‘Providing for Children... Deprived of a Normal Home Life’: The Curtis Report and the Post-war Policy Landscape of Children’s Out-of-Home Care

The *Report of the Care of Children Committee* was presented to Parliament on 13th September 1946.¹ Chaired by Myra Curtis, a retired senior civil servant and Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, the report constituted the most substantial review of the out-of-home care of children to have been undertaken in England and Wales for a generation. Neither the war-time coalition Government, nor the in-coming Labour administration of 1945, had originally intended that such a Committee of Inquiry be established. Although it was well-recognised within the Ministry of Health, the Home Office and the Board of Education that the fragmented legislative and administrative system that had evolved for children’s out-of-home care was inefficient and in need of reform, it was assumed that reform could be managed through a private governmental inter-departmental committee.² In 1944, however, a public campaign for an inquiry into standards of care in residential children’s homes, led by Marjorie Allen, created the political conditions in which the Labour Government felt obliged to create an over-arching review of children’s out-of-home care that would produce a public report relating both to its

¹ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, cmd.6922 (London: HMSO, 1946).

² On the process by which the Care of Children Committee came to be established, see Lynch, ‘Pathways to the 1946 Curtis report’.

administrative structures and to appropriate standards of care.³ Although its creation was formally announced by the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, in the House of Commons in December 1944, the membership of the Committee was not announced until the following February. By then, Morrison was under growing pressure to expedite the Committee's work with public attention further focused on failings in children's out-of-home care as the case of Dennis O'Neill, who was beaten to death by his foster-father, attracted sustained press attention.

The work involved in the production of what became known as the Curtis report was substantial. Between March 1945 and June 1946, the 17-member committee received oral and written evidence from representatives of 51 governmental, professional and voluntary organisations and 18 individuals, as well as a further 31 written memoranda from other interested organisations and individuals.⁴ In addition to collating comprehensive statistics about the different forms of out-of-home care in which children were currently accommodated, and the various public authorities responsible for their care, members of the Curtis Committee also divided into sub-groups that undertook inspection visits to 451 residential institutions and an unspecified number of foster homes across 41 counties. On the basis of these inspections, the Committee claimed that from a total of 124,900 children currently 'deprived of a normal home life', they had been able to form direct impressions of the standards of care for around 30,000. In addition, members of the Committee reviewed children's case files and institutional inspection reports held by relevant public bodies both to compare these with their own impressions and to establish the extent to which systems of inspection were proving effective in identifying and changing poor standards of care.

Recognising the limitations of what could be learned from single visits to institutions, the Committee acknowledged that they were unlikely to become aware of specific cases of children being subjected to harsh or cruel treatment by staff and that their exposure to individual institutions lacked sufficient depth to identify any by name for particular praise or

³ On Allen's campaign, see Lynch, 'Pathways to 1946 Curtis report', pp. 28–32. As well as being well-known to the UK Government, cuttings from *The Times* of correspondence relating to Allen's campaign were also held on file by the Australian Commonwealth Department of Post-War Reconstruction in the context of policy discussions about the resumption of post-war child migration (see NAA.C: A9816, 1944/589).

⁴ See indexes of memoranda and transcripts of oral evidence in TNA: MH102:1451a and 1451d.

censure. Nevertheless, this range of underpinning evidence made it possible for its report to identify what the Committee understood to be a wide range of examples of both current good and bad practice in child-care, as well as the shortcomings of a fragmented policy framework.⁵

The report's recommendations played a central role in shaping the administration, ethos and oversight of post-war out-of-home care for children and were substantially implemented in the 1948 Children Act. These recommendations were not wholly innovative and in many respects reflected changes to administrative structures which had been proposed in an internal report produced by the Ministry of Health in 1944.⁶ Its critiques of impersonal residential children's homes, discussed in more detail later in this chapter, also reflected views already familiar to those responsible for different aspects of children's out-of-home care in the Ministry of Health, Home Office and Board of Education,⁷ and, as Marjorie Allen's campaign illustrated, had wider public and professional support.⁸ The fact that the Curtis report built on well-established ideas meant that it was able to exert considerable influence over both the policy framework for children's out-of-home care in the emerging post-war welfare state and public understandings of appropriate standards of child-care. Although some of

⁵ For a summary of the Committee's methodology in relation to these inspection visits, see *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 2, 100–105, 397; on the point about single visits being unlikely to identify any children 'being cruelly used in the ordinary sense' see para 418.

⁶ See *The Break Up of the Poor Law and the Care of Children and Old People*, TNA: MH102/1378.

⁷ Similarities between the 1944 Ministry of Health report on 'The break-up of the Poor Law' and the *Report of the Care of Children Committee* are discussed in more detail later in this chapter. By 1944, staff in the Home Office, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education also recognised that there was widely held critique of the psychologically damaging effects of impersonal institutional care for children and of the benefits of forms of care more closely resembling family life, such as adoption or foster care ('Draft of a Joint Memorandum which it is suggested might be submitted to the Reconstruction Committee by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Education', 30th November 1944, MH102/1161).

⁸ See, for example, the leader article in *The Times*, 31st July 1944, p. 5, which noted the 'virtual unanimity with which children's magistrates, child psychologists, education experts, workers in, and officers responsible for, children's homes' had written, supporting Allen's concerns. The letters pages of *The Times* over the previous month actually suggested more diverse views, but *The Times* editorial sought to emphasise the views of those supporting Allen from these professions over the views of correspondents from voluntary organisations who had sought to defend current standards in residential care.

the report's aspirations were slow to be realised—notably in terms of improving levels of training for child-care workers and the proportion of children placed in foster care rather than residential institutions⁹—it nevertheless shaped the policy landscape of children's out-of-home care in the early post-war period, providing the background within which child migration to Australia was resumed, managed and contested.¹⁰

THE CURTIS REPORT AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE RESTRUCTURING OF CHILDREN'S OUT-OF-HOME CARE

The *Report of the Care of Children Committee* focused on three main areas of concern: the administrative structures for government oversight and management of the out-of-home care of children, the ethos of child-care needed to provide an appropriate compensation for the lack of a family home, and the framework of staffing, training and inspection needed to ensure that these standards were maintained. With some minor variations, these concerns and key recommendations were also shared by the *Report of the Committee on Homeless Children*, or Clyde Report, that had submitted its review of the out-of-home care of children in Scotland at the end of July 1946.¹¹

⁹ See, for example, a survey showing that in 1964, 61% of local authority child-care officers were still not fully qualified, with significant regional variations in the proportion of local authority staff with suitable training (J.A.G. Griffith, *Central Departments and Local Authorities*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966, p. 364). In some cases, Children's Officers were still in post in the early 1960s because of their more general administrative abilities rather than any specific qualifications in child-care, the quality of Children's Officers was uneven and local authority child-care could still be influenced by elected members of Children's Committees having more direct involvement in children's case-work and other operational matters than was appropriate for their experience and training (ibid., pp. 383–6, 392).

¹⁰ On the process and significance of the Curtis report, see also Gordon Lynch, 'Pathways to the 1946 Curtis report and the post-war reconstruction of children's out-of-home care', *Contemporary British History*, 34(1), 2019, 22–43; Gladys Kammerer, *British and American Child Welfare Services* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1962); Janet Fink, 'Inside a hall of mirrors: residential care and the shifting constructions of childhood in mid-twentieth century Britain', *Paedagogica Historica*, 44(3), 2008, 287–307.

¹¹ *Report of the Committee on Homeless Children*, cmd.6911 (London: HMSO, 1946), see also Holman 'Fifty years ago' and John Stewart, 'The most precious possession of a nation is its children: the Clyde Committee on homeless children in Scotland', *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 21(1), 2001, 43–66. The main differences in the recommendations of the Clyde and Curtis reports were that the former did not see a need for an inspectorate to be distinct from existing community-based professionals (such as medical practitioners and min-

In relation to issues of administration, Myra Curtis had already been told on appointment to her role that her Committee was not to make any specific recommendations about which central government department should assume primarily responsibility for children's out-of-home care.¹² Whilst observing this request (even though most of its members appear to have favoured giving this responsibility to the Home Office),¹³ the Committee's report nevertheless made the more general case for administrative reform by observing the failings of the current fragmented system within central government. These problems were exacerbated by the fact that the central government department responsible for a child's out-of-home care varied depending on the particular legal measure through which they had come into care.¹⁴ Some institutions could receive multiple inspections from different public bodies if children had been placed in them through different statutory processes, whilst some children (e.g., in endowed voluntary children's homes not reliant on public subscriptions or children aged nine and above who were boarded out for payment) received no inspections at all.¹⁵ Of particular concern to the Committee were fragmented local authority structures, where it found evidence of both inconsistent systems and of poor standards of care and record-keeping resulting from dysfunctional relationships between different committees within the same local authority.¹⁶ These problems became even more acute in the

isters) who currently undertook inspections in Scotland and was more prepared than Curtis to accept the value of institutional care for children (whilst recognising the need for skilled staff in this role and the avoidance of institutional rigidity). The Clyde report made no reference or recommendation explicitly relating to child migration.

¹² See 'Homeless Children' memorandum, 1st April 1946, TNA: MH102/1387.

¹³ See 'Memorandum to Secretary of State', 13th December 1946, TNA: MH102/1393 on private contact between a Home Office official with Henry Salt, and Rosling to Allen, 24th October 1946, MRC: MSS.121/CC/3/7/1-17.

¹⁴ Lynch, 'Pathways to the Curtis report'; F.M.G. Willson, *The Organization of British Central Government, 1914-64*, 2nd edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968).

¹⁵ See, for example, *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 98-99. Examples of correspondence between the Home Office and Ministry of Health about their separate inspection interests in a single institution can be found in TNA: MH102/1399 in relation to the Middlemore Emigration Homes.

