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# Evaluation of Independent Child Trafficking Advocates trial: Final Report

Research Report 86

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	3
Executive summary.....	4
Aims and approach of the evaluation .....	4
Characteristics of the children in the trial .....	4
How was the advocacy scheme implemented? .....	5
How did the role of the advocate work in practice? .....	5
What was the impact of the advocacy scheme for trafficked children? .....	6
Discussion .....	6
Issues raised for further consideration .....	6
1: Introduction and background.....	8
2: Overall aim and scope of the evaluation .....	9
3: Methodology .....	11
4: Characteristics of the children in the trial .....	12
5: Key Findings - How was the advocacy scheme implemented?.....	16
6: Key Findings - How did the role of the advocate work in practice?.....	18
7: Key Findings - What was the impact of the advocates on trafficked children? .....	27
Barriers and challenges for implementing the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service.....	35
8: Conclusions.....	39
9: Issues raised for further consideration.....	40
Annex .....	43
Data Tables .....	43
Methodological approach .....	51
Relevant laws and policies in the UK and the European Union.....	55

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# Executive summary

This report presents findings from an evaluation of a one-year trial of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service that took place across 23 local authority areas in England. The trial was part of the Government's commitment to section 48 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which sets out provisions for the ICTA service.

The role of the independent child trafficking advocates is to provide specialist independent support to trafficked children and to act in the child's best interest across the areas of social care, immigration and criminal justice. This is in addition to the existing statutory service provision for trafficked children.

## Aims and approach of the evaluation

This independent evaluation of the ICTA trial by the University of Bedfordshire sought to answer three questions.

- How was the advocacy scheme implemented?
- How did the role of the advocate work in practice?
- What was the impact of the advocacy scheme for trafficked children?

The trial used alternate allocation to place children identified as potentially trafficked into an advocacy group or a comparator group. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach comprising surveys, interviews and focus groups with a range of stakeholders and the children themselves. Case files for the children in the trial were analysed to understand the different experiences of the children in the advocacy and comparator groups.

The circumstances of the trial presented considerable challenges in addressing the key questions. There were complexities in looking across 23 local authorities, each having their own policies and practices. The evaluation was set up to look in detail at the work of the advocates with trafficked children, meaning that there are more and better quality data about the children in the advocacy group than those in the comparator group. This means that there is limited information to assess the impact of the advocacy service, relative to existing provision. The report focuses on the impact of the service on trafficked children, drawing on the views of a range of stakeholders and the children. In addition, one year is a very short time to build, deliver and measure the effectiveness of a new advocacy service for trafficked children. It will take longer to establish many of the sustainable beneficial outcomes for this vulnerable group of children.

## Characteristics of the children in the trial

- Overall, 158 children were allocated to the trial: 86 children to the advocacy group and 72 children to the comparator group.
- There was an almost even gender split and the majority (59%) were aged between 13–16 years.
- The majority (70%; 110 out of 158) of the children were nationals of non-EU countries,

most commonly Vietnam and Albania; 28 of the 47 EU nationals were from the UK (nationality was unknown for 1 case).

- The children in the trial had been subjected to a range of exploitation types, the most common type was sexual exploitation (30%). For a quarter of the children the type of exploitation was unknown because at the time of recording information there was no categorical information but rather general concerns about potential trafficking.
- Referrals to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), the UK's identification and support system for victims of modern slavery, were made in just over half (78 of the 141) of cases where case files were available, and were pending in a further 24 cases.

## How was the advocacy scheme implemented?

- The ICTA service was run by Barnardo's, a national voluntary organisation with experience of working with trafficked children. The provision was based on a 'hub and spoke' model, with six advocates and their managers embedded in existing services and reaching out to cover all trial areas. The service provision included volunteers to help the children to access social activities and a 24-hour helpline.
- The trial guidelines stipulated that the children should be referred to the advocacy service within two hours or as soon as practically possible. In practice, referral within 2 hours only occurred in just under one-fifth (19%) of cases. These delays may in part be due to the trial design, which required allocation to either the advocacy or comparator groups. Once referred to the service, 84 per cent of the children were allocated to a named advocate within 24 hours.
- Where Barnardo's services were established and the workers in local areas were convinced of the value of the trial, the systems worked well. In other areas there was a concern that the ICTA service was, in effect, a replacement social work service.

## How did the role of the advocate work in practice?

- Advocates worked mostly in social care, followed by immigration and criminal justice. Working independently at the hub between these areas appeared to allow advocates to see a holistic view of the child and their life, and coordinate actions between agencies.
- There were differences in the work that advocates did with the children who had been internally trafficked compared with those trafficked across borders. The children trafficked across borders appeared more isolated from protective networks and non-EU nationals often had complex issues around immigration. Internally trafficked children, particularly in cases of child sexual exploitation, had access to a range of existing services and interventions, meaning that the advocates operated in a more crowded context.
- On average, each advocate had a caseload of 14 children. Overall, cases in the advocacy group were held open for longer than cases in the comparator group.
- The advocates were a diverse group and largely came from a background of social work and youth work. They completed a range of training courses, in addition to 'on-the-job' learning.
- In the trial the advocates raised some issues about the difficulties of working without legal powers (those set out in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 had not come into effect during the trial).
- Advocates also raised issues about the perceived unsuitability of accommodation for some of the children. However, there was evidence from the trial that suggests that public authorities were carrying out their statutory duties and balancing limited resources across a spectrum of needs.

## What was the impact of the advocacy scheme for trafficked children?

- The children in the advocacy group were very positive about their advocate. They felt that they had someone on their side during meetings and that advocates were reliable and trustworthy. Advocates provided a safe adult presence in the lives of the children.
- Stakeholders, including practitioners from social care, immigration and criminal justice, were largely positive about the advocacy service. The main areas where stakeholders felt that advocates added value were:
  - building trusting and credible relationships with the children and other stakeholders;
  - sharing expertise and knowledge of trafficking with practitioners across domains;
  - helping the children to navigate through complex circumstances;
  - speaking up for the children when necessary and acting in the child's best interests;
  - maintaining a momentum in a case that was suitable to the child's needs; and
  - improving the quality of decision making.
- A small minority of stakeholders expressed dissatisfaction with the advocacy service. In particular, they felt that it overlapped with existing service provision and any additional resource would be better spent on social work services.
- There was a complex picture in relation to missing children. There was no evidence that advocacy led to reductions in the number of children going missing, although in the advocacy group some of the children went missing before referral to an advocate. There were particular issues with Vietnamese children going missing.

## Discussion

Taken together, evidence from the trial suggests that advocates added value to existing provision, to the satisfaction of the children and most stakeholders. The ICTA service appears to be important in ensuring clarity, coherence and continuity for the child, working across other services responsible for the child, over time and across contexts. However, some stakeholders questioned the role of the advocate in providing more than a good specialist social work service and there was evidence, in some instances, of friction between the advocates and statutory services.

## Issues raised for further consideration

- **Scale and scope:** The types of children requiring an advocate are likely to influence the numbers of advocates required and the range of work that they undertake. Children trafficked across borders may require additional advocacy resources and time due to their high levels of need in the immigration domain. Further consideration should be given to the scale and scope of a future advocacy service working with internally trafficked children and cross border trafficked children.
- **Legal powers of a child trafficking advocate:** There should be monitoring of the legal powers for advocates as set out in the Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- **Visibility of advocates:** Independent advocates, as defined in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 section 48, should be visible. Consideration should be given to how they can be part of formal systems and networks of care and protection, with the duties and responsibilities of advocates understood by all key stakeholders.
- **Independence:** It is important for advocates to be independent, but also to be linked to established services to allow them to work in ways that are child-centred and support the work of other services.
- **Referrals:** There were limitations with the trial referral processes. Further consideration needs to be given to the referral processes to an advocacy service, in terms of setting

and maintaining appropriate referral times, widening the sources of referral beyond local authorities and clearly identifying referral pathways to the service.

- **Missing children:** Further research is required, in particular in relation to Vietnamese children, to identify how and why children go missing, and the ways that an advocacy service becomes part of a coordinated response to finding the missing children.
- **Training and regulation of advocates:** Further consideration should be given to the range of topics covered in the training of advocates and the potential benefits of certificated training, leading to an accredited and registered status for advocates.
- **Implementation:** Further consideration should also be given to the model of service provision, in particular with regard to the 24-hour helpline and the use of volunteers.
- **Transitions:** Due to the short-term nature of the trial, there was insufficient evidence on the ways that the children transition from an advocacy service to other services or independent living. It would be helpful to understand longer term transitions.

# 1: Introduction and background

The Modern Slavery Act received Royal Assent and became law in March 2015.<sup>1</sup> Section 48 of the Act establishes provision for an Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) in England and Wales. In January 2014 the Home Office commissioned a trial of independent child trafficking advocates to work with trafficked children across 23 local authorities in England.<sup>2</sup> The trial included children trafficked into, within or out of England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> It was guided by the principle that the welfare of the child is paramount.

The one-year ICTA trial began on 8 September 2014. The ICTA service was run by Barnardo's, a children's charity with established organisational expertise in working with trafficked children. The 23 trial local authorities represented a mix of urban and rural areas with varied experiences in dealing with children trafficked for the purposes of different forms of exploitation. The trial was designed to capture the breadth of responses within local authorities, and the ways these aligned with the work of Barnardo's as a national voluntary sector service provider.

