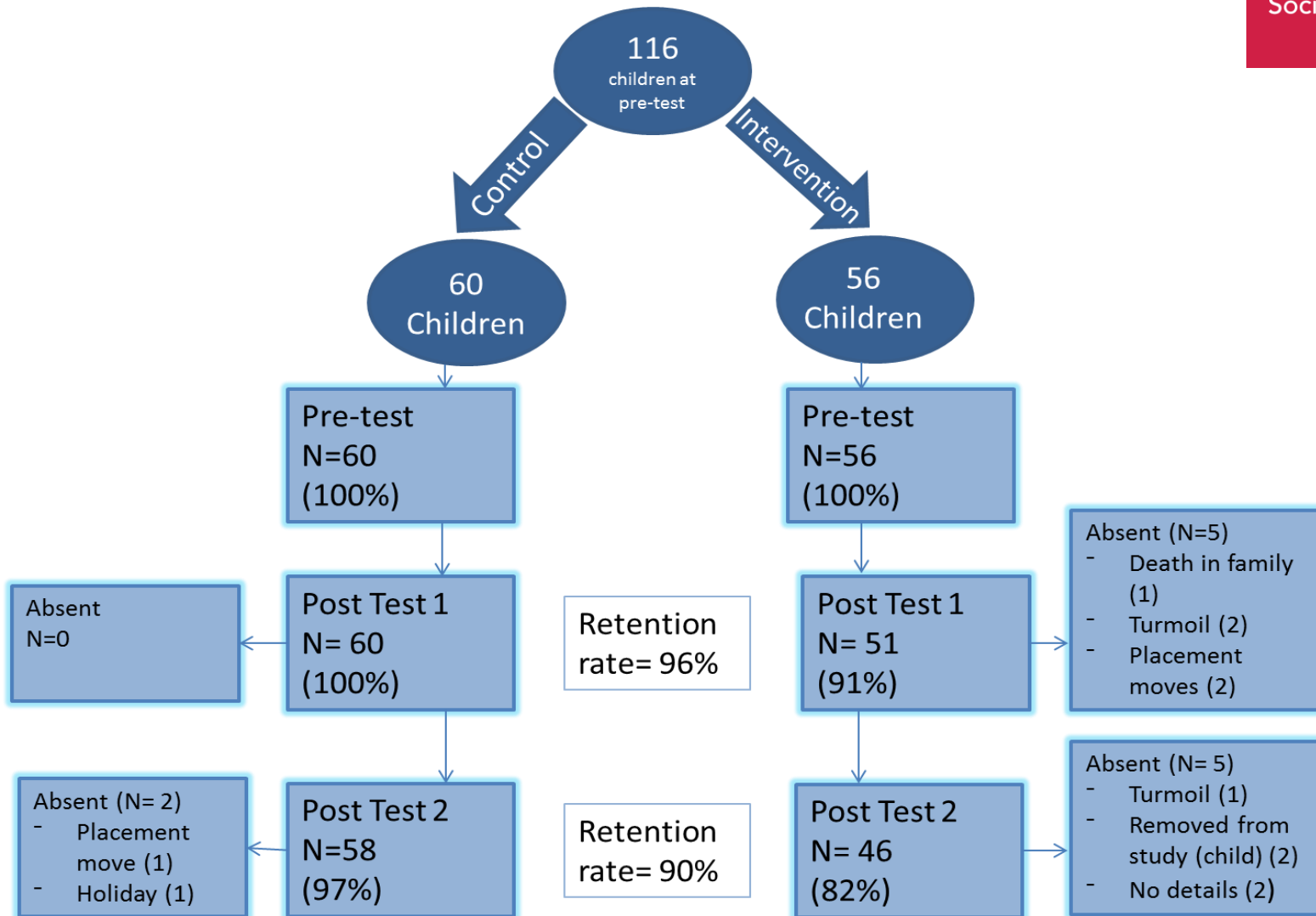
Are gains down to the Letterbox Club?

- Need RCT to test this
- **Random** allocation of children to an intervention group and a control group
- The control group do not get the intervention there and then (receive it slightly later)

RCT Design

	April- May 2013	May- October 2013	October 2013	November- May 2014	June 2014	September 2014
Intervention Group	Pre- testing	Receive 6 monthly parcels	Post- test 1	Carry on as normal	Post- test 2	Qualitative interviews and focus groups
Control group		Carry on as normal		Receive 6 monthly parcels		

RCT Design



- Neale Analysis of Reading Ability
- Reading Attitude Survey
- <http://www.leadtoreadkc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Professor-Garfield-reading-survey-used-by-Lead-to-Read-KC.pdf>
- Questionnaire

Neale Analysis of Reading Ability

- Reading Accuracy
- Reading Comprehension
- Reading Rate

Elementary Reading Attitude Survey

- Academic Reading Enjoyment
- Recreational Reading Enjoyment

- Slight differences in the groups at pre-test
- None big enough to be deemed significant
- Groups were well matched in all areas tested
- Measures were found to be consistent and valid

Main Analysis

<u>Measure Used</u>	<u>Outcome Measure</u>	<u>Post-test adjusted mean score</u>		<u>Sig</u>	<u>Effect size (Hedges G)</u>
		<u>Control</u>	<u>Intervention</u>		
Neale Analysis of Reading Ability	Reading Accuracy	91.147 (14.263)	92.149 (15.138)	0.812	0.068
	Reading Comprehension	91.974 (15.348)	91.484 (16.053)	0.796	-0.031
	Reading Rate	100.982 (13.055)	97.829 (14.035)	0.062	-0.233
Elementary Reading Attitude Survey	Recreational Reading	30.388 (6.680)	29.583 (7.355)	0.746	-0.115
	Academic Reading	30.451 (6.753)	29.779 (7.215)	0.567	-0.096

- Slight differences observed
- None big enough to be deemed significant – may have occurred by chance
- Effect sizes showed no effects for all of the outcome variables
- Pre test scores were controlled for

- 11 foster carers, 20 children
- Explores implicit theory of change with real lived experiences
- Ownership – motivation – engagement – attainment
- Differences and disjuncture

- Suggests a need to re-visit theory of change
- Adjust
- Re-test

- First RCT of a book gifting intervention for children in care
- RCT's can be undertaken with vulnerable groups with ethical protocols in place
- For social justice and equality imperatives it is crucial to know what works
- Further research should be undertaken