¹⁶ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 106-120, 123, 129-35. On occasion there even appeared to be some confusion between committee members about what system of local inspection was being discussed (see, e.g., Notes of a meeting held at the Home Office, Whitehall, SW1, on Monday 26th March 1945, pp. 15-17, TNA: MH102/1451D/C1).

cases of children, like Dennis O'Neill, who were boarded out by one local authority in private homes within another local authority. The lack of consistent notification of the 'receiving' local authority meant that children could sometimes be placed in foster homes by the 'sending' authority that the 'receiving' authority had previously rejected as unsuitable. Such failings arising from fragmented structures in local authorities posed an even greater risk to vulnerable children, the Committee concluded, than those in central government.¹⁷

One of the most important emphases in the report's recommendations was therefore a series of measures to develop a simpler and more comprehensive administrative structure within central and local government.¹⁸ The lead department in central government was to take responsibility not for all aspects of the lives of children 'deprived of a normal family home', but specifically for those aspects of their lives where the lack of this family environment needed to be compensated in some way. This department would establish a central register of all children's residential institutions and have the right both to inspect these and to de-register them if their standards of care were unacceptable. It would set out consistent standards for boarding out to be adhered to by all local authorities and voluntary organisations. This lead department would also develop an inspectorate with sufficient resources both to undertake direct inspections of residential institutions and to oversee local systems of inspections for boarded out children. These recommendations were subsequently implemented after the Labour Cabinet decided, in March 1947, to make the Home Office the lead department for children's out-of-home care in England and Wales, and the Home Department within the Scottish Office, the lead department for Scotland.¹⁹ This led both to the creation of Advisory Councils on Child Care in England and Wales, and in Scotland, to offer guidance to their respective Secretaries of State on how their new

¹⁷ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 438.

¹⁸ Recommendations about these administrative structures occur in *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 423–26, 429–34, 438–46, 452, 454, 472, 475, 492.

¹⁹ See 'Cabinet, Responsibility for the Care of Deprived Children', Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal, 12th March 1947, TNA: MH102/1393, and 'Extract from Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet 29(47)', held on Tuesday 18th March 1947, TNA: MH102/1393. The exception to this new administrative arrangement was with the Ministry of Pensions retaining responsibility for children who had having lost one or both parents during the war, and who were regarded as special cases with regard to public sympathy and support (Cunnison to Barlow, 12th March 1945, TNA: MH102/1381).

responsibilities might be discharged in line with current thinking on child-care. An expanded Home Office Children's Department Inspectorate with regional offices across England and Wales was also established.

The Committee could have recommended that responsibility for the out-of-home care of children would be allocated to just this one central government department, following Lady Allen's suggestion that local authorities be removed from this work altogether.²⁰ However, it rejected this approach as likely to generate too impersonal a system. Instead it made a series of recommendations about local authorities' continued involvement, working within the wider framework set down by the central government department. Recognising that a number of local authorities were already moving towards having a single committee responsible for the out-of-home care of children, the Curtis Report recommended that this take the form of newly created Children's Committees. Through these new committees, local authorities would discharge a more integrated and expanded range of duties, including taking responsibility for all children currently maintained under the Poor Law, the Children and Young Persons Act, the Public Health Act and the Adoption Act. In addition, the local authority would no longer be able to refuse the duty of care for a child placed with it by a juvenile court under the Children and Young Persons Act. The local authority would maintain oversight of all residential children's homes within its area and continue to develop and manage its own residential institutions. It would also maintain oversight of foster homes within its area, keep a register of approved foster homes, ensure regular inspections of these and develop new policies to encourage registration of privately arranged foster placements. The work of these Children's Committees was to be led by the newly created posts of Children's Officers, comparable in standing to local Directors of Education and Medical Officers of Health, and who would become the *de facto* guardian of all children placed in the local authority's care. Communication over the transfer of children between local authorities would also be improved by responsibility for this also being placed on the respective Children's Officer of each authority.

²⁰ Home Office staff consulted with Myra Curtis in early 1946 to check her views about Lady Allen's proposal that all local government involvement in children's out-of-home care should be ended. Curtis indicated that the Committee definitely favoured retaining local authority involvement and that Curtis personally preferred the model of having children's officers appointed at a comparable level to directors of education (Note, 15th February 1946, TNA: MH102/1385).

Whilst the report offered significant continuity with ideas already discussed in Government,²¹ there was one policy initiative amongst these that Curtis did press forward despite significant opposition. The Ministry of Health's internal report on *The Break-Up of the Poor Law* had suggested the creation of Children's Committees within local authorities and the creation of Children's Officers as senior local government posts subsumed to neither health nor education. This was an idea to which Curtis herself was also strongly committed.²² These ideas were highly controversial, however, particularly for those who were used to local authority education officers and committees taking leading roles in children's out-of-home care (e.g., through their responsibility for oversight of children placed under 'fit person' orders with local authorities through the Children and Young Person's Act).²³ Before the Committee's report had even been submitted to the Home Secretary, Ellen Wilkinson, the Minister for Education had already raised objections on this issue during discussions at the government's inter-departmental committee on the break-up of the Poor Law.²⁴ After the publication of the Curtis report, Wilkinson continued to press the case for local education committees being given responsibility for children's out-of-home care, finding support in this from the National Union of Teachers, the Association of Educational Committees, some local authorities and Lady Allen herself.²⁵ In the face of this opposition, the Home Office and Ministry of Health found themselves less willing to

²¹ See Ministry of Health, *The Break-Up of the Poor Law*; see also 'The future of the homeless child: outlines of a suggested scheme', 11th March 1946, TNA: MH102/1387, which sets out proposals that are very close to the eventual recommendations of the Curtis Report.

²² See the summary of Curtis's views on this in Maxwell to Pimlott, 14th March 1946, TNA: MH102/1386.

²³ See, for example, *Report by Sir Walter Monckton*, pp. 4–5, although Monckton also demonstrated local variations to this with LEA responsibility for boarded out CYPA children being delegated to Public Assistance Committee in Shropshire as they had more experience of over-seeing foster placements.

²⁴ 'Minutes of meeting on Thursday 18th July', recommendation 26(g), TNA: MH102/1390.

²⁵ See 'Draft Cabinet Paper, Administrative responsibility for the care of deprived children', Memorandum by the Minister of Education, 19th November 1946, TNA: MH102/1390. File MH102/1395 is a collection of papers relating to the NUT's intervention in this debate. See also 'The Curtis Report – A.E.C. Memorandum', *Times Educational Supplement*, 16th November 1946, TNA: MH102/1396, and 'Some criticisms of the Curtis Report, by Lady Allen of Hurtwood', MRC: MSS.121/CC/3/7/1-17. This view was not shared by everyone associated with the field of education, however, and an editorial in the *Times Educational Supplement* supported the creation of separate Children's Committees working under the

give outright backing to the Curtis recommendation on the separation of Children's Committees from local authority education or health committees, suggesting instead that local authorities could be allowed to make whatever administrative arrangements for over-seeing children's out-of-home care they felt appropriate, subject to final approval by the Home Secretary.²⁶ It was only as discussions of the implementation of the Curtis report continued in spring 1947, that Arthur Greenwood, the Lord Privy Seal, was able to argue successfully in Cabinet that Children's Committees should be established as separate entities from health or education committees. He was able to secure this agreement on the grounds that the special issues relating to the out-of-home care of children should not be subsumed within committees that had responsibilities for all children living in that area.²⁷ Although the creation of Children's Committees and Children's Officer posts formed part of the distinctive legacy of the Care of Children Committee, the implementation of this continued to face opposition in some local authorities for a number of years afterwards.²⁸

CRITICISMS OF EXISTING STANDARDS OF CARE

In addition to its attention to administrative structures, the Curtis report also had much to say about approaches to child-care on the basis of the hundreds of visits to residential institutions and foster homes that its members had undertaken. Whilst its recommendations about the future administration of the out-of-home care of children played a pivotal role in shaping the architecture of post-war children's services, its vignettes about standards of care arguably played a more important role in shaping public reception of its findings. In its call for urgent government action on the

oversight of the Home Office ('Who Shall be the Guardian?', 16th November, 1946, *Times Educational Supplement*, TNA: MH102/1396).

²⁶ See 'Report of the Curtis Committee, Memorandum by the Minister of Health', 23rd November 1946, 'Children Deprived of a Normal Home Life, Memorandum by the Home Secretary', 21st November 1946, and 'Note to Secretary of State', 11th November 1946, all TNA: MH102/1392. See also papers discussed at a Cabinet sub-committee meeting on the Curtis Report, 12th December 1946, in TNA: CAB130/15.

²⁷ 'Cabinet, Responsibility for the Care of Deprived Children, Memorandum by the Lord Privy Seal', 12th March 1947, TNA: MH102/1393. Curtis herself later re-stated her support for this idea having been consulted again by the Home Office, see Memorandum to Secretary of State, 27th March 1947, TNA: MH102/1396.

²⁸ Roy Parker, 'Getting started with the Children's Act: What do we learn?', *Adoption and Fostering*, 35(3), 2011, 17–29.

report's recommendations, *The Spectator*, for example, quoted at length from one of its most critical accounts of a children's ward in a workhouse in which Committee members had found:

an eight-year-old defective child who sat most of the day on a chair-commode... There were two babies with rickets clothed in cotton frocks, cotton vests and dilapidated napkins, no more than discoloured cotton rags. The smell in this room was dreadful. A premature baby lay in an opposite ward alone. The ward was very large and cold. The healthy children were housed in the ground-floor corrugated hutment which had once been the old union casual ward... They slept in another corrugated hutment in old broken iron cots, some of which had their sides tied up with cords. The mattresses were fouled and stained... The children wore ankle-length calico or flannel frocks and petticoats and had no knickers. Their clothes were not clean. Most of them had lost their shoes... Their faces were clean; their bodies in some cases were unwashed and stained.²⁹

Whilst adopting a more measured tone than *The Spectator*'s call to action, an editorial in the *Economist* also commented that the report's accounts of standards of care in residential homes had clearly demonstrated the need for 'a complete change of attitude on the part of many local government officials and others... and a great many more of the right sort of workers'.³⁰

The report itself was, in some respects, more cautious than this in its general statements about standards of care. With apparent reference to Lady Allen's campaigning work based mainly on second-hand testimony, it observed that its own direct research into current practices in residential homes 'has given us a firmer basis for conclusions about actual present day conditions'.³¹ On the basis of this, the Committee found little direct

²⁹ 'The Government and the Children', *The Spectator*, 22nd November 1946, TNA: MH102/1396, see also *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 136–156. In this respect, the Curtis report mirrored criticisms of the conditions for the care of children in workhouses made in the *Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission: Part I, the Break-Up of the Poor Law* (London: National Committee to Promote the Break-Up of the Poor Law, 1909), pp. 83–135.