The role of the advocates was to provide specialist independent support for trafficked children, in addition to existing statutory service provision. Their role was:

- to help trafficked children understand what is happening to them, and speak up for them when necessary; and
- to enhance timely, clear, consistent and better decision making by stakeholders in criminal justice, immigration and social care services.

The advocates worked within systems of existing statutory provision, as set out in Department for Education guidance. Local authorities have specific responsibilities regarding unaccompanied and trafficked children in care and those leaving care. These responsibilities include identification of potentially trafficked children and support for these children. The guidance recommends that local authorities develop a 'close multi-agency approach' to protection and care, including working with other public authorities such as the police, immigration officials, and specialist voluntary organisations.<sup>4</sup>

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1 The UK had already ratified the Council of Europe *Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings* on 17 December 2008 and brought it into force on 1 April 2009. In England and Wales, the Government is clear that existing provisions by local authorities under their statutory child protection obligations, including social workers and independent reviewing officers, fulfil the guardian requirements in the Directive. The provisions for child trafficking advocates in section 48(5) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 provide trafficked children with representation by an independent child trafficking advocate who is required to act in the child's best interests. The section states that the advocate should be independent of any person who will be responsible for making decisions about the child. Since 2010 the Scottish Guardianship Service has provided a specialist independent guardian for all unaccompanied asylum seeking and trafficked children in Scotland. On 13 January 2015 the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 was given Royal Assent. This Act ensures the presence of independent legal guardians for all separated children. See: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2015/2/contents/enacted>

2 Croydon, Derbyshire, Greater Manchester (Manchester City, Stockport, Tameside, Oldham, Rochdale, Bury, Bolton, Wigan, Salford and Trafford); Kent, Lancashire, Oxford, West Midlands (Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull, Walsall and Wolverhampton); West Sussex.

3 **Home Office** (2014) *Statement of Principles for Child Trafficking Advocates Trial*, Annex C, point 1.2. The *Statement of Principles* was the guide document for the ICTA service trial's working relationships with the 23 local authorities.

4 The Department for Education guidance, issued in July 2014 mentioned the role of independent advocates (paragraph 49). See [here](#)



## 2: Overall aim and scope of the evaluation

In July 2014 the University of Bedfordshire was appointed to provide an independent evaluation of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service, and to analyse its work with trafficked children. This final report consolidates and builds on the interim findings published in March 2015.<sup>5</sup> This is the first time that a national study of child trafficking advocacy across England has taken place.<sup>6,7</sup>

The evaluation sought to address the following key questions.

- How has the advocacy scheme been implemented?
- How has the role of the advocate worked in practice?
- What has the impact of advocates been for trafficked children, compared to existing provision?

The ICTA service was a complex intervention for which answers to simple questions such as ‘does it work?’ are not forthcoming. By exploring the implementation and impact through a range of methods this evaluation aimed to understand the mechanisms underpinning the ICTA service. The trial was set up to place little additional burden on local authorities and the research was designed to provide more and richer information on the work of the advocate to investigate the first two research questions.

There were particular challenges in looking at the impact of advocates for trafficked children compared with existing provision. There was a wide variation in the policies and practices across the 23 local authorities. As this report shows when discussing the views of stakeholders, the trial was taking place when many of the local authorities were under increasing resource and regulatory pressures. None of the local authorities received additional resources in relation to the trial.<sup>8</sup> This meant that the level of engagement varied amongst the local authorities. In some areas there were difficulties in accessing the local authority data for some of the children. Therefore the findings only partially address the question of comparative impact. There were additional challenges because of the short timescale of the trial.

- One year is a very short time to build, deliver and evaluate the effectiveness of a new advocacy service for trafficked children in contexts where credible relationships with the children and professional stakeholders can take time to establish.
- Where knowledge of trafficking is low, there can be delays in identifying the children as trafficked.
- Once identified, disclosures of details about trafficking can take time to emerge from a child and time to process by the authorities.

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<sup>5</sup> The interim report is available [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> Some members of the research team have previously conducted evaluations focusing on guardianship for separated and asylum seeking children in Scotland and Northern Ireland. see [Scotland Report](#) and [Northern Ireland Report](#).

<sup>7</sup> Annex A20 summarises legal provisions related to guardianship in Europe and the UK and A21 provides a table comparing key aspects of guardianship/advocacy in the four UK nations.

<sup>8</sup> The Grant Agreement value for Barnardo’s over the 12-month period September 2014 – September 2015 was £420,916.

- Many potential benefits of advocacy for the children are long term and so are difficult to identify within the short time frame of a one-year trial. For example, if looking at the impact of advocates on the timeliness and quality of decisions, such as, National Referral Mechanism (NRM) and immigration decisions, many of these processes take time and may not have ended during the time frame of the trial.
- There was relatively slow progress in obtaining ethics approvals and data sharing agreements, and in obtaining permissions to interview the children and to view case files (see Annex A19).

## 3: Methodology

The evaluation used an alternate allocation process as a basis for comparing children supported by advocates relative to existing provision. All children identified as potentially trafficked were referred to the local authority for assessment and allocation to the trial. Following referral to the local authority, the designated single point of contact within each local authority recorded demographic information about each child and allocated the child alternately into one of two groups:

- **‘advocacy’** group – where the child is then referred (within two hours where practical) to the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service for the allocation of an advocate in addition to receiving existing statutory services; or
- **‘comparator’** group – where the child continues to receive services as usual, based on the local authority’s practices and policies.

To meet the evaluation aims, and to understand the patterns and trends of child trafficking advocacy, a range of methodological approaches were used (see Table 3:1 and Annex A19 for further details).

**Table 3:1 Summary of methods used in evaluating the ICTA service**

Method	Outputs
Allocations via local authorities	Core demographic information for the 158 children in the trial.
Interviews with the children	30 children interviewed (21 in advocacy group, 9 in comparator group).
Interviews with advocates	6 interviews completed.
Interviews with external stakeholders	18 interviews completed (12 with operational stakeholders and 6 with strategic stakeholders).
Separate focus groups with advocates, Barnardo’s operational and strategic managers	9 focus groups completed, at 3 separate intervals during the year for each set of respondents.
Stakeholder surveys	2 online surveys completed, 116 responses in total (survey 1 n=26, survey 2 n=90).
Case file analysis	141 case files examined plus 17 cases with limited information (see below).
Barnardo’s records of ICTA training, supervision, use of volunteers, use of helpline	All records available and examined prior to data cut-off point on 31 July 2015.

Data from the ICTA service were fully available throughout the trial. Access to data from existing service provision was restricted to examining local authority case files and interviewing a sample of the children about the impact on their lives of ‘services as usual’. Overall, there were generally more and better quality data about the children allocated to an advocate than for the children in the comparator group.

The evaluation raised several ethical complexities in researching the impact of advocacy on the lives of trafficked children. To minimise any risk of potential harm, an Ethics Protocol for the involvement of trafficked children in the evaluation was developed.

## 4: Characteristics of the children in the trial<sup>9</sup>

Overall, 158 children were allocated to the trial: 86 children to the advocacy group and 72 children to the comparator group (Annex Table A1).<sup>10</sup> The average rate of allocation to the trial was about four cases per week. Distribution of allocation across each of the 23 local authorities varied considerably. No allocations were received from six local authorities. These areas confirmed that they had no known child trafficking cases during the trial period.<sup>11</sup>

The research team was able to examine fully case file data for 141 of the 158 children in the trial (Annex Table A2); this comprised full case file data for all 86 children in the advocacy group and 55 of the 72 in the comparator group. Information for 17 comparator group children remained restricted.<sup>12</sup> In such cases, allocation records were accessed to add information where it was available, or further clarification was sought through a single point of contact or strategic manager in the local authority about the children's characteristics and circumstances.<sup>13</sup> The information below highlights where findings are based on all 158 children in the trial, or are limited to the 141 case files examined.

- **Gender:** Within the whole group of 158 children there was an almost even gender split (78 males and 79 females, plus one unborn child).
- **Age:** The majority (59%) of the whole group of 158 children were aged between 13–16 years, and 29 per cent were 17–18. Out of the 141 cases where case file data were available, 85 children were not age assessed; 31 children were age assessed. In a further 11 cases, age assessment was proposed, but had not been carried out by the data cut-off point, with data being unclear or missing for 14 cases. Out of the 31 where an age assessment had been carried out, 23 were age disputed (see Annex Table A4).<sup>14</sup>

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9 Annex Tables A3 to A7 contain further details for some of these characteristics. In the report percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. Chi square analysis was performed on 'primary exploitation type', 'age' and 'gender' of the children from both the advocacy and the comparator groups to establish whether the distribution between the two groups was similar for these categories. This revealed statistically significant similarities within the distributions of the two groups for age and gender, but not for primary exploitation type.

10 Allocations ended after nine months, on 8 June 2015, to allow each child in the trial at least three months of further worker contact before the trial ended.