³⁰ 'Common-sense on Curtis', *The Economist*, 30th November 1946, TNA: MH102/1396. On accounts of children's experience of residential care in the inter-war period, see, for example, Laura Tisdall, '“That was what life in Bridgeburn had made her”: reading the autobiographies of children in institutional care in England, 1918–46', *Twentieth Century British History*, 24(3), 2013, 351–75.

³¹ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 418.

evidence of very serious cases of 'neglect or harsh usage' in children's homes, suggesting that accounts of abusive forms of discipline that had recently received public attention might be a reflection of conditions ten years ago or more, and that a 'gentler and more sympathetic' approach was more pervasive now. Serious allegations had been made about some institutions that Committee members judged, on the basis of their visits, to be excellently run. On this basis, the report refrained from censuring any single organisation for its standards of care. However, it noted that even in well-run organisations that had admirable policies, individual staff 'may develop harsh or repressive tendencies or false ideas of discipline' and that effective systems of inspection needed to be maintained to ensure appropriate forms of care were being delivered.³² The report's account of the workhouse children's ward cited at length by *The Spectator* was, in fact, very much the exception rather than the rule, and whilst there were considerable variations in standards across residential institutions, 'by far the greater number of Homes were, within the limits of their staffing, accommodation and administrative arrangements, reasonably well run from the standpoint of physical care, and in other ways the child has more material advantages than could have been given to him in the average poor family'.³³

The report's strongest criticisms were aimed less at the basic standards of physical care provided to children, however, and far more at the unsuitability of the physical and emotional environment of many institutions for supporting children's development. Underpinning its comments on what it saw as both good and bad standards of child-care, the report placed a consistent emphasis on the importance of nurturing children's individuality with particular attention to the emotional and imaginative dimensions of their inner lives. To become emotionally healthy and socially capable adults, children needed security of affection, opportunities to develop their individuality through play, and an environment which provided them with a sense of belonging, self-respect and a growing awareness of personal responsibility. This required continuity of staffing; the ability of staff to give children individual attention; suitable spaces and materials for play including access to gardens and green outdoor spaces; environments that were light, colourful and visually stimulating; and the ability for children to acquire and keep personal possessions. The ultimate goal of children's

³² *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 417.

³³ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 418; see also paras 170, 180/181, 189, 242, 243.

out-of-home care should be their successful integration into wider society as adults. To this end, children needed opportunities to interact with others in activities and settings beyond the residential institution or foster home. Maintaining their bonds with siblings, and where possible other relatives, also constituted an important element of both their present sense of emotional security and their future sense of belonging. Their capacity to act as responsible and autonomous future citizens also needed to be nurtured through them being given regular pocket money that they could learn to manage, save and spend, respecting others' private property, learning how to undertake domestic chores (to the extent that might reasonably be expected of any child of their age), and acquiring relevant skills of self-caring. The latter, for girls, included the motivation and ability to care for and repair their own clothes. Discipline of the child should be understood in the context of the emotional significance that it would have for them in terms of their wider psychological development. In this context, the report stated that enuresis should be managed as an issue that disclosed underlying problems with a child's sense of emotional security, and not a matter for which a child should be humiliated or punished.³⁴

In too many cases, residential homes run by both local authorities and voluntary organisations failed to provide these conditions, with children instead being 'brought up by unimaginative methods, without opportunity for developing their full capabilities and with very little brightness or interest in their surroundings'.³⁵ In some cases, local authorities were found still to be using old barrack-style accommodation for children, because they judged that to leave them unused would constitute too great a cost for local rate-payers. Management of large numbers of children in such environments inevitably led to a regimented and impersonal ethos. Even in cases where children were placed in grouped homes (i.e., a number of 'cottage homes' gathered on a single site), the Committee found instances where the high numbers of children accommodated in each 'cottage' precluded anything like individual attention. A number of examples were found of both larger institutions and grouped homes in which children lacked outdoor spaces for play other than empty, walled asphalt yards, and had either no indoor playrooms or playrooms that were dark, drab

³⁴ See, for example, *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 207, 208, 214, 217, 247, esp. 427, 485, 493.viii; on failures to administer discipline with appropriate emotional sensitivity, or the punitive or stigmatising treatment of enuresis, see paras 261–63, 265.

³⁵ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 418.

and equipped with little or nothing by way of play materials. Insufficient play materials could lead to children fighting over or breaking what little they had, leading staff to complain that they could not be trusted to look after them. Poor play resources were not simply attributable to war-time deprivation however, the Committee noted, as varying levels of provision could be observed in different residential homes run by the same local authority. In many homes run by local authorities, children were unable to keep personal possessions because no lockers were provided. In homes run by voluntary organisations where lockers were provided, children were often not allowed to have personal possessions in their bedrooms which consequently lacked 'comfort and individuality'.³⁶

Individual attention to children was made harder by low ratios of staff to children, caused often by difficulties in recruiting even untrained staff and in some cases by over-crowding of children. Whilst some staff were praised for their evident ability to create a sense of personal relationship with children in their care, the report noted that this was often difficult to achieve either because of lack of time, lack of training, or lack of staff aptitude for this work. In the case of many voluntary organisations, non-managerial staff often had training of a specialist religious nature rather than training relevant to the care of children. The challenges of recruiting staff—often because of the poor conditions of employment—meant that it was rarely possible to appoint staff on the basis of their suitability to work with a particular age group of children. Lack of individual attention to children marred not only their time in residential institutions (including their educational attainment), but planning for their lives beyond it. Vocational training and after-care were found often to pay little attention to the specific interests of the individual child. Training and after-care were found to be very poor in around two-thirds of all children's homes run by voluntary organisations, with a third simply directing boys in their care to manual labour and girls to domestic work.³⁷ In this respect, standards at many residential homes in Britain were not significantly better than those

³⁶ See, for example, *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 141, 159, 195, 208, 234–36, 252–4.

³⁷ See *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 151, 169–71, 173, 176–79, 222, 237, 270, 329, 331; on recommendations regarding more individualised attention in after-care see paras 502–07. On the pressures and difficult working conditions of female staff in residential child-care, see also Katherine Holden, 'Other people's children: single women

which the Dominions Office and UK High Commission had come to view critically at Pinjarra.

Low levels of staffing in some institutions could also lead to an over-reliance on children's domestic labour to maintain the running of the institution. High expectations could also be placed on children's labour in residential homes in which there was a culture of spotlessness, which the report described as a 'fetish of tidiness and high polish'. Whilst children in well-run residential homes might be expected to undertake a total of half an hour of domestic work per day, in other institutions Committee members noted that children were doing to do up to four hours per day. It was observed that this was not always because of under-staffing and that filling children's time with domestic work was sometimes used as a means of controlling their behaviour. Such over-use of children's domestic labour was problematic, the Committee noted, not only for its effects on their ability to concentrate on schooling, but on their capacity to cultivate their individual interests and imaginative lives through free leisure time. In terms of their formation as future citizens, the report also commented that over-exposure to domestic chores would have the deleterious effect of reducing children's sense of intrinsic value in tasks they would need to undertake when running their own households.³⁸

Whilst standards varied considerably, many residential homes also failed to provide children with sufficient contacts and experiences outside of the institution that would support their sense of social belonging and their future social integration. Siblings were commonly separated from each other when accommodated in grouped homes in which individual cottage homes were segregated on lines of age or gender. Whilst the principle of maintaining relationships between siblings appeared to be recognised more often in the context of boarding out, in practice foster placements continued to be made in which siblings were split up and had varying degrees of on-going contact. Although some voluntary homes fared better in this regard, staff often made little effort to maintain contacts between children in their residential homes and relatives in the wider community, assuming that these relatives would have little interest in these children. Involvement with wider community activities were, if they happened at all,

and residential childcare in mid-20th century England', *Management and Organizational History*, 5(3-4), 2010, 314-330.

³⁸ See *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 186, 188, 190-91, 194, 238, 240, 247, 250.

found to take place in structured ways that gave children little opportunity to build significant relationships beyond the institution. Informal friendships with children outside the institution were rarely supported or encouraged. Lack of prams in some residential nurseries suggested that infants accommodated in them rarely left the institution. Although some homes run by voluntary organisations had instituted 'aunts and uncles' schemes in which children would be enabled to visit or stay with local families, this could lead in some instances of favouritism in which better opportunities were given to children that receiving families considered 'attractive'. The geographical isolation of some residential homes obviously hindered children's opportunities for constructive engagement with the wider community. Constraints on children's external contacts could be particularly acute in residential homes run by religious organisations in which the children's schooling also took place within the same institution. Pocket money in some homes was paid at such a low level or pooled to spend on group activities so that children had little experience of personal management of their own money.³⁹

Whilst claiming to be cautious about claiming any causal relationship, the Committee nevertheless commented that children in institutions in which they received little individual attention either craved attention from visitors (including complete strangers) or seemed listless and withdrawn. Concern was particularly expressed that children in many homes run by voluntary organisations appeared to become progressively more withdrawn as they grew older. Social skills that might be expected of children at different ages were, in such homes, often missing. By contrast, the report observed that children who benefitted from individual attention were far more likely to interact with visitors in engaged and spontaneous ways, or indeed show complete indifference to visitors if they had no interest in interacting with them. Children raised in more attentive environments were found to be more likely to engage with adult visitors on the assumption that adults would show interest, sympathy and the capacity for a common sharing of amusement. Such varying outcomes for children appeared to be more the result of the quality of staff relationships with children than institutional policy with examples found, for instance, of

³⁹ See *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 161, 167, 199, 201–03, 206, 213, 250, 256–58, 375.

children's homes run by the same authority offering very different emotional environments.⁴⁰

'CHILD PSYCHOLOGY' AND THE ETHOS OF CHILD-CARE

The Committee's emphasis on the emotional conditions for healthy child development can be understood in the context of growing interest in the inter-war period in the psychology of children.⁴¹ This included theoretical developments in psychoanalytic, behavioural, educational and developmental psychology, as well as initiatives including the child guidance movement, play centres, progressive education and a growing interest in new psychological understandings of child-care amongst both professionals and the wider public.⁴² Although some histories of child-care have situated the influence of an awareness of the psychological importance of the child's relationship with the parent primarily from the late 1940s onwards (often in association with the work of John Bowlby),⁴³ these inter-war developments indicate earlier origins than this.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ See *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 210–11, 239, 241, 264.