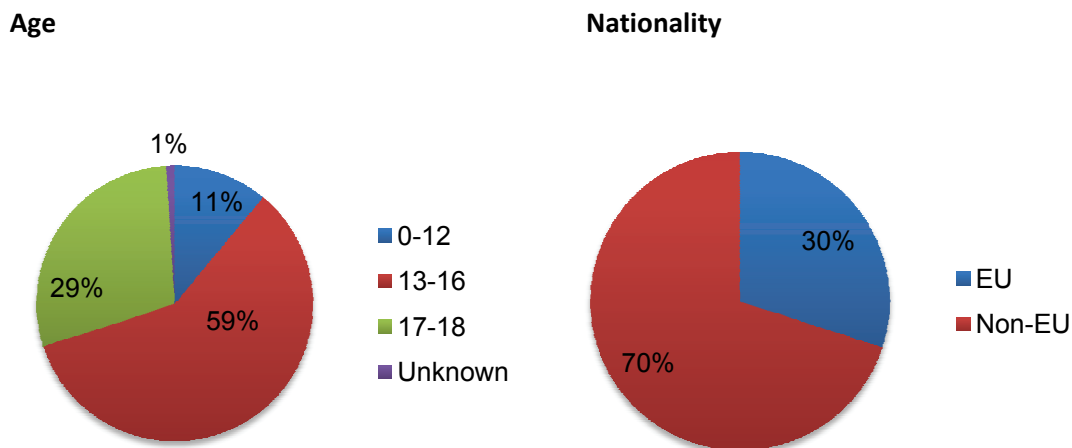
11 The research team followed up each local authority with zero allocations for confirmation that no cases of potential child trafficking occurred within the trial period, that no cases were missed, and that there were no other reasons that led to a zero allocation. Respondents for local authorities with zero allocations confirmed that they had no cases and had missed no cases, so far as their records indicated. For some local authorities the number of children allocated to the trial were lower than expected. The research team did not follow up on this issue, but it may require further examination when considering the scale and spread of a national service.

12 Primarily this was because some local authorities did not agree to allowing access to case file data.

13 The absence of case file data in such instances means that the trajectories of those children remain hidden. This evaluation cannot fully comment on local authority practices in those cases, or reflect on outcomes for those children.

14 Of the 23 age disputed cases, 17 were Vietnamese nationals.

**Figure: 4.1: Age and nationality of children in the trial**



- **Nationality:** The majority of the whole group (70%; 110 out of 158) were nationals of non-EU countries, most commonly from Vietnam and Albania; 28 (out of 47) of the EU children were UK nationals (nationality was unknown in one case – see Annex Table A6 for further information on UK nationals in the trial).
- **Immigration status:** From the non-EU group of children, 73 of the 110 were claiming asylum as unaccompanied or separated children, or their immigration claims were still being clarified.
- **Care:** Case file data showed that 72 per cent (102) of the 141 children across both groups were ‘looked after’ by local authorities under the Children Act 1989. Most ‘looked after’ children (66%) were accommodated under section 20<sup>15</sup> (61 in the advocacy group, and 32 in the comparator group). A small minority (9 out of 141) were subject to a care order, an interim care order, or a police protection order. A range of placements was used. Many children were in foster placements (45%) and in residential care (11%); 21 children (15%) were living at home with parents (11 in the advocacy group and 10 in the comparator group).
- **National Referral Mechanism (NRM) referrals:** NRM referrals were made in just over half (78 of the 141) of cases where case files were available, and pending in 24 cases (though this information was missing or unclear in 28 cases). In at least eight cases, the decision had been made not to refer the child into the NRM. The NRM referrals were mainly for the children in the advocacy group (59), with 19 NRM referrals for the children in the comparator group (this information was not available for 22 comparator group children, see Annex Table A8).
- **NRM decisions:** From the 78 NRM referrals, 43 received a ‘positive reasonable grounds’ decision (59% of those in the advocacy group, 42% in the comparator group) and the remainder were either pending a reasonable grounds decision, or their reasonable grounds decision was negative or had been suspended or withdrawn. Of those with a positive reasonable grounds decision, 11 had progressed to a ‘positive conclusive grounds’ decision (10 in the advocacy group, 1 in the comparator group) and

<sup>15</sup> Under the Children Act 1989 there are two main routes to children being ‘looked after’ by a local authority. One route is to be ‘accommodated’ via s20 with their consent, or with their parents’ consent if they are less than 16 years of age. The other is for a child to be made the subject of a care order under s31. In this study, only nine children were subject to a care order, an interim care order (s38), or a police protection order (s46). For 30 children out of 141 (21%), care status was unclear in the case files, in 5 cases (4%) children were receiving support via s17, for 3 cases (2%) the child was discharged from care or not in care and 1 case was under investigation (s47).

6 had received a negative conclusive grounds decision; the remainder were pending<sup>16</sup> (Annex Table A9). In most instances, the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service continued to work with the children who had received a negative NRM decision, when there remained some continued uncertainty about how and when to transfer cases to other services. Overall, transitions of cases were rare, given the short duration of the trial.

- **Criminal justice involvement:** In all, 44 children were involved in criminal justice proceedings as a victim of trafficking (34 in the advocacy group, 10 in the comparator group). Involvement as an offender was clear in eight cases where the child had been compelled to undertake criminal activity by traffickers (six in the advocacy group, two in the comparator group). In a further six cases, the child was involved both as a victim and an offender. In 56 case files there was no mention at all of criminal justice involvement. In a further 27 it was clear that there was no involvement at all in criminal justice matters (Annex Table A10).
- **Contact with traffickers:** Out of 86 advocacy group children, concerns were noted in case files that 27 appeared to have continued contact with traffickers. No contact between child and trafficker was confirmed for 29 advocacy cases. There were concerns noted in 5 cases that there may be some contact, but no conclusive information was available (this information was unknown in 25 cases). In comparison 13 comparator group case files out of 55 noted continued contact with traffickers, and 9 confirmed no contact. Concerns were noted for one child about possible continued contact. In a further 32 comparator group case files, either this information was missing from case files, or not known<sup>17,18</sup> (Annex Table A11).
- **Type of exploitation**<sup>19</sup> Sexual exploitation was the single biggest category in both groups when taken together. Of those subject to sexual exploitation, 20 of 48 were UK nationals (12 in the advocacy group, 8 in the comparator group). The majority were from a single local authority. Table A6 shows the characteristics of the British children in the trial.

Unknown exploitation formed the second largest category, because at the time of recording information, there were many cases where there were general concerns about potential trafficking rather than categorical information. Some children in this group were very young and the nature of trafficking remained unclear. Others went missing before more precise information came to light (see section 7 for further information about missing cases).

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16 In the report stage of the Modern Slavery Act 2015, Lord Bates noted, "... the reference here to 'reasonable grounds' does not tie the appointment of a child trafficking advocate to a reasonable grounds decision or the national referral mechanism. The wording of the clause as it stands seeks to ensure that all children who are suspected of being victims of human trafficking are appointed a child trafficking advocate in a timely manner, regardless of whether they have entered the national referral mechanism system ... The intention behind the amendment is to standardise wording across the Bill: the test will be the same as it would have been if the clause still read 'reason to believe'." Hansard, 25 February 2015.

17 In interviews advocates were asked about their responses to cases where the children were exposed to contact with traffickers. They said that the ICTA service responded in three ways. First, it alerted the relevant public authority, including children's services, to continued contact to make sure that safeguarding procedures were used to secure the child's safety. Second, it ensured that the ICTA safety intervention plans for the child highlighted the risks of continued contact, and ways of monitoring and managing that risk. Third, advocates worked directly with the child to explain the risks and to make sure, through repetition, that they were understood over time.

18 Further data were gathered from case files about assessments (initial or Common Assessment Framework assessments, or a variant of those following [The Munro Review](#), child protection plans, care plans, placement moves, language issues and access to interpreters, health plans, education plans, and health and education needs. However, these data were difficult to discern in local authority case files given the variety of case file structures. The research team excluded these data from the report as they offered only a tentative comparison between groups.

19 In many instances the 'primary exploitation type' categories are fluid and permeable rather than static and solid. They are subject to interpretations based on the judgement of a decision maker at the time of the categorisation, within the context of their understanding of child trafficking. Some categories may exist (temporarily or permanently) as sub-types within larger categories. Also, children may be re-categorised over time, as details of a case are understood. For example, a young child trafficked for the purposes of domestic servitude or benefit fraud may later be sexually exploited. Similarly the children of trafficked women may also be at risk of illegal adoption, sexual exploitation or being groomed to beg and take part in street crime on behalf of a trafficking gang. Overall, therefore, the findings are considered within a landscape of categories that move, and children who may be subject to categorisation multiple times during the life of a case.

Multiple exploitation was noted in instances where several forms of exploitation were thought to be equally significant and simultaneously present. For example, children who were sexually exploited and at the same time had their labour exploited in another part of a criminal gang's enterprises, such as a nail bar. Criminal and labour exploitation are presented separately above but remain linked, as at times it was difficult to differentiate one from the other. There were only three cases of domestic servitude.

**Table 4:1 Primary exploitation type**

	Percentage	Number		
		Advocacy	Comparator	Total
Sexual exploitation	30	28	20	<b>48</b>
Unknown exploitation	25	18	22	<b>40</b>
Criminal exploitation	16	17	8	<b>25</b>
Labour exploitation	13	6	15	<b>21</b>
Multiple exploitation	13	17	4	<b>21</b>
Domestic servitude	2	0	3	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>158</b>

- Cases: Open and closed**<sup>20</sup> The majority of the 158 cases across both groups remained open to advocates and had an allocated social worker at the data cut-off point (31 July 2015). All were seen to have social care needs. This evaluation does not take the view that the quality of service is necessarily associated with the issues of how many cases are open or closed at any time. During the trial period, 29 per cent of comparator group cases were closed, as were 13 per cent of advocacy cases – so the ICTA service tended to hold cases open for longer than across local authorities as a whole. In both groups, cases were kept open when children were missing from sight of public authorities either permanently or intermittently.