⁴¹ The Committee's concerns about the unsuitability of workhouses as environments for the care of children, about which Myra Curtis herself had particularly strong feelings, also had a clear precedent in the kinds of criticisms made in the *Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission*, pp. 83–211.

⁴² See the excellent discussion of these developments in Mathew Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1–16, 109–39. See also Christina Hardyment, *Dream Babies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) and Harry Hendrick, *Narcissistic Parenting in an Insecure World: A History of Parenting Culture 1920s to Present* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2016). See also Maureen McAleer, *Freedom to Grow: Sister Marie Hilda's Vision of Child Guidance* (Glasgow: John S. Burns & Son, 1981) on the opening of the first Catholic child guidance centre in Scotland in 1931.

⁴³ See, for example, Eileen Younghusband, *Social Work in Britain: 1950–1975, A Follow-Up Study, Vol. 1* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 36–7.

⁴⁴ For example, Susan Isaacs, *Childhood and After: Some Essays and Clinical Studies* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1948), pp. 208–36, cites a range of pre-war and war-time studies demonstrating the importance of family bonds for children's physical, emotional and cognitive development. Of the 159 studies cited by John Bowlby in his influential report for the World Health Organisation on the psychological effects of separation from home and parents, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, 55 had been published before the end of 1945 and 19 of which had been published before 1939. Examples of pre-war and war-time literature on child psychology used in early post-war child-care training courses include J.R. Rees, *The Health of the Mind* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929); Mary Burbury, Edna Balint and Bridget Yapp, *An Introduction to Child Guidance* (London: MacMillan & Co, 1945);

Care should be taken, however, in drawing precise lines of influence between this growing field and the Committee's claims about the conditions for children's healthy psychological development.⁴⁵ Child psychology was not a homogenous movement, but riven by conflicts over theoretical concepts, clinical practices and the roles of different professional groups as well as by complex relationships between 'elite' and popularised uses of psychology.⁴⁶ The Committee's emphasis on the nurturing of children's individuality through stable, warm and attentive care reflected particular approaches within the wider field of child psychology, very different to behavioural emphases on discipline, order and the careful management of affection.⁴⁷ These ideas can be traced to the growing interest in the meaning of children's emotional worlds and the significance of parental, particularly maternal, bonds for children that were associated with psychoanalysis. Care again needs to be taken in tracing this

D.E.M. Gardner, *The Children's Play Centre* (London: Methuen & Co, 1937); Rogerson, C.H., *Play Therapy in Childhood* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939); Charlotte Buhler, *From Birth to Maturity* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1943); Emanuel Miller, *The Growing Child and Its Problems* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1937); (ed) John Rickman, *On the Bringing Up of Children – By Five Psycho-Analysts* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1936), Phyllis Blanchard, *The Child and Society* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1928), and W. David Wills, *The Barns Experiment* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945) and (ed.) Cyril Burt, *How the Mind Works*, 2nd edition (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945). Psychological models used within these ranged across behavioural, psychoanalytic and eclectic approaches. Muriel Payne's *Oliver Twist* (London: Edward Arnold & Co, 1929), which gave a fictionalised account of more empathic approaches to child-care in a poor law residential institution, remained popular throughout this period and had, by 1949, gone into its seventh reprinting.

⁴⁵ For example, the account of the influence of psychological theory on post-war child-care in Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 151–77, fails to take sufficient account of the ways in which the popularization of child psychology re-shaped psychological theories or the use of 'child psychology' as a placeholder term rather than reference to particular theorists, or the wider assumptions about gender, class, domesticity and the formation of the civic subject within which ideas of child psychology were taken up. Rose, like others (see Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society*, p. 56) also places more emphasis on the importance of John Bowlby's work on early post-war child-care policy than is warranted (see notes 107, 114 below).

⁴⁶ See, for example, Stewart, *Child Guidance in Britain*, pp. 123–4, 132–7 on conflicts over whether child guidance clinics should always be run by psychiatrists rather than psychologists, as well as disagreements over clinical practice such as Donald Winnicott's dismissal of the value of play therapy. Also Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, passim.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Michal Shapira, "'Speaking Kleinian": Susan Isaacs as Ursula Wise and the Inter-War Popularisation of Psychoanalysis', *Medical History*, 61(4), p. 532.

psychoanalytic influence. Although Melanie Klein's work on the psychodynamic processes of early infancy attracted much attention in the psychoanalytic world, popularised forms of psychoanalysis bore little relation to her vivid technical language for the conflicts of the infant's internal object relations. In part, this reflected a view amongst some psychoanalysts that their theoretical concepts and clinical practices should be reserved for the relationship between analyst and patient and could not simply be transferred, in diluted form, to the ways in which parents or teachers might engage with children.⁴⁸ As a consequence the psychoanalytic interest in a child's emotional world and formative relationships did not lead so much to the direct transmission of specific psychoanalytic ideas to other social and professional contexts as contribute to a wider cultural 'psychological mindedness' in which the importance of a child's emotional security and individual development were recognised. The term 'child psychology', as it appeared, for example, in *The Times* correspondence in response to Lady Allen's campaign or in public reception of the Curtis report, therefore referred less to a specific body of psychological theory but functioned as a placeholder term for a more general understanding of the role of care and attention to the individual child in promoting their personal and civic development.

A key figure, in developing this wider public interest in child psychology, was Susan Isaacs, whose influence was more widespread and well-established by the time that the Curtis Committee sat than either Donald Winnicott or John Bowlby.⁴⁹ Isaacs was a pioneering female psychoanalyst,

⁴⁸ Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 130–31.

⁴⁹ See Philip Graham, *Susan Isaacs: A Life Freeing the Minds of Children* (London: Karnac, 2009); Michal Shapira, "Speaking Kleinian": Susan Isaacs as Ursula Wise and the Inter-War Popularisation of Psychoanalysis', *Medical History* 61(4), 2017, 525–47. Unlike Isaacs, Bowlby's work was generally not referenced in reading lists for child-care training courses in the early post-war period, unsurprisingly given his more popular work was not published until the 1950s (see, e.g., training course reading lists in TNA: MH102/1420 and TNA: MH/1435). Even then the reception of Bowlby's work was far from being universally supportive (see, e.g., Riley, *War in the Nursery*, pp. 106–8; Pat Thane & Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 96–8). Although Winnicott was more recognised than Bowlby as an authority in the psychological development of children by the time the Committee sat (see, e.g., war-time papers later published in his 1957 collected papers, published as *The Child and the Family* and *The Child and the Outside World*), his influence on the Committee's conclusions appears to have been very limited (see n.114) and his more influential work again post-dated the Committee's report. Isaacs's own memorandum to the Care of Children

having joined the British Psychoanalytical Society only two years after its formation in 1919. From 1924 to 1927, Isaacs was appointed head of the Malting House School in Cambridge, an experimental initiative in progressive education, and during that period became increasingly committed to Kleinian theory.⁵⁰ After leaving the school, Isaacs went on to write two popular books based on that experience, *The Nursery Years* and *The Children We Teach*, which were widely read by parents, nurses and teachers. She also began to write for a number of magazines aimed at middle-class parents as well as a weekly advice column (under the pseudonym 'Ursula Wise') for the magazine, *Nursery World*.⁵¹ Through the 1930s, Isaacs continued to publish a number of books for professional and public audiences and develop her influence on educational professionals through her appointment as head of the newly created Department of Child Development within the Institute of Education at the University of London. Her professional activities included her leadership of a major study of the early war-time evacuation of children from London to Cambridge, to which the Curtis Committee member, Sibyl Clement Brown, and John Bowlby, also contributed.⁵²

Isaacs's work exemplifies the complex relationship between psychoanalysis and popular conceptions of 'child psychology'. Despite her early attachment to the emerging psychoanalytic movement in Britain, her psychological ideas were initially also significantly influenced by Piaget's theory of child development as well as John Dewey's work on progressive education. Although her theoretical interests became increasingly Kleinian, she rarely made any direct reference to technical Kleinian language in her

Committee cited a wide range of psychological and clinical studies which provided evidence of better developmental and emotional outcomes for children raised within the family, or 'family-like' environments, than for those living in institutions. None of this literature included work by Winnicott. Isaacs did make reference to Bowlby's study of the family backgrounds of 44 juvenile thieves, but this was only 1 of 12 studies she cited with her memorandum giving more prominence to the work of Charlotte Buhler, Jean Piaget and (implicitly) Melanie Klein.

⁵⁰ Case material from her time at the Maltings was written up by her in Susan Isaacs, *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930) and *Social Development in Children* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1933).

⁵¹ For edited collections of these columns, see Susan Isaacs, *Troubles of Children and Parents* (London: Methuen & Co, 1948) and Caroline Vollans, *Wise Words: How Susan Isaacs Changed Parenting* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁵² Susan Isaacs, ed., *The Cambridge Evacuation Survey: A Wartime Study in Social Welfare and Education* (London: Methuen & Co, 1941).

public work and instead tried to find accessible ways of referring to Kleinian concepts such as the inherently aggressive instincts of the infant.⁵³ Similarly, at other points, her work was far less concerned with the explicit communication of psychoanalytic concepts than a psychoanalytically inflected rejection of children's exposure to behaviourism or other forms of rigid moral training. As she wrote in 1929 in *The Nursery Years*:

If we can really get into our bones, so to speak, the sense of slow growth of the infant's mind through these various bodily experiences, and the knowledge that each phase has its own importance in his development, we are more likely to give him [sic] the gentle care and patient friendliness which he most needs to carry him on successfully from one phase to the next, and to avoid the harsh and hasty methods which may make him fear and hate us. For this is the surest way to bind him in his infantile ways. The child who goes in fear of scoldings and naggings cannot expand freely and happily into social life. He is thrown back on the infant's mode of gaining love by his helplessness, or driven into the blind protest of rage and tantrums. It is now common knowledge among humane parents that fear of whippings or severe punishments has this evil effect, but it is not yet widely realised that the fear of carplings and harsh criticism may be just as paralysing to the sensitive child. He can most easily learn to fit himself into the social world if he is free from undue anxiety about possible mistakes, and has a sense of affectionate unity with those around him.⁵⁴

As letters to her Ursula Wise advice column also showed, Isaacs's role for her readers was not simply one of conveying technical information about child development but in giving practical advice in how to practise a 'humane' form of parenting with which many of those readers already sympathised.⁵⁵

Although the Care of Children Committee received evidence from Isaacs, Winnicott and Bowlby, the nature of their influence on the Committee's final conclusions was also complex. Given the Committee's interest in the conditions necessary to compensate a child for the loss of a 'normal' home life, it is unsurprising that these three specialists in the psychology of children's emotional development should have been invited to present evidence to it. Other current aspects of psychology, such as

⁵³ See, for example, Isaacs, *The Nursery Years*, pp. 81–83; also Isaacs, *Childhood and After*, pp. 217–224.

⁵⁴ Isaacs, *The Nursery Years*, p. 31.

⁵⁵ Shapira, "Speaking Kleinian", pp. 535–47.

intelligence testing, which became increasingly important in other policy contexts relating to children,⁵⁶ fell beyond the Committee's concerns.

It was far from the case, however, that the Committee were simply persuaded by the strength of psychological insight or research presented by these witnesses. When Winnicott appeared before the Committee with the then psychiatric social worker, Clare Britton, nearly all of the questions focused on Britton's experience of managing a group of hostels for children in Oxfordshire.⁵⁷ Winnicott was not asked any questions about his psychoanalytic work, and in a rare exchange focusing on Winnicott's wider opinions, he presented a far more accepting view of the use of corporal punishment for children in care than that eventually taken in the Committee's report.⁵⁸

Bowlby's evidence to the Committee focused primarily on his claims of the association of separation from a mother-figure for a pre-school child and that child's later delinquency, based on a study he had undertaken before the war at the London Child Guidance Clinic.⁵⁹ However, Bowlby appeared quite diffident about generalising from this study, noting the need for more research and his lack of further work with children during the war. His evidence, in several respects, ran with the psychological grain of the Committee's Report. He emphasised the importance of continuity of care with a foster-mother and of the emotional demands this could place on carers, noting that early separation from an established foster-mother could be as traumatic for a child as separation from the birth mother. He also recognised the value of continuity of care within the wider family in the case of the loss of the mother, saw value in the use of play therapy, and supported the use of trained workers in assessing and inspecting foster carers. However, Bowlby's caution in straying beyond his own research led him to say less about the importance of emotional bonds for older children or even to express a clear view on the relative merits of institutional versus foster care. His view that children were best removed from unmarried mothers in order to provide them with a greater

⁵⁶ See, for example, Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, pp. 110–13.

⁵⁷ See TNA: MH102/1451D/C48. The Committee had previously received a copy of an article co-authored by Britton and Winnicott for the New Education Fellowship on lessons learned from these hostels, TNA: MH102/1451B/69, which included the claim that a stable home life with accepting parents was a key basis for children's psychological development and those children who lacked this proved harder to maintain in evacuation billets.

⁵⁸ See also Winnicott's memorandum on corporal punishment, TNA: MH102/1451B/96.

⁵⁹ See TNA: MH102/1451B/22 and MH102/1451D/C18.

opportunity for a stable family life was one which the Committee's final report clearly did not share. Whilst the Committee seemed sympathetic to his psychological insights, these were largely reduced to basic, core principles. As Myra Curtis asked him at one point, 'Your prescription, if I may so call it, of affection and stability is really what all the children with whom we are concerned need, is it not?'

Isaacs's evidence before the Committee focused primarily on a memorandum she had submitted to it⁶⁰ advocating for the use of foster care rather than institutional care, on the basis that the former was more likely to provide the consistency of individual attention, flexibility and opportunities for wider social activities essential for children's healthy development.⁶¹ The significance of family bonds, or life in a 'family-like environment', for meeting children's essential needs was emphasised as was the developmental importance of children's access to play materials and opportunities for broader forms of learning through engaging in domestic tasks.⁶² Myra Curtis in particular pressed Isaacs on whether institutions were absolutely unable to provide these conditions, and whether trends in institutional care were already taking more progressive directions. In response, Isaacs clarified that she did not wish to proscribe the use of institutional care altogether—'a first class institution can be better than an indifferent or even second class foster home... I do not want to idealise the foster home'. She also acknowledged that effective inspection of children's care might be easier in well-run institutions than in trying to supervise a larger number of dispersed foster homes. However, her views on what would constitute tolerable institutional care were substantially

⁶⁰ See TNA: MH102/1451B/33. This memorandum was reprinted in full in Susan Isaacs, *Childhood and After*, pp. 208–36.

⁶¹ See TNA: MH102/1451D/C32.

⁶² Much of the psychological literature cited by Isaacs on the importance of children's affective bonds with parents focused particularly on the developmental importance of these for pre-school children. Isaacs pointed to evidence in the Cambridge Evacuation Study that older children similarly experienced considerable distress at parental separation (*Childhood and After*, p. 209), although Thomson has argued that the Cambridge Study gave this issue relatively less attention than subsequent studies of evacuation which indicated that many children appeared to fare better if kept with their families even if they remained in areas under bombardment (Thomson, *Lost Freedom*, pp. 59–64). This suggests that the principle of the importance of family bonds throughout childhood, supported by the Committee's report, may have been as much influenced by the experience of evacuation as psychological and psychoanalytic studies of the significance of emotional relationships with parents for children's early years' development.

reflected in the Committee's eventual findings. Isaacs argued that if institutional care were to be used it should be organised around groups of no more than 10–12 children (reflecting the old, 'large' family), should not be segregated around age or gender, should engage children in appropriate domestic tasks whilst not allowing this to impede on their education or leisure time and should use staff with some training in child psychology. The tendency of large institutions to fall into an 'institutional atmosphere' and fail to provide a 'simple, friendly, homely atmosphere' had to be 'carefully guarded against'. As her evidence progressed, Curtis and Isaacs concurred on the central point in the Committee's final conclusions that appropriate institutional care might be needed in cases where there were insufficient numbers of the 'best foster homes'.

Isaacs's, and to a lesser extent Bowlby's, broad psychological perspectives were therefore accepted by the Committee. This acceptance arose, however, not simply because the Committee deferred to their professional experience, but out of the apparent desire of at least some Committee members to make sense of what they had already observed by that stage from their inspection visits to residential institutions. As the Committee's final report made clear, their experience of undertaking these inspections had made them uncomfortably aware of the emotionally unsettled behaviour they had experienced from children in many large residential institutions. Their public hearings with Isaacs and Bowlby included interactions in which Committee members tried to make sense of what they were observing in these visits:

Curtis: I should like to put a different point, arising of our recent experience when we visited a very large Children's Home in which young children were concentrated, not in what you would call the cottage home but in a large house of two units, with thirty in each. Those children were merrily playing and talking in their play-hour and when we went into the room they were obviously most anxious for any kind of sign of physical affection; they wanted to handle one and touch one and press one's hand and climb all over one. Do you think this is a normal symptom?...

Bowlby: Again I feel that we would like more information, but I would like to stress that these chronic delinquents, if you meet them, very often appear normal, lively, even affectionate children. If you meet them, you say "What a nice child", but it is all superficial; in some curious ways there are absolutely no roots to their relationships.⁶³

⁶³ TNA: MH102/1451D/C18.

Harford: May I ask what your main tests of whether an institution is satisfactory... when you go to see it? Might I ask whether there is any significance in whether the children particularly the younger ones, come very much to the visitor, anxious to touch and handle bags and anything belonging to the visitor...? What would you advise people to look out for?

Isaacs: ...It is awfully difficult to lay down a rule, but I would judge much more by the way [emphasis original] in which the child came—if he looked greedy, unsatisfied, anxious or frightened, or came in a way you felt meant there was something missing in his life.... You can tell when people are feeling happy and free and active and interested. I think that is a very important indication.⁶⁴

The Committee's views on the appropriate ethos of child-care can therefore be traced not simply to an abstract interest in principles of 'child psychology', nor to deference to the work of particularly well-regarded psychologists or clinicians, but to a desire amongst at least some Committee members to make sense of children's behaviour that they had found disturbing.⁶⁵

The influence of ideas from 'child psychology' on the Committee's report was also refracted through wider assumptions about gender, class and domesticity. Whilst it is doubtless the case that the notion of the mother's bond with a child took on particular public significance in the context of women's post-war withdrawal from the work-place,⁶⁶ gendered understandings of adult child-care roles were already well-established by then⁶⁷ and had operated concurrently with women's increased involvement in the work-place during the war years. These assumptions firmly placed primary responsibility for the child's emotional care, and attention to their internal world, on the mother rather than the father. In the round-up of letters written in response to Lady Allen's, published in *The Times* on 1st August 1944, one correspondent commented that vulnerable children 'needed, above all else, one person throughout the day whom they could

⁶⁴ TNA: MH102/1451D/C32.

⁶⁵ See also Younghusband, *Social Work in Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 39.

⁶⁶ Riley, *War in the Nursery*, pp. 80–196; though see Thane, 'Family life and "normality"', pp. 208–9, on the more complex patterns of encouragement and discouragement for different groups of women to participate in the post-war work-place.