<sup>20</sup> Cases of 'missing' children are discussed separately in section 7 of this report.

## 5: Key Findings - How was the advocacy scheme implemented?

The Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service provider brought established expertise of working with highly vulnerable children. The organisation's national presence and good reputation provided a robust foundation in a complex and fast moving territory. The main features of the trial ICTA service were:

- a 'hub and spoke' model, within which advocates and their day-to-day managers were embedded in existing Barnardo's services and reached out to cover all local authorities in the trial;
- six advocates covering all the participating local authorities (two in South East England, two in London, one in the Midlands and one in Greater Manchester);
- four hub managers, a programme manager for the trial and strategic managers with identified responsibilities for the trial;
- recruitment and deployment of volunteers to spend time with young people, supporting them to access leisure and recreational activities; and
- a 24-hour helpline for both trafficked children who had an advocate and the people working with them, to provide support, advice and a route for referral 24 hours a day, throughout the period of the trial.

### Allocation to the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service

At the start of the trial it was intended that the children allocated to the advocacy group should be referred to the ICTA service within two hours or as soon as practically possible.<sup>21</sup> This occurred in only 16 cases out of 86 in the advocacy group (19%). A further 11 cases were referred within 2 days (13% – Annex Table A14). For 51 out of 86 cases (69%) there was a delay of longer than 3 days, with a further 8 cases where the length of delay of referral was unknown. Some referrals took months.

The ICTA service expended much energy in chasing potential referrals, seeking clarifications, and working closely with local authorities to increase the speed and tempo of referrals. Despite these interventions, the majority of the children were not allocated to the trial in a timely way. The following factors may explain how the speed of referrals fell below the recommended two-hour period.

- Unfamiliarity with the trial during its early stages.
- Having a distributed referral hub across 23 local authorities, with single point of contact (SPOC) responsibilities changing in some local authorities occasionally, may have led to new staff needing time to learn about the trial prior to making allocations.
- The trial may not have been a constant priority for very busy local authority staff as they were given no additional resource to take part.

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21 Statement of Principles for Child Trafficking Advocates Trial, p 4.



- Information about cases filtering through to a SPOC from operational staff may have taken time.
- Given that the fundamental principle underpinning the trial was the welfare of the child, addressing immediate safeguarding concerns may have taken priority over referring the child to an advocate. The mechanism of the trial, and filtering potentially trafficked children through unwieldy arrangements to ensure accuracy of allocation to advocacy or comparator groups clearly frustrated some stakeholders.

*“Referral processes were a bit tricky ... Allocating to comparator/CTA [child trafficking advocate] and maintaining the database was at times challenging and it would have been easier if this could have been done by social workers directly contacting CTA in first instance. However, I recognise this is largely to do with the terms of the trial.”*

(Survey respondent, social care)

The trial’s architecture did appear to impede the allocation rate. However, given the persistence of delay in many instances across the whole trial period it cannot be the sole reason for so many delays. It may be that a two-hour allocation period is not feasible.

Once referred to the ICTA service, allocation to an advocate happened comparatively quickly in most instances (Annex Table A14, Chart A15). The majority (84%) of the children were allocated to an advocate in less than 1 day and all were allocated to an advocate within 2 days. In comparison, about 46 per cent of comparator group cases were allocated to a named social worker within 2 days.<sup>22</sup> The ICTA service remained prompt and alert to receiving referrals, and chasing potential referrals, throughout the trial. Over time, a feature of the service became the capacity to seek and find information in a robust, determined, and sometimes challenging way, when delays occurred.

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<sup>22</sup> Percentage calculated on the basis of 55 comparator group cases to which there was case file access.

## 6: Key Findings - How did the role of the advocate work in practice?

### Advocates' workloads

During the trial the 86 advocacy cases were distributed across the six advocates at an average of about 14 per advocate, within a range of 22 to 9 cases each. Advocates described their caseloads as consisting of children with a wide range of needs, with some cases more complex than others, which affected how much time was spent on each case. Advocates reported that they often worked long hours and were on call to ensure that they were available for the children when required. They also highlighted the need to spend time travelling across long distances given the geographical spread of cases in the 23 trial areas. A snapshot of caseloads for social workers in children's services in a similar period in 2014 in the UK indicates an average of 23 each.<sup>23</sup> The variance between advocates' caseloads and social workers' caseloads may explain some of the differences in the frequency of contact and the amount of time spent with the children (see below).

### Advocates' training

The advocates were a racially and culturally diverse group of men and women. They were qualified at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with a range of relevant work experience. Some had social work and youth work qualifications. They received regular group and individual supervision. They appeared to work together well as a team, and were well supported by energetic managers who helped them to contextualise their responses to the many complexities they faced. During the course of the trial the service ensured that its own learning from the Safe Accommodation project<sup>24</sup> was applied, and that advocates were familiar with national and international standards of effective care for trafficked children.<sup>25</sup>

During the course of the trial all but one of the advocates and the programme manager for the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service attained Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) Level 2<sup>26</sup> and became regulated immigration advisers. The ICTA service provider became a regulated organisation under the OISC.<sup>27</sup> In addition, advocates nominated the training in the following areas as being particularly important and useful in their day-to-day work:

- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- child protection and child care law;

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<sup>23</sup> See [Social Work caseloads 2014](#).

<sup>24</sup> See [Barnardo's Safe Accommodation project](#).

<sup>25</sup> See the Fundamental Rights Agency's guidance on training for those working with trafficked children <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/guardianship-children-deprived-parental-care>.

<sup>26</sup> The requirements to practice at OISC Level 2 are set out in [How to become a regulated immigration adviser](#).

<sup>27</sup> After having undertaken OISC training there were mixed views within the ICTA service about the value of being a trained immigration adviser. Some advocates felt that it blurred the boundaries between being an advocate and an immigration adviser, as advocates were unlikely to ever act for a child as immigration advisers. However, the training provided them with good understanding of the legal frameworks and was used to advise and assist the children with immigration matters

- advocacy skills training and ways to speak up for children;
- interviewing and counselling children;
- psychological impacts on children of abuse and trauma;
- age assessments to ensure that age assessments were ‘Merton compliant’;<sup>28</sup>
- the various stages of the asylum process for children;
- child development, particularly in cross-cultural contexts;
- identifying child victims of trafficking and the role and functions of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM);
- harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation;
- child sexual exploitation;
- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) guidance on human trafficking, slavery and smuggling;<sup>29</sup> and
- acting as an ‘appropriate adult’ in social care, immigration and criminal justice contexts.<sup>30</sup>

This training began to establish expertise for advocates in working across social care, immigration and criminal justice, and was seen as beneficial by many stakeholders. Much learning also took place ‘on the job’ in relation to working specific cases over time across all areas. In such cases advocates learnt to sharpen skills and apply knowledge through problem solving together. Within group supervision sessions, individual cases with similar features were discussed to locate barriers and resolutions, with advocates identifying thresholds of effective practice. So in that respect, the pedagogic and apprenticeship model of learning about advocacy appeared to boost the competence and confidence of advocates over time. The advocates remained as a stable group with no staff turnover from the start of the trial until the data cut-off point.

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28 The Government’s guidance on age assessments, including commentary on the Merton judgement is available [here](#). Guidance on age assessments produced by the Association of Directors of Children’s Services in October 2015, currently being used by the ICTA service is [here](#).

29 CPS guidance, as used by the ICTA service, available [here](#).

30 The ICTA service followed the Government’s guidance on acting as an appropriate adult, available [here](#).

## Advocates' roles and tasks

Figure 6:1 Areas of work for the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service