⁶⁷ See, for example, Jane Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood: Child and Maternal Welfare in England, 1909–1939* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Laura King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, c.1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); also Helen McCarthy, *Double Lives: A History of Working Motherhood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020).

trust and on whom they could depend: in other words, someone who would act in the capacity of a mother'. Another argued that children's homes should be run by a 'man and wife', not just a house mother, whilst adding the qualification that 'I do not suggest that the man should make it his life work, any more than any father makes the care of his children his only interest'.⁶⁸ Such gendered assumptions about women's inherent suitability for the emotional care of children were reflected in the Committee's view that Children's Officers were more likely than not to be women and that evidence of an improvement in quality of inspection reports could be attributed to the recent employment of more female inspectors.⁶⁹ Whilst its Interim Report on *Training in Child Care*, recognised that 'house fathers' should be expected to be interested in, and understanding of, children in his care, it also commented that 'his domestic work will lie on the side of out-of-door and recreational activities rather than the physical care of the child'. Training for men in this role should focus on areas such as gardening, poultry keeping, care of grounds, and household maintenance, in place of content for women on cooking, housework and care for clothing.⁷⁰

If concepts of 'child psychology' were over-laid on existing assumptions about the domestic and work roles of men and women, the same was also true of structures of class. Based on the evidence it received, including its own inspection visits, the Committee took the view that the majority of direct child-care being provided through foster care or cottage homes was by working-class women.⁷¹ With this in mind, it recommended that training for house mothers should avoid being 'too academic'. Content on child development should be 'non-technical' (i.e. devoid of abstract psychological theory), and would form just one element of the training alongside practical household management, childhood health and disease, children's play, wider forms of social service provision and basic record-keeping. Some attention should also be given to content that would improve 'the general standard of culture', developing house mothers' taste in areas such as literature, music, art and drama.⁷² Training that

⁶⁸ *The Times*, 1st August 1994, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para.414, 444; see also paras 477, 478.

⁷⁰ *Training in Child Care*, paras 10, 14. On the more complex realities of gendered labour within the home, see Claire Langhamer, 'The meanings of the home in post-war Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40(2), 2005, 341–62.

⁷¹ See, for example, *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para. 465.

⁷² *Training in Child Care*, paras 4, 14.

explicitly engaged with theories of child psychology was to be reserved for middle-class workers, such as senior managers or boarding-out visitors.⁷³ Whilst it was hoped that this psychological ethos would permeate through the provision of children's out-of-home care, for the working-class women undertaking this work this ethos was generalised to the broadest principles of recognising the child's individuality and providing stability of care and affection.

The notion that emotionally healthy development through childhood was important for an individual's formation as a citizen was also situated in an emphasis on the civic importance of domestic life.⁷⁴ As noted above, the Committee's report did not see out-of-home care as simply needing to support the child's emotional development, but as needing to provide them with the essential skills and attitudes to manage their own household in the future. The underpinning assumption of the social importance of the home, structured around a stable family life, was itself an expression of demographic trends established by the 1930s towards reductions in both early parental deaths and the average number of children within a family.⁷⁵ This notion of the smaller, nuclear family as a social norm continued to be consolidated demographically in the early post-war period. In this context the home was seen as an important building block for society which functioned not simply as a place of privacy and leisure, but of various forms of emotional and physical labour and acts of self-responsibility upon which decent communal life rested. As one respondent to a Mass Observation interview put it, in 1943, 'a happy home and family life is the bulwark of a Nation'.⁷⁶ Parents, too, increasingly came to recognise the home as a place in which greater investment could be made in the care and development of their children, such that their children could go on to enjoy more

⁷³ *Training in Child Care*, para 23; *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, Appendix 1, Section 4.

⁷⁴ On the concept of the child as constructed in relation to concepts of adult citizenship in this period, see, for example, Laura Tisdall, 'Education, parenting and concepts of childhood in England c.1945 to c.1979', *Contemporary British History*, 31(1), 2017, 24–46, and Laura King, 'Future citizens: cultural and political conceptions of children in Britain, 1930s–1950s', *Twentieth-Century British History*, 27(3), 2016, 389–411.

⁷⁵ Pat Thane, 'Family life and "normality" in post-war British culture', in (eds) Richard Bessel & Dirk Schumann, *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 193–210.

⁷⁶ Langhamer, 'The meanings of the home', pp. 344–5; see also Wendy Webster, *Imagining Home: Gender, 'Race' and National Identity, 1945–64* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

opportunities and a better standard of living than they had experienced themselves.⁷⁷

This underpinning ethos, of broad notions of 'child psychology', refracted through assumptions about gender, class and domesticity, was to inform the report's view on forms of out-of-care for children that should now be prioritised.

A FUTURE BEYOND RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS

If the Committee's recommendations about administrative structures reflected ideas that had already been circulated in government, its recommendations about appropriate forms of out-of-home care appear to have gone significantly beyond what was being considered in draft policy statements within the Ministry of Health and Home Office. Whilst the Government anticipated recommendations addressing standards in residential care, the *Report of the Care of Children Committee* presented a set of conclusions that sought to move child-care provision significantly away from residential children's homes altogether. Whilst recognising that residential institutions could provide better standards of material care than in family homes that were significantly affected by poverty, it concluded that the lack of individual attention, unimaginative and unstimulating environments, and problems with staffing of such institutions meant that their standards of emotional care could be far worse. Although a child's family home might not be a good one in all respects, it might nevertheless provide more in terms of affection, individual interest, support and belonging than an impersonal residential home. As a consequence, the presumption should be that a child should be kept within the family home (including remaining with unmarried mothers), wherever that home could be made 'reasonably satisfactory'. To remove the child from that home, the report concluded, implied a very serious responsibility on those organisations involved to ensure that the substitute home provided a better, 'indeed much better', standard of care.⁷⁸

With this in mind, the Committee presented a hierarchy of forms of substitute care which, if managed with appropriate safeguards, might provide the social and emotional benefits that would be associated with the 'normal' family home. The most preferable option, they argued, was

⁷⁷ Thane, 'Family life and "normality"', p. 207.

⁷⁸ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 427, 447.

adoption, in which the child would have new parents and the adoptive parents would have full rights and responsibilities, becoming the ‘real parents so far as human nature allows’. The Committee recommended improving existing safeguards by ensuring that all children placed for adoption had a probationary period of at least three months (and not usually more than six months) during which time they would fall under the supervision of the relevant local authority’s Children’s Officer. In cases where an adoption placement proved to be unsatisfactory, juvenile magistrates should be empowered to place the child with the local authority as a ‘fit person’, other than adoptions arranged by recognised adoption societies who were obligated to take children back during their probation period if their placement failed.⁷⁹

The second best option, in the Committee’s view, was boarding out.⁸⁰ The report recognised that foster placements (as the O’Neill case had demonstrated) had the potential to cause acute unhappiness for children, were vulnerable to vagaries of circumstance affecting the individual foster home and could have problems that were not always easily observable on superficial inspection. Nevertheless, the Committee concluded, ‘we found in the children in foster homes we visited almost complete freedom from the sense of deprivation which we have described among the children in Homes’. In one of its strongest censures, the report particularly deplored what it regarded as the perverse policy of one unnamed organisation, which boarded children out as infants before taking them back from settled foster placements once they reached school age.⁸¹ Whilst anonymised in the report, this appears to refer to the work of the Catholic Child Welfare Council, on behalf of whom George Craven had given evidence that children over school age were taken from Catholic foster homes into institutions both to create space for more children in those foster homes

⁷⁹ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 448–59.

⁸⁰ Whilst the Curtis Committee, and the Home Office Children’s Department, emphasised the value of boarding out purely in terms of the social and emotional well-being of the child, it was also substantially cheaper than residential care. In the post-war period the Parliamentary Select Committee on Estimates periodically encouraged the Home Office to increase the proportion of children boarded out on grounds on economic efficiency (see Griffith, *Central Departments and Local Authorities*, pp. 393–4).

⁸¹ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, para 451.

and to ensure institutional protection of those children's Catholic faith and practice.⁸²

Given the potential value of this form of substitute home, the Committee expressed concern that of the total of 125,000 children they had identified as living in different forms of out-of-home care, only 31,000 of these were boarded out, and of these only 11,000 had been placed in foster homes by a public authority. Divergent policies within voluntary organisations were also noted, with Dr Barnardo's Homes and the Church of England Children's Society supporting boarding out, whilst the National Children's Home and Catholic Child Welfare Council averse to doing this as a matter of policy. Even so, those voluntary organisations that supported boarding out in principle were still found to be maintaining most of their children in residential institutions.

Local authorities were therefore encouraged to embark on initiatives to identify new foster homes. Significant expansion in foster-care provision should not be made, the Committee warned however, at the expense of approving homes that were less than satisfactory. Prospective foster homes that were a source of concern for any reason should not be used because rigorous supervision and the ability to remove the child were insufficient in mitigating the emotional harm caused to a child through being put through one, or indeed several, failed placements. Stronger and more consistent safeguards for boarding out should be established by having a single set of boarding-out regulations produced by the lead central government department for all placements made both by local authorities and by voluntary organisations. Children's Officers should maintain an informal register of approved foster homes for use by their own or any other local authority as well as any voluntary organisation. Homes on this list should be subject to supervision from boarding-out visitors, working under the direction of the Children's Officer, who would be provided with new training specific to that role. Suitably trained workers could also undertake this role for voluntary organisations. Such safeguards would, the Committee hoped, constitute a significant improvement on current weaknesses in the quality and frequency of visits to boarded-out children, particularly by volunteer workers. The lack of more cases nationally such as Dennis O'Neill's was, it noted, probably more an indication that

⁸² Evidence of Catholic Child Welfare Council, 26th May 1945, TNA: MH102/1451D/C14, p. 6.

boarding-out care was generally good rather than that existing inspection systems were adequate in detecting problems.⁸³

Whilst the Committee hoped that these proposals would lead to greater use of boarding out, it also recognised that any such expansion would take considerable time to accommodate the numbers of children currently 'deprived of a normal home life'. Although the introduction of new family allowances and social insurance were likely over time to reduce the numbers of children needing out-of-home care, the Committee anticipated that a third option—institutional care—would still be needed for at least the next 10–15 years and beyond.⁸⁴ The Committee recognised that large residential homes could have advantages for children, including greater recreational facilities, a wider social circle within which to form friendships, more activities and 'often the society and friendship of more cultivated and educated people'. However any such benefits were outweighed by their impersonal atmosphere that left children continually feeling 'the lack of affection and personal interest'. To mitigate against this, institutional care would best be delivered through children being looked after by a house mother, or house mother and father, in small units. Whilst the model of the 'scattered home' (first pioneered by public assistance officers in Sheffield) was best placed to offer individualised care and access to the wider community, the Committee also recognised that this entailed risks of isolation for the house mother. As an alternative 'grouped homes' might also be used. The numbers of children accommodated in these units should be kept low, however, to allow as 'family-like' an atmosphere to develop as possible. The maximum number of children in any individual home should not exceed twelve, and would ideally be around eight, with a staff ratio of one house mother per ten

⁸³ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 420–22, 460–75; on existing problems with boarding out inspections, see paras 349, 371–2, 376, 394. Home Office staff had acknowledged in oral evidence to the Committee that they had no central guidelines on the criteria by which foster homes should be selected, and although they had the right of inspection of individual foster homes this was in practice wholly delegated to local authorities. The Home Office had no comprehensive overview about local authorities' approach to inspections, although had the view from inspections of a substantial number of local authorities that the suitability of those undertaking inspections varied significantly (Notes of a meeting held at the Home Office, Whitehall, SW1, on Monday 26th March 1945, TNA: MH102/1451D/C1).