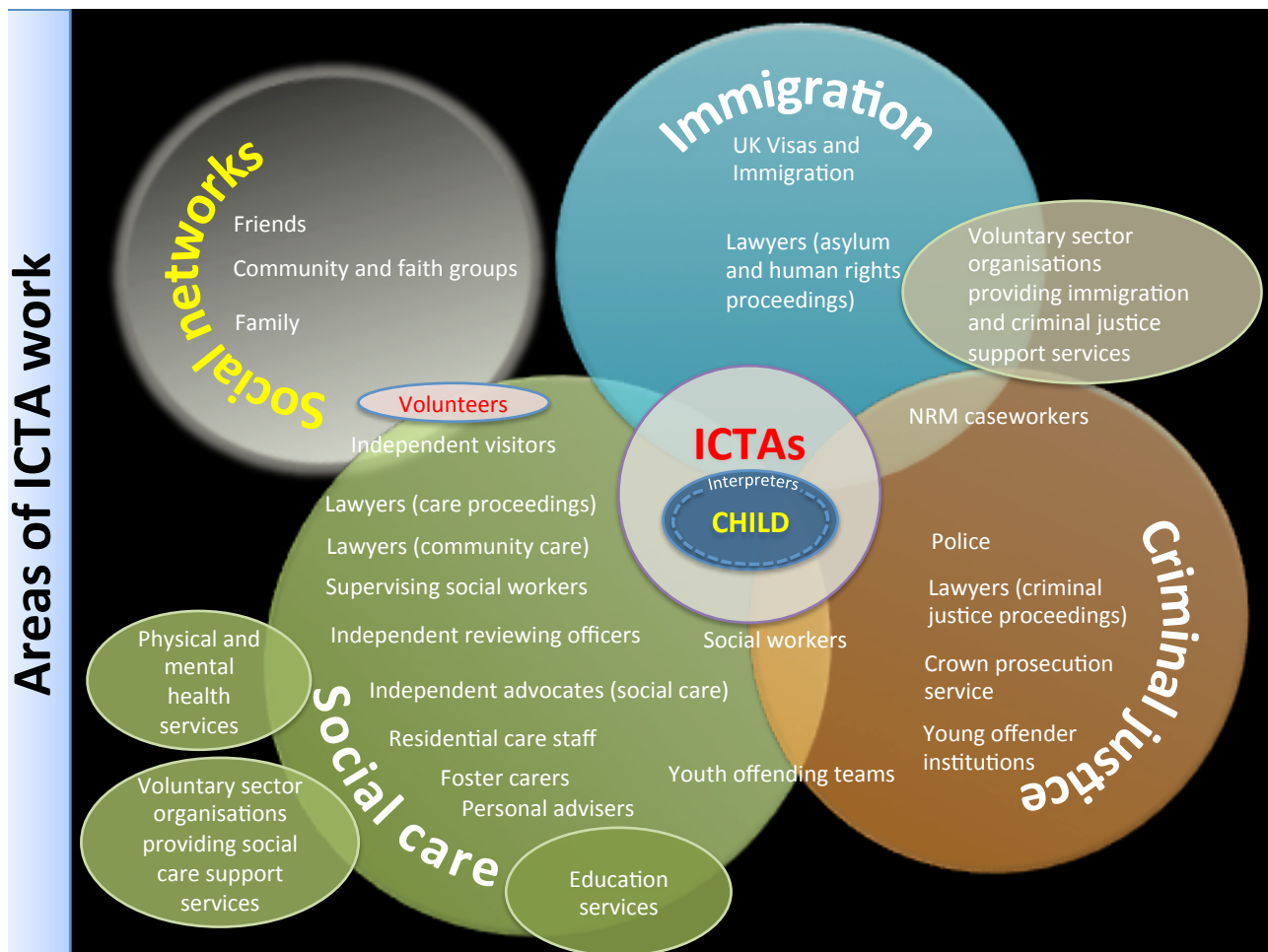


Figure 6:1 shows that the world of a trafficked child can be a crowded and noisy place, with many actors with varying responsibilities.<sup>31</sup> It is also a world full of movement within and across areas, where people come and go, and nothing stands still for long. Awareness and knowledge of child trafficking is unevenly spread. Information about a child can remain disconnected, and actions to safeguard children can be uncoordinated.<sup>32</sup>

Advocates' roles and tasks within this complex territory covered the three main areas of social care, immigration and criminal justice. Some of the advocates' roles involved similar types of tasks within each of these areas.

- Raising awareness and improving understanding of child trafficking issues for the NRM for professionals working with trafficked children, to enable them to have a better understanding of the child's circumstances.
- Taking time to explain processes to the children in a way that they could understand.

31 It is not possible within the confines of Figure 6.1 to show the details of some other services providers in the lives of trafficked children. For example, the domain of family justice, where private and public law cases involve not just the judiciary, but also local authority social workers, Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) guardians, and health and social care experts who may give evidence in proceedings, have not been indicated. Nor have secure children's homes, virtual school heads, or other professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and other Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) professionals been listed. Figure 6.1 is, therefore, indicative rather than exhaustive, of the number of professionals and systems around trafficked children

32 See, for example the report by Rigby *et al.* (2012) on child trafficking and care provision that highlights some of the complexities of practice, available [here](#).

- Taking time to prepare the children for interviews and meetings, and de-briefing them afterwards.
- Accompanying the children to meetings and acting as a responsible adult for the child in meetings and for certain processes such as age assessments and criminal justice proceedings.
- Ensuring that appropriate interpreters are present for the children during meetings and interviews.
- Challenging outcomes on behalf of the child, with the child's consent, when decisions appeared to lack fairness, or heighten risk.

In addition to preparing, accompanying, and debriefing the children, there were specific tasks that advocates undertook within each area, as follows.

## Working with social care

All 86 children in the advocacy group had needs in relation to social care. Each child had an allocated social worker and 57 case files indicated that there was also an independent reviewing officer involved in cases of looked after children.<sup>33</sup> Working within the social care area was multi-faceted and time consuming. In addition to the work done by social workers, advocates ensured that each child in the advocacy group had a bespoke safety intervention plan<sup>34</sup> that was monitored and reviewed regularly by the service in coordination with social work colleagues, on the basis that risks and threats changed over time. The ICTA service attempted to ensure that all professionals worked to one set of safety and care plans for the child, and that communications between different parties remained clear and consistent over time.

The advocates were involved, where possible, in statutory meetings for the children – for example, in designing personal education plans, in health assessments, and in review meetings for looked after children. In such meetings, the advocates brought specific knowledge of trafficking and its impact on a child, while also presenting the child's views, wishes and feelings as an ordinary child, with a life beyond the label of trafficking. Over time, advocates sought and secured educational opportunities for the children, including access to English language classes. They presented the children with choices of programmes of further study, accompanied them to college interviews, and made applications for bursaries and bus passes – to ensure that transitions back into educational contexts was practically helpful and smooth. When a child went missing, the ICTA service ensured that a coordinated response was made via strategy meetings, and that the momentum of a case was maintained, and the child did not disappear from the considerations of agencies.

## Working with immigration

In the advocacy group 42 children were being assisted in resolving immigration matters; in another 12 cases immigration claims were being considered, while 32 children were not involved in immigration matters because they were UK or EU citizens. Advocates ensured that the children had access to good quality legal representation where possible. They challenged such representation if they considered that it was poor quality, or advised the children about

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33 The IRO's primary focus is to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child and to ensure that their current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

34 The safety intervention plan is devised by Barnardo's, and focuses on an ecological model of understanding the child's well-being in relation to: education; health; mental health and emotional well-being; living arrangements; location; appropriateness of placement; access to services; culture and spiritual beliefs; legal support; access to activities; leisure time and opportunities to develop talents and skills and build supportive networks, whilst enabling them to move away from harmful networks. The safety intervention plan was usually reviewed by the ICTA service in relation to each child at one, three, and six months, and at three-monthly intervals thereafter.

accessing different lawyers who could offer better quality representation. They ensured that sufficient time was given to the children to understand immigration processes, to read through reports, and to make amendments and corrections to these as necessary. Where necessary, they provided expert information via witness statements for asylum claims and tribunals.

## Working with criminal justice

Generally, advocates worked less in criminal justice than the other areas. In criminal justice, advocates assisted 34 children as victims, 6 children as offenders, and 4 children with involvement as both a victim and offender. This involvement emerged from two to nine months after allocation to an advocate. For 17 cases in the advocacy group, it was noted in case files that there was no involvement with criminal justice by the data cut-off point. For a further 5 cases, it was unclear whether there was any involvement, and in 20 cases there were no data to indicate involvement in criminal justice (see Annex Table A10).

Advocates ensured that the children understood what being part of an investigation could mean, accompanied them to court proceedings, and explained court processes and outcomes in ways that the children could absorb, often through repetition. They advised the courts through expert witness statements and in giving oral testimony, about the impact on individual children of trafficking, and the ways that a court could consider plans for helping a child to move from a young offenders institution to safe accommodation. Advocates used the Crown Prosecution Service guidance on human trafficking, slavery and smuggling to identify best practices, and set standards for effective interventions. Towards the final phase of the trial, advocates began to advise the children, where appropriate, of compensation claims processes.

## Working between and across areas

Being at the hub between social care, immigration and criminal justice, and being independent of services within these areas, appeared to allow advocates to see a holistic view of the child and their life. In coordinating actions between agencies, and in holding the child's experiences as a primary consideration, advocates ensured that information about the child was weighed correctly, and shared effectively, to reach decisions that were well informed, fair and sustainable.

For the children, there was a clear value in having one trustworthy person who could explain processes to them in a distilled and comprehensible manner. There appeared to be a clear value also in one agency maintaining the momentum of a case. Coordination of actors, plans, actions and outcomes led to coherence over time in instances where people were prepared to work together, though there continued to be resistances to the actions of advocates. Acting in the best interests of the children as the dominant focus led advocates to see themselves, as one commented, as *“the glue that pulls everything together”* to bring clarity of purpose to the child and other stakeholders.

## Working directly with trafficked children

At a very practical level, the advocate made sure that the children had food, shelter, bus passes, and money to get by, as well as access to support services including therapeutic services when needed. Where required, they accompanied the children to health appointments, including attending sexual health screening clinics, or in more generally ensuring that their physical and mental health needs were assessed and met.

Advocates were seen to respond speedily to the children's requests for contact or information.

Advocates remembered birthdays, anniversaries, and culturally specific celebrations. Over time, advocates sought out opportunities for the children to participate in activities that developed their talents and skills. The ICTA service provided a number of young people's grants, which were used to support the children to access karate classes, dance classes, sea cadets, snooker, bike riding, as gentle re-introductions into ordinary life. Advocates helped young people to write CVs, apply for jobs, understand how to access emergency services, understand employment rights, manage money, and get a bank account. These types of activities were highly valued by the children and young people.

Overall, in the relatively short trial period, and with children with complex histories, much time was spent in helping the children to sort out the present, rather than focusing on future sustainability. Work within social care and immigration took up much time in the initial phases of a child's case. The children focused on settling into placements and finding the rhythms and routines of day-to-day life. After six months of working with all trafficked children, the case files began to show some evidence of 'future orientated' work. Case file notes for 48 children in the advocacy group showed that as the cases matured, the children were helped to use educational opportunities, to develop safe social networks, and follow their interests, hobbies and talents. This work was complemented by the children's access to vetted and trained volunteers, whose work introduced a sense of normality into the children's lives, as a way of glimpsing a possible future outside the 'trafficking' world.<sup>35</sup> Given the short-term nature of the trial, there was little evidence of the children transitioning from the advocacy service.

## Working with children trafficked across borders, and internally trafficked children

There appeared to be variations in the ways that the ICTA service worked with the children who had been trafficked across borders and those trafficked internally. The children trafficked across borders appeared to be more isolated from protective networks than their internally trafficked counterparts. They were unfamiliar with their rights as children requiring protection. They valued and welcomed advocates. They particularly noted feeling better orientated, more able to speak up, having a greater hand in decision making, and feeling that someone was beside them at difficult times.<sup>36</sup> As advocates worked with them on immigration issues, the children appeared to understand their complex immigration circumstances clearly.

Internally trafficked children who were already embedded within networks of protection sometimes had initial difficulties in understanding the role of an advocate in their lives and trusting them. However, once they formed a relationship with an advocate, they tended to value them highly, particularly in sensing that the advocate was a constant companion for them. In cases of child sexual exploitation of British nationals, the advocates worked in a much more crowded context, where other professionals also questioned the need for their involvement. Questions arose around duplication of efforts, blurring of roles, and competition around effective interventions in a child's life. In such cases, advocates found small spaces within which to manoeuvre.

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<sup>35</sup> Barnardo's 24-hour helpline saw very little use during the course of the trial, with an average one call a month by professionals rather than the advocacy group children in the trial. However, there is a rationale for out-of-hours contact opportunities for both children and professionals, as a way of responding speedily to crises, or offering speedy advice and support to decision makers.

<sup>36</sup> Case files indicate that 41 children in the advocacy group were always accompanied to assessment and decision making meetings, compared with only 12 children in the comparator group. Decisions were challenged in 38 advocacy cases, and 5 comparator group cases. In 27 cases in the advocacy group, the children were informed of their rights as (trafficked) children, and in 7 cases in the comparator group. Advocacy as a specific activity took place in 56 advocacy group cases, and in 10 comparator group cases.

*“Finding a clear role, that is distinct from other professionals in such situations has been key, for example, completion of the NRM, support in criminal justice proceedings and engaging young people through [social] activities. This has, however, only been successful where professionals have supported this involvement. Where professionals have identified CSE [child sexual exploitation], but not linked this with internal trafficking, their willingness to engage with CTA [child trafficking advocate] is decreased as they do not see what benefits such a service can bring.”* (ICTA service strategic manager)

## Helping organisations to think, see and act

As the trial progressed the ICTA service helped other services to understand trafficking better, particularly in cases where such understanding was not already established. In some cases, this was perceived to be helpful but in others advocates were seen as thinking ‘trafficking’ too readily, and seeing things that were not tied to evidence so far as other professionals were concerned. From the advocates’ perspectives, this sometimes slipped into frustrations about being disregarded. However, overall the wider narrative among parties appeared to be some relief at the presence of advocates, and the expertise that they brought. As one strategic stakeholder observed:

*“Yes, there’s something about helping the organisation think.”*  
(Strategic stakeholder, interview)

### Case study: Helping organisations to think, see and act

There were eight British young women who had been internally trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation who were referred to the ICTA service. The service quickly established contact with three of them, focusing successfully on safeguarding and well-being. However, the five other cases stalled for a variety of reasons. In two cases the social worker maintained that there were no trafficking indicators and therefore the ICTA service was not required. In the third case the social worker judged that there were too many professionals around the child and that the advocate would ‘muddy the water’. In the fourth case the young woman did not wish to engage with an advocate, and the fifth case had been closed to social care even though a referral was made to the advocacy service. After five months of little forward movement in these five cases, the ICTA service team manager and the local authority point of contact convened a meeting with social workers to consider avenues for collaboration.

Through exposition of trafficking indicators, the local authority’s role in NRM referrals, and the scope of the ICTA service, the ICTA team manager enabled the social workers to reconsider the young women’s situation and the trafficking indicators present. Those attending agreed that four of the five young women would benefit by further ICTA involvement, aside from the young woman who did not wish to engage with an advocate. Had the ICTA service closed the case files for these young women due to lack of information and engagement from the local authority, trafficking indicators and any additional vulnerabilities of these five young women would have been missed. Instead there was persistence and collaboration between the ICTA manager and the local authority point of contact. In this instance, a point of contact, taking a lead role on behalf of the local authority, provided the ‘clout’ necessary to bring social workers to the table to listen to the advocate. Trafficking indicators that were not visible were interpreted correctly through collaboration. Face to face specialist trafficking panel meetings resulted in the accurate identification of individual vulnerabilities.



## Anchors for organisations

Throughout the trial period, the advocates were ‘anchors’ for the children and busy staff around them. The research team was aware of the pressures on public authorities represented by the many professionals working with advocates. The flux and demands of work often appeared to be intense and unremitting. Time was expensive, and rationed. A variety of factors influenced a sense of perpetual reactions to circumstances often beyond the control of organisations themselves, rather than calm and planned responses.

*“I think because we had such a turnover of issues in [the organisation], at the moment it’s CSE [child sexual exploitation]. Next month it will be FGM [female genital mutilation]. Next month it will be the latest fall out from the serious case review. Next month it will be the reorganisation following the rationalisation. I think by having the CTA [child trafficking advocate] based in the organisation, it keeps trafficking in people’s minds.”*

(Strategic stakeholder, interview)

Taking and making time, using established working relationships, and advocates being present in Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) teams,<sup>37</sup> emergency duty teams, or assessment teams, all appeared to stabilise an organisation’s capacity to act coherently, and to move at the necessary speed when required to do so.

## Orienteers and navigators for other professionals

There was much evidence of advocates helping other professionals to find their way among the complexity and clutter of cases. They did this by piecing together information, and sorting out the substantive from the trivial in terms of trafficking indicators to allow judgements to be made about further actions. They filled gaps in knowledge of trafficking and information about specific cases.

*“They fill a gap because of the high numbers and our capacity issue and also I think probably because ... we don’t have the necessary skills, [so] things get missed.”*

(Strategic stakeholder, interview)

This gap filling was seen in many instances as more than a matter of plugging staff shortages. Demonstrating their own expertise, advocates mapped the territory of trafficking with reassuring dexterity, and stayed in a hub position, helping others to find their way. An immigration lawyer noted that:

*“Having someone with a specialist knowledge of trafficking is important to ensure a potentially trafficked child’s needs are met and in my experience there are many agencies such as prisons, police and local authorities who have had no experience of a trafficked child. The Barnardo’s CTA [child trafficking advocate] I am working with at present on one case has stayed on top of all aspects of the child’s case as a central contact, whether immigration or criminal, and brought a safety net with her trafficking experience to make sure that his trafficking status is not overlooked by any agency. It’s great to have that extra support and would be nice to have for every child in the same situation.”*

(Respondent, survey 1)

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37 See the Home Office’s report on the multi-agency working and information sharing project, July 2014 [here](#) .

The advocates appeared to flow into and fill the gaps and cracks of knowledge between services, and many respondents were reassured by their presence, echoing the views of the children in the advocacy group. Having a reliable orienteer and navigator for a case brought relief in most instances. Over time, as the trial progressed, stakeholders showed a trust in advocates, as illustrated by the following reflection by a child protection chair.

*“The conference was attended by the child who was very familiar with the advocate and she was able to introduce me to the child and so give him the confidence to trust me. He trusted her judgement that I was an OK person to talk to ... The worker was skilled and understood her role as the child's advocate while having a clear understanding of mine as conference chair.”* (Respondent, survey 2)

# 7: Key Findings - What was the impact of the advocates on trafficked children?

## Views of the children

As greater numbers of the children agreed to be interviewed in the advocacy group, there was generally a more extensive range of data about the views of the children in that group than the children in the comparator group.

For many children in this study, advocates held an anchor position, linking them with other services, directing the range of people that they encountered, and ensuring that communication channels were opened where possible or closed where necessary.

*“I can call my social worker and then she tells me OK but I’m busy or something. But if I call [the advocate] then she can make things happen.”* (Child interview, advocacy group)

*“I feel confident that my advocate gives me all the information I need to know about what they’re doing for me.”* (Child interview, advocacy group)

Whereas several comparator group children spoke of social workers constantly changing, the majority of advocacy group children remained allocated to the same advocate during the course of the trial. This constancy appeared to have a major beneficial impact on the children’s experiences with their advocates. A pattern emerged during the course of the trial that suggested that when an advocate was involved in their life, the children had a sense of being cared for in a ‘tight knit’ manner. For the comparator group children, a steady impression emerged of more ‘loose weave’ relationships with intermittent contact with social workers; foster carers or teachers carried much of the responsibility for the child’s day-to-day well-being. As one child noted:

*“There are people who are good at listening to me and my problems. First of all members of the family here, [referring to foster parents]. There is a brilliant teacher at the college who listens to me and helps me, also the social worker.”* (Child interview, comparator group)

Alternatively, the children in the comparator group more frequently gave accounts of relying on themselves to get by.

*“Right now, in the foster carer places, sometimes I cope myself. I wash my clothes myself and I tidy up my room myself. I think that this is not a problem for me.”* (Child interview, comparator group)

In contrast, the children in the advocacy group could compare professionals, recognising the constraints and benefits that this brought.

*“Sometimes my weekly allowance don’t get paid on time so I have to talk to [the advocate], so she sends an email to [the social worker] or she calls her. I know that my social worker is a bit busy because she has 22 other young persons that she looks after. But [the advocate] has been always there. I thank God I have [the advocate]. (Child interview, advocacy group)*

The frequency of contact that the children had with their advocates and social workers over nine months was calculated, taking measurements from case files at three-monthly intervals. Advocates appeared to have a higher frequency contact than social workers with the children at three and six months, reinforcing the views expressed by the children in interviews<sup>38</sup> (see Annex Chart A18). Advocates were seen as kind, hospitable and knowledgeable people, who could understand the children’s whole lives, and who were honest, reliable and trustworthy. Over the period of the trial, they appeared to show a humanitarian commitment that the children in the advocacy group clearly valued. The advocacy group children also understood the value of an advocate investing time in their lives,<sup>39</sup> and the ways that the advocate persisted when the children initially rejected them:

**Interviewer: “And what is it that made you learn to trust him? What was it about [the advocate]?”**

*Child: “He came two or three times and I wasn’t speaking to him, but he continued coming.”*

**Interviewer: “He’s been the only professional/adult that’s done that?”**

*Child: “Yes.”<sup>40</sup> (Child interview, advocacy group)*

The children said that they were grateful for having someone on their side in meetings that would otherwise have been bewildering or frightening. Over time, they described the advocates as friendly, and as people who could negotiate with other important people in their formal networks of care and protection. They shielded them.

*Child: “Because I always need somebody to defend me.”*

**Interviewer: “Do you have an example of when [the advocate] has defended you?”**

*Child: “She defends me anytime ... It’s also true that she understands my fears and concerns. It’s true that my advocate listens to and understands the kinds of things make me fearful and keep me safe. In particular [the advocate] has tried to be an adolescent, to come to my level and reach the same wave length with mine and while at the same time, being an adult who will offer me the feeling of safety that I*

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38 The research team’s calculations used *t* tests of statistical significance in this instance for 3 months ( $p < 0.01$ ) and 6 months ( $p = 0.02$ ). Data for month nine were limited, as many cases had not matured to that point during the course of the trial, but showed the same trend as at earlier stages. The team also measured the frequency of the advocates’ activity in relation to contact with the children by telephone, Skype and email. Each showed statistically significantly higher contact by advocates than social workers at three and six months. The frequency of contacts by advocates with social care and immigration agencies were also statistically significantly higher in the first six months of the trial. Contact with criminal justice agencies showed no statistical significance differences at the 3 and 9 month stages, but was statistically significantly higher at the 6 month stage ( $p = 0.03$ ).

39 Barnardo’s carried out its own small-scale enquiry about the *amount* of time that advocates were spending with the children during the trial period. This enquiry revealed that in a sample of 7 cases with a mean duration of 23 weeks each, advocates spent on average 52 minutes per week in direct contact with a child. These data have not been independently verified, and are presented here for information.

40 Advocates also picked up on this need for persistence. As one of them observed during an interview discussing a child who was reluctant to engage initially, *“It’s how long are you going to stick around if I push and push and push you away? And we stick around, we have to be there.”* In many such instances, advocates showed a capacity to outlast the children’s rejections.

*need, so it has been a perfect combination of covering both parts.” (Child interview, advocacy group)*

## Working with networks when children were missing

Just over half (80 of 158) of the children in the trial were noted as having **no** missing episodes after allocation, and for another 6 it was unclear whether any missing episodes had occurred. The remaining 72 children (46%) had at least one missing episode that was recorded. Out of these 72, there were 27 children who remained missing (17% of the whole cohort of children<sup>41</sup>). From these 27, 23 were Vietnamese nationals. The comparator group included 12 children who remained missing, compared with 15 children who remained missing in the advocacy group (see Annex Table A7 for further details of missing children). Importantly, 7 out of the 15 advocacy group children went missing between allocation to the trial and referral to the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates) ICTA service, so advocates had no opportunity to work with them.

**Figure: 7.1: Features of missing children**



There is no evidence that having an advocate led to reductions in the number of children going missing. In cases where children went missing before they were referred to the ICTA service, the advocate had alerted the local authority to the risks of a child disappearing from placements that the service considered unsuitable due to lack of sufficiently robust monitoring arrangements. In such instances, there was substantial evidence of the ICTA service seeking to warn, persuade and challenge local authorities to provide adequate protection and sustainable care. However, the advocates could not readily influence decisions about accommodation provision and it is not known what resource constraints local authorities were operating with. Also, the sample size is small, and a number of variables, including nationality and the quality of care planning, influence the heightened risk of children disappearing and remaining missing.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This proportion echoes the 2010 Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre estimation of between 15 per cent and 18 per cent of children going missing in 2010. See [CEOP Child Trafficking Strategic Threat Assessment 2010](#)

<sup>42</sup> Chi square analysis revealed no statistically significant differences between the advocacy and comparator groups for whether or not a child goes missing. However, the numbers of some categories in the study are very small, and do not yield conclusive statistical answers.

Much further work needs to be done to identify the variables that are linked to short and longer term disappearances, with a much larger sample of ‘missing’ children. However, there was substantial evidence that showed the ways that advocates continued to coordinate formal networks of protection to ensure that the child’s absence did not result in cases being forgotten or closed. In such cases, as one advocate noted, perhaps there was a case for a specialist advocate focusing entirely on trafficked children who go missing.

*“We need an advocate for the missing to make sure that somebody is constantly going, ‘Why aren’t you following this case up? Where is this person? What are the police doing?’ That could be a job for one person because I’m finding with some of mine that I’m the only person who’s interested.”* (Advocate, focus group)

The ICTA service performed the following roles in relation to missing children.

- It maintained continuous contact with social care and police services to ensure that cases were not closed.
- It ensured that strategy discussions took place and actions and outcomes were regularly reviewed so that the cases of missing children remained classified as high risk and not reduced to a lower risk status. This required significant persistence on the part of the advocate.
- It continued to oversee the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) process by submitting a referral if one had not been completed prior to the missing episode, or by submitting additional information after the child was missing and ensuring that a decision was not suspended owing to a child’s missing status.

There was extensive evidence in the latter parts of the trial from case files and by talking with the children, about situations where the child’s understanding of safety and risk differed from that of their advocate. Advocates made sure that any risk was clearly understood by the child. This confirms the interim findings<sup>43</sup> that through the investment of time and effort, the children were trained to recognise safety tactics and requirements, to see a bigger picture of what keeps them safe beyond wanting a mobile phone or overnight stays with people and places that were not monitored or assessed. Advocates reported some instances of being able to close down unsafe contacts, as well as to open up many opportunities for safe connections for trafficked children, either by linking with a volunteer, or extending informal networks carefully and safely over time.<sup>44</sup> The capacity to take time and make time for the children, and to be a consistent, clear, and companionable ‘sense maker’ often appear as strong features of the children’s views about what makes a good independent guardian.<sup>45</sup>

The case study below shows the ways that the ICTA service worked closely with other services to trace and track a missing child who was assigned adult status and had moved from one local authority to a distant other. In effect the case study confirms this evaluation’s earlier observations about the ICTA service minding and filling such gaps, but in this instance through effective contacts between advocates in separate parts of the country.

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43 The interim report is available [here](#).

44 Where full access to case files was available, risk and harm reduction strategies were recorded for 41 out of 86 advocacy group children, and 27 out of 55 for the comparator group children, giving an equivalent average of about 50 per cent in each group.

45 See **Crawley, H. and Kohli, R. K. S.** (2013) ‘*She Endures With Me*’. *An Evaluation of the Scottish Guardianship Service Pilot*. Available [here](#).

## Case study: Working with cases of missing children

A young male non-EU national arrived and went missing from a local authority children's residential unit within 48 hours. Four weeks later he was identified from a hospital admission in another part of the UK during a weekend. Hospital staff linked the case to the originating local authority. The ICTA service noted clear trafficking indicators related to labour exploitation.<sup>46</sup> During that weekend, the service linked its advocates across the regions to provide coordination for the young person's return to the local authority, and to specify a safety intervention plan (see footnote 34, section 6). Despite an advocate's request that he was found a foster placement to ensure close monitoring, the local authority elected to place him back in the original residential unit. He was age assessed, and his claimed age of 15 years was disputed. The local authority judged him to be an adult. He was given 15 minutes to gather his possessions and was told that a taxi would take him to Home Office accommodation.

The advocate asked for the process to be slowed down, given his health needs and vulnerabilities to trafficking, and contacted a solicitor to challenge the local authority age assessment. He immediately disappeared once more. The advocate checked and the Home Office had no record of his asylum claim. The advocate discussed this with the NRM hub to pursue the submission of an NRM referral but was told that as he was judged to be an adult by the local authority, the advocate could not submit an NRM referral without his signature.

Two months later, the ICTA service received another call from the same hospital after they found the service's contact details on the young person's medical records. The advocate contacted the original local authority once more to be told that the local authority had closed the case as he had been judged to be an adult. The local authority did not accept the advocate's rationale that the young person wished to challenge the age assessment. Two police forces covering the hospital and the originating local authority said that they could not support an individual who had been judged to be an adult, as he was now seen to be able to make his own choices about where he was, and who he was with. The advocate's emphasis on his continued vulnerabilities, even as an adult, did not result in any further police action. The hospital discharged him.

The ICTA service referred the case to the Refugee Council. A Refugee Council worker, through systematic deduction, traced the young person to a given address. He agreed to go with her to safe accommodation for the night. He then agreed to be housed in safe supported housing by the Refugee Council. He will now be helped to claim asylum and the advocate will further discuss whether he wishes to challenge the age assessment.

## Views of the 'value added' by advocates

Stakeholders with direct experience of the trial were consulted about the 'value added' of an advocacy service, in terms of the ways that the ICTA service was seen to enhance clarity, coherence and continuity of care for trafficked children. There were clear views from the service itself.

*"... the value added of [the service] is almost like a piece of netting that a young person has to walk through in terms of experiencing trafficking and [this netting has] a number of*

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<sup>46</sup> In order to maintain anonymity, these indicators cannot be detailed in this case study.

*holes. If the CTA [child trafficking advocate] wasn't there to point those holes out, or to hold the netting together, then they would just fall through and nobody would know."*  
(Advocacy hub manager, focus group)

Many other stakeholders responding to surveys and interviews shared this view. The stakeholder surveys data, taken six months apart from each other, show that stakeholders perceived advocates positively in relation to both acting in a child's best interests, and being satisfied overall with the ICTA service (see Annex Chart A17). In the second survey, 84 per cent thought that the ICTA service served the 'best interests' of the children (see Annex Chart A16) and 90 per cent were in the 'satisfied' range in terms of their work with the ICTA service.

It is reasonable to conclude that as the advocacy service matured over the course of a year, there was increasing agreement about its value to the children, and satisfaction felt by other professionals around the child. In terms of 'best interests' respondents commended the ways that advocates could see beyond a child's own horizon of wishes, in order to secure what was needed for safety and stability to emerge over the longer term. As described by one advocate:

*"We've had a few young people where I've advocated against their wishes because I feel that it was not safe for them and I thought maybe our relationship would be damaged. But the relationship actually got stronger in the end, when at first they were really not happy but they came around and realised that I was acting in their best interests."*  
(Advocate, focus group)

In contextualising the notion of 'best interests' one survey respondent made the following contribution.

*"The independent CTA [child trafficking advocate] that I have met had a cross cutting knowledge of the NRM, criminal and immigration proceedings that other professionals working with the child (social services and support workers) openly told me they did not. She made sure that his interests in all three areas were proactively pursued, by remaining in contact with all other relevant professionals working with the child. I thought she was excellent in tying these areas together. It is my experience from other cases without CTAs that ... you can sometimes feel like you are working with one hand behind your back when social workers/prison officers/the home office/criminal lawyers don't communicate with you, despite having your details, and it damages the immigration case. The child is the one who loses out when you cannot access them or understand what is going on with other parts of their life. I could not agree more strongly that having an independent CTA with specialist knowledge of trafficking to act as a link person for all aspects in the child's life ensured that my client's best interests were met. She certainly helped me represent my client more effectively, understand how to work with him more sensitively, and made relationships with other professionals smoother."* (Legal representative, survey 2)

The advocate was seen by the majority of survey respondents as someone seeking to dissolve opposition and allow consensus to emerge, by clearly focusing on the child.

*"In strategy meetings between several government agencies, the advocate remained the voice of the child at all times, and often pulled lengthy discussions back to the basic principle of the child's views and interests."* (Lawyer, stakeholder survey).

And another respondent, looking to a future advocacy service, said:

*"The advocacy service is invaluable and having worked with children represented by the service ... it is difficult to see how the children and the agencies involved will manage*



*without them. In my experience, the Barnardo's [advocate] is the only person ... able to ensure that the child's best interests are always the primary consideration. I am so disappointed for the relevant children that this project will be coming to an end."* (NGO, stakeholder survey)

Overall, this can be considered a very rich achievement of finding an authoritative position among established stakeholders by a new service within a short time span. When respondents in the surveys and interviews endorsed the advocates, they often did so in reference to patterns of effectiveness. When they gave negative views, these were in the minority, and tended to focus on incidents that had perturbed them. The views of the majority of stakeholders, particularly the children, were almost always positive.

## Perceived overlap with other roles

Some stakeholders were concerned about whether an additional service resolved some of the difficulties they saw in 'services as usual', or whether it added to them. One strategic stakeholder noted that in developing targeted services:

*"There's always a risk that what we end up with is a series of subject-specific champions that just become [part of] a rather cluttered landscape."* (Strategic stakeholder, interview).

Another felt that:

*"The answer is to improve the system as a whole and not just create another less well defined role within it,"* (Respondent, survey 2, immigration).

In such examples, displacement, segmentation and enlargement threatened a sense of coherence, with an allied threat of more heat than light being brought to already difficult circumstances for the children. These were, however, minority views in comparison with those who were substantially supportive of a specialist, independent advocacy service.

## Impact of advocates on the quality and timeliness of decisions

As noted above, where there were gaps in knowledge about trafficking indicators, or in cases where these were less visible to professional networks, advocates took care to marshal evidence and provide information to other stakeholders, in order to raise the quality of decision making. This capacity to raise awareness in pursuit of fair decisions for the children can be further illustrated by the following vignettes:

## Vignette 1: Raising awareness of trafficking and reducing risk

An advocate became a member of a local authority's Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) Panel to act as an adviser in relation to identification of trafficked children. The advocate highlighted the links in some cases between child sexual exploitation and internal trafficking, and the need for internally trafficked young people to be referred into the NRM. Prior to this involvement, this was not the usual practice in the local authority. In addition, referrals into the ICTA service were sped up through the swift identification of internally trafficked young people, followed by timely referral by the advocate into the NRM. This has resulted in 'positive reasonable and conclusive grounds' decisions being made and appropriate safeguards being implemented to minimise the risk of young people being re-trafficked.

## Vignette 2: Quality assurance in legal advice for a child

In dealing with a child's asylum claim, the advocate observed that the solicitor was not preparing the child adequately for each stage of the process. This resulted in incorrect information being provided to the Home Office on the day of the substantive interview, with a subsequent negative impact on the child's confidence about the claim. The solicitor was unwilling to meet with the child after the interview to read through the interview transcript. The advocate had to push for this meeting so that the child had an opportunity to comment on the content of the interview. Subsequently the advocate helped the child to understand the immigration process, and to submit a complaint in relation to the solicitor's conduct.

## Vignette 3: A child's voice and improving decision making

A child expressed to his advocate the difficulties he was having within his foster placement, including an unwelcome home environment where his carers were unbelieving of his story and history, his cultural and religious needs were not being seen or met and he felt sad and lonely. The advocate worked with the child to raise his concerns with the social worker, supervising social worker and independent reviewing officer. The child remained in the placement and nothing changed. The advocate repeatedly raised the concerns with social workers on the child's behalf, recommending a change of placement. With persistence from the advocate and child, the local authority reviewed the placement and concluded that the placement was not meeting the needs of the child. A more suitable placement was found, where the child was more settled.

## Vignette 4: Collaborating to ensure better decision making

An advocate worked with a child who wished to move into semi-independent accommodation. The advocate grew increasingly concerned about this wish when further indicators of trafficking became apparent as the case progressed. The advocate informed the independent reviewing officer (IRO). The IRO requested that the advocate provide an assessment based on her expertise within the trafficking field, outlining potential risks and how these might be mitigated, before any decisions were made in relation to future planning for the child. This expert review by the advocate set the frame for further, safer, decision making about the type of suitable accommodation for the child.

It has also been noted that the advocates' capacity to slow matters down or speed them up influenced how evidence was processed so that cases could be managed more effectively by all services. This attention to speed, aligned to accuracy of information usage, appeared as important features in several cases, as illustrated by the following vignettes:

### Vignette 5: Slowing things down

A child had just arrived in the UK and wished to be moved to another area of the country. She was placed with foster carers. The local authority agreed that the child could move and that the move could happen swiftly. The advocate noted that there were significant indicators of trafficking that had not been fully assessed at this point. In addition, the prospective accommodation that had been identified for the child was judged by the ICTA service to be unsuitable and unsafe, potentially increasing the risk of the child going missing. In raising concerns and advocating for the child to remain in foster care until a clearer picture emerged, the process of moving was slowed down. This gave time for thorough assessments of need and risk to be undertaken and for all of the child's wishes and feelings to be considered. The child remained in foster care.

### Vignette 6: Speeding things up

An advocate asked for a child to be enrolled in school promptly. The foster carer was adamant that the child would not be enrolled in any of the local schools because they had no availability. No other professionals were trying to access education for the child. The advocate advised the carer and