⁸⁴ *Report of the Care of Children Committee*, paras 157/8, 161, 163, 462, 476–96.

children. Children would be mixed by age and gender within these homes, allowing siblings to remain together, and would ideally remain in the care of the same house mother until school-leaving age at 15. A national programme of specialist training for house mothers had already been proposed in the Interim Report published by the Care of Children Committee back in March 1946,⁸⁵ which the Committee recommended be introduced alongside appropriate support and conditions of employment. The residential environment for children should also have all the qualities—homeliness, space for private possessions, materials for reading and play—that the Committee found lacking in many larger institutions. It should also provide children with regular pocket money, good opportunities to develop interests and friendships outside of the home and on-going contact, where not harmful, with other relatives. Whilst local authorities should look to develop their own scattered and grouped homes in appropriate ways, there was also no reason why children should not be placed in voluntary homes that offered suitable care. Indeed, there could be value in continuing to maintain a 'friendly rivalry' between voluntary and public provision.

THE CARE OF CHILDREN COMMITTEE AND POST-WAR CHILD MIGRATION

The attention given to the issue of child migration in the Curtis report was far briefer than other forms of children's out-of-home care and was entirely unaddressed in the Clyde report. In the case of the Curtis Committee, this appeared to reflect its assumption that any post-war resumption of child migration would only take place on a relatively small scale, an assumption reinforced by the limited evidence that the Committee received on this issue.

Of those voluntary organisations who involved themselves in post-war child migration work, only the Fairbridge Society and Dr Barnardo's Homes presented any formal evidence on this subject to the Committee. Neither the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society (soon to become the Church of England Children's Society), the National Children's Home, nor the Catholic Child Welfare Council, gave any indication of

⁸⁵ *Training in Child Care: Interim Report of the Care of Children Committee*, cmd.6760 (London: HMSO, 1946).

their interest in developing this work in their evidence.⁸⁶ For several of these organisations no plans were being developed to resume their migration work until the Australian Commonwealth Government had confirmed its arrangements for financial support. By the time this confirmation was given, in August 1946, the Committee's work had been completed. The decision by the Catholic Child Welfare Council, in June 1946, to support the resumption of child migration to Catholic institutions in Western Australia also post-dated its oral evidence to the Committee the previous month,⁸⁷ although the confidential nature of the Council's June meeting makes it unclear that disclosures about its migration plans would have been made to the Committee at that point anyway.

A memorandum submitted to the Committee from Dr Barnardo's Homes set out the history of its child and juvenile migration work, focusing particularly on its work in Canada, as well as the recent policy context and a brief note on its future plans.⁸⁸ Parental consent, it acknowledged, was being given less frequently for the emigration of children because of parents' 'very natural desire not to be separated [from their children], and secondly, the knowledge that the type of child suitable for migration is precisely the type of child for whom [our] Homes are able to find excellent openings in technical trades in this Country'. The decreasing population in Britain, continued parental reluctance, greater job opportunities in technical trades and lack of encouragement from overseas Dominions meant that the post-war resumption of child migration faced significant challenges. Nevertheless, Barnardo's claimed that the clear benefits of their past migration work both to the children involved and to the countries receiving them meant that its resumption should be encouraged. The memorandum stated that Barnardo's Council intended its future migration work to be concentrated in Ontario, Canada, following its long-established practice of boarding out younger children and placing juveniles in employment. The work envisaged was to be on a small scale, with groups of only 30 children and juvenile migrants sent to Canada per annum, similar to the numbers of juvenile migrants sent by the charity to Canada through the 1930s.

As a summary of its organisational history and future plans, the memorandum said curiously little about the charity's child migration work to

⁸⁶ The Waifs and Strays Society did make a very brief reference to their past migration work in their written memorandum to the Committee, TNA: MH102/1451B/14.

⁸⁷ TNA: MH102/1451D/C14.

⁸⁸ TNA: MH102/1451B/123.

Australia. Although it noted that Dr Barnardo's Homes had sent children both to the farm schools at Picton and Pinjarra, no reference was made to Empire Settlement Act funding for their child migration work to Australia, including the loan from the Dominions Office towards the costs of developing the Picton site. The lack of any reference to future plans for resuming child migration to Australia also appeared to be a significant omission as Dr Barnardo's Homes General Superintendent, Mr P.T. Kirkpatrick, had been corresponding with the Dominions Office since June 1944 on various administrative matters relating to the Picton farm school on the assumption that it would continue to receive more children from Britain after the war.⁸⁹ Kirkpatrick had also indicated to an Australian Commonwealth Government sub-committee in the spring of 1944 that it would be possible, with three months' notice, to fill the Picton farm school (accommodating 100 boys and 50 girls) to capacity again.⁹⁰ Given that Kirkpatrick was the most senior administrator of Dr Barnardo's Homes at that time and led the Barnardo's group that gave evidence to the Curtis Committee,⁹¹ it seems unlikely that the omission of the intention to send children to Australia in this memorandum would have happened simply through error.

A memorandum from the Fairbridge Society was also sent to the Curtis Committee following a fact-finding visit on behalf of the Committee to Fairbridge's London office by Letitia Harford.⁹² Harford, who was well aware of Fairbridge's work partly through her sister who had previously

⁸⁹ See Kirkpatrick to Wiseman, 8th June 1944, 17th December 1945, and 6th March 1946, TNA: DO35/1138/M996/1. See also Kirkpatrick to Hart, 26th April 1945, ML: MLMSS9025, Box 13, enclosing a draft letter to the Australian High Commissioner from Barnardo's Chairman of the Council indicating that they hoped to resume sending children to New South Wales but that given greater resistance to child migration in view of demographic trends in Britain this would be made easier if their child migrants could be given better resources and opportunities in Australia in future. Reference is also made to Barnardo's extensive plans for sending children to Australia in the post-war period in 'Australia as Home for War Orphans', *Daily Telegraph*, 3rd November 1943, and 'Plans for British Orphan Migrants', *Canberra Times*, 4th November 1943, NAA.C: A446, 1960/66716, and its General Manager wrote a public letter offering Barnardo's help when the Australian Commonwealth Cabinet announced its plans for the immigration of 50,000 children in the immediate post-war years ('Child Immigrants', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8th December 1944, NAA.C: A446, 1960/66716).

⁹⁰ See Report on Child Migration (British and white alien), 17th March 1944, NAA.C: A689, 1944/43/554/2/5.

⁹¹ See TNA: MH102/1451D/C11.

⁹² See Note for Mr Green, 5th October 1945, ULSCA(F): H6/2/14.

worked for Fairbridge, was briefed on the concerns which the London office had about its ability to ensure that proper standards of care were maintained for children it had sent to Australia. In a note on this meeting, Harford was said to have recognised clearly ‘how serious a matter it is that “London” has responsibilities which *in law* (emphasis original) it is powerless to honour’. Harford also reportedly told a member of staff at the London office that the Curtis Committee had also received two critical reports about child migration work, one from an unnamed ‘responsible source’ and the other from Miss Tempe Woods, whose criticisms of Pinjarra had formed an important part of Fairbridge’s dossier which had been submitted to the Dominions Office. These critical accounts were never published by the Curtis Committee, or publicly acknowledged, and formed part of the wider body of information received by the Committee that was treated as informal and confidential material. It was also noted during this visit that there had initially been problems in securing adequate monitoring of CORB children who had been placed out with families in Australia and that this had only been put in place after successful lobbying of the Commonwealth Minister of the Interior by social workers and State child welfare officers.

On the basis of this briefing, Harford recommended that Fairbridge submit a formal memorandum outlining its future plans and the powers it had to achieve them. This memorandum, submitted to the Curtis Committee in January 1946, briefly outlined the extent of the involvement of the Australian Commonwealth and State governments in approving the selection of children for migration and providing a financial contribution to their maintenance until school-leaving age.⁹³ It noted, however, that there was no compulsory government inspection of the farm schools, nor of after-care, by the Australian authorities. As a consequence, the sending of children to incorporated bodies in Australia, over which the London society had no control, meant that these children ‘forfeit the shelter of what is (and further, will be) provided by the State

⁹³ Memorandum, 25th January 1946, ULSCA(F): H6/2/14. Fairbridge also provided the Committee with a copy of a memorandum originally submitted by them to the Dominions Office on 25th January 1945 which described both the rationale and working methods of the organisations, and re-iterated its view of the need to ensure appropriate protections for child migrants in Australia (see copies in both ULSCA(F): H6/2/14 and TNA: DO35/1139/M1118/1). The Dominions Office was also notified that this memorandum had been shared with the Curtis Committee (see Green to Bottomley, 24th May 1946, TNA: DO35/1139/M1118/1).

in the United Kingdom for the care and protection of homeless children and are then yielded to the discretion of the Executive Committees of the Incorporated Fairbridge Societies in Australia'. Given that these overseas committees effectively functioned as 'closed societies', there was no way of ensuring that members who could provide appropriate advice and oversight of standards of care were appointed to them. This had proven particularly problematic, it was noted, in relation to conditions at Pinjarra.

The aspiration, the memorandum argued, should be to ensure that standards of care for British child migrants were no worse overseas than they would have been had they remained in the United Kingdom. As it observed:

Recently, agreement has been reached between the United Kingdom Government and the Australian Commonwealth Government whereby migrants will not forfeit by their translation to Australia their rights of pensions and other social benefits which would have been theirs had they remained in the United Kingdom. We suggest that child migrants in like manner should find in Australia no less effective State protection, no lower standard of education, no inferior opportunity for work and equipment for citizenship than they would have enjoyed had they remained in this country—in the category of "children without families" in the care of voluntary societies answerable to the State.

Part of the solution to this, it was suggested, might be for the UK Government to approach the Australian Commonwealth Government to ensure that the guardianship of child migrants was transferred to the Commonwealth Government on their arrival in Australia. Whilst this would not necessarily ensure that the local committees in Australia would necessarily always maintain proper standards, such a measure would at least mean that the farm schools in Australia would be subject to more formal government scrutiny to ensure 'care and protection no less effective than that ensured for children in this country and also for Australian children'. The assumption that standards of care expected in future by the state would be comparable in both the United Kingdom and Australia was, as the following chapters will demonstrate, to prove unwarranted.

After receiving this memorandum, the Curtis Committee invited representatives of Fairbridge's London office to give evidence at a full meeting

of the Committee on 14 May 1946. Mr Kirkpatrick was also invited to appear on behalf of Dr Barnardo's Homes, whose main hearing before the Committee had taken place eight months before Fairbridge's memorandum had been received. This meeting which, according to Fairbridge's records, focused particularly on sensitive issues around the governance of child migration programmes, appears to have been conducted as a closed session.⁹⁴ Whilst Kirkpatrick reportedly emphasised that Dr Barnardo's Homes in the United Kingdom exercised effective control over its branch in New South Wales and that this arrangement had proven to be an 'unqualified success', Gordon Green and his assistant, Miss Hart, reiterated the concerns set out in Fairbridge's memorandum. They were also questioned by Committee members who were evidently concerned that after-care be conducted in an effective way.

Despite having some knowledge of problems associated with child migration work, the Curtis Committee did not seek any evidence from the Dominions Office, concentrating instead only on the four government departments which it knew to have any form of statutory responsibility for children's out-of-home care—the Ministry of Health, the Home Office, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Pensions. Whilst it had some understanding of problems both with standards and systems of governance, it does not appear to have been aware of the extent to which the Dominions Office had already invested financially in farm schools in Australia nor of the aspiration of the Australian Commonwealth Government (known within the Dominions Office) for child migration to be significantly increased when assisted migration resumed. In the absence of this knowledge, the Committee appears to have seen child migration as a relative minor challenge compared to the other problems it sought to address with regard to children's out-of-home care.

There was no consensus amongst the Committee's members as to whether child migration was, in principle, an appropriate form of welfare intervention. John Litten had already visited Australia before the outbreak of war to explore possibilities for child migration and took a leading role in establishing the child migration work of the National Children's Home after the war.⁹⁵ Other

⁹⁴ See 'Curtis Committee – Care of Children, 14th May 1946', ULSCA(F): H6/2/14. This session is not listed in the index of transcribed hearings at TNA: MH102/1451D.

⁹⁵ See 'Children as migrants: proposals for Australia', *Argus*, 2nd November 1937, & *Melbourne Herald*, 'Home Principal's Visit', 1st November, NAA.C: A436/1945/5/85; Boucher, *Empire's Children*, pp. 180–3.

Committee members, such as John Moss (who was to undertake an informal review of receiving institutions in Australia in 1951/2) and Letitia Harford, do not appear to have had any absolute objections to child migration. Given the Committee's rather tepid support for the resumption of child migration, it appears other members were less convinced of its value. There was, however, clear concern amongst the Committee about what they had learned from Fairbridge about the challenges of maintaining appropriate standards of care for child migrants in Australia. The single paragraph in its report that dealt with child migration re-iterated Fairbridge's point about the need for parity of treatment for children whether remained in the United Kingdom or were migrated overseas. As the report put it:

We understand that organisations for sending deprived children to the Dominions may resume their work in the near future. We have heard evidence as to the arrangements for selecting children for migration, and it is clear to us that their effect is that this opportunity is given only to children of fine physique and good mental equipment. These are precisely the children for whom satisfactory openings could be found in this country, and in present day conditions this particular method of providing for the deprived child is not one that we specially wish to see extended. On the other hand, a fresh start in a new country may, for children with an unfortunate background, be the foundation of a happy life, and the opportunity should therefore in our view remain open to suitable children who express a desire for it. We should however strongly deprecate their setting out in life under less thorough care and supervision than they would have at home, and we recommend that the arrangements made by the Government of the receiving country for their welfare and after care should be comparable to those we have proposed in this report for deprived children remaining in this country.⁹⁶

This statement was condensed into the report's single recommendation explicitly concerning child migration that 'the emigration of deprived children should be subject to the condition that the receiving Government makes arrangements for their welfare and supervision comparable to those recommended in this report'.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ *Care of Children Committee Report*, para 515.

⁹⁷ *Care of Children Committee Report*, recommendation 61.

The qualification that the Curtis report placed on the resumption of child migration work was significant. By recommending that unaccompanied children only be sent overseas if standards of care were comparable to those it had advocated for future implementation in Britain, the Committee set out expectations that were to be repeatedly referred to in policy and operational discussions about this work in the coming years. As noted in the previous part of this chapter, progress in implementing the report's recommendations in existing areas of child-care provision such as staff training and greater use of foster care was gradual in many parts of England and Wales. However, the proposed resumption of child migration was effectively regarded by the Committee as a new initiative on which the report's standards could be imposed from the outset. What was to prove more difficult in the coming years was the process of establishing measures that would effectively ensure that these Curtis standards would be maintained for child migrants.

The Committee's concern about ensuring appropriate standards of care for child migrants was subsequently taken up in the 1948 Children Act. In s. 17(1–3) of the Act, local authorities were empowered to seek the migration of any child in their care—thus extending existing powers available to a local authority who served as a 'fit person' for a child under the terms of the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act (s.84:5). As had been the case under the 1933 Act, the migration of a child in the care of the local authority was, however, subject to the consent of the Home Secretary, with the 1948 Act noting that:

The Secretary of State shall not give his consent under this section unless he is satisfied that emigration would benefit the child, and that suitable arrangements have been or will be made for the child's reception and welfare in the country to which he is going, that the parents or guardian of the child have been consulted or that it is not practicable to consult them, and that the child consents,

[p]rovided that where a child is too young to form or express a proper opinion on the matter, the Secretary of State may consent to his emigration notwithstanding that the child is unable to consent thereto in any case where the child is to emigrate in company with a parent, guardian or relative of his, or is to emigrate for the purpose of joining a parent, guardian, relative or friend. (s.17:2)⁹⁸

⁹⁸ The second paragraph of this clause was interpreted differently in Scotland compared to the rest of the United Kingdom (see Opening comments of Senior Counsel to the Inquiry, Transcript of Day 42, *Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry*, pp. 40–43). Whereas in

The Act also empowered the Secretary of State to introduce regulations controlling the emigration of children by voluntary organisations, which would require those organisations to provide satisfactory information about their operational approach to child emigration as well as the arrangements made for the reception and welfare of children overseas (s.33:1–2).

The 1948 Act therefore appeared to create a statutory framework for child migration in keeping with the recommendations of the Curtis Committee. However, in reality, the measures introduced in the Act, and their subsequent interpretation by civil servants, created significant variations in the processes through which children came to be emigrated from the United Kingdom. Whilst the 1948 Act empowered the Home Secretary to introduce regulations for the child migration work of voluntary organisations, such regulations were never introduced in the post-war period in which these schemes actually operated.⁹⁹ The reasons for this will be discussed further in Chap. 5, but it is important to note at this stage that this lack of regulation of voluntary organisations created a dual-track system for post-war child migration. Whereas children emigrated by local authorities required the consent of the Home Secretary (in practice, a procedure that was delegated to staff in the Home Office Children's Department),¹⁰⁰ those emigrated by voluntary organisations required no such consent. In the case of children emigrated by voluntary organisations the only consent effectively required for their migration was that of the signature of a parent, or someone signing as their guardian, on the application form used by immigration officials of the country receiving them. Whilst, in principle, the Home Secretary was able to refuse a child's migration from the care of a local authority on grounds of their personal circumstances or the suitability of arrangements for their care overseas, the lack of regulation of

England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the requirement of a younger child being migrated with a parent or guardian was interpreted loosely to allow voluntary organisations migrating and receiving children overseas to be recognised as their 'guardians', in Scotland the term 'guardian' was understood strictly to refer to a specific individual. In practice, this meant that the migration of children under 12 years of age from local authority care in Scotland was significantly curtailed as such cases were only allowed by the Scottish Home Department where the child was migrating with an individual parent or guardian, and not simply under the auspices of a voluntary organisation.

⁹⁹ Grier, 'A spirit of "friendly rivalry"?', pp. 241–3 argues that the failure to introduce regulations for the voluntary sector in the original 1948 Act reflected what some saw at the time as the under-regulation of the voluntary sector in the Act more generally.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, the discussion of the cases of children to be emigrated from the care of Cornwall County Council to Fairbridge Farm Schools in Australia in TNA: MH102/1954.

voluntary organisations meant that the UK Government had no comparable powers for children migrated by them. Measures intended to rectify this discrepancy were not introduced until the spring of 1957, nearly ten years after the first British post-war child migrants had arrived in Australia.

The policy influence of the Curtis report therefore provided a complex background to the post-war child migration. Its acceptance of the possible benefits of migration in the cases of some children created a permissive policy framework in which child migration programmes were able to resume on a larger scale than at least some of the Committee's members had anticipated. At the same time, the Curtis report had articulated a set of expectations about standards in child-care which the Committee expected to be met for those children being sent overseas. By insisting on particular standards of care for child migrants, the Curtis report shaped a policy context in which child migration resumed after the war in the midst of increasing scrutiny of its effects on children and new discussions about standards involving voluntary organisations and government departments in both Britain and Australia. Managing the gap between Curtis standards and the reality of child migration programmes was to become one of the defining challenges for post-war child migration policy.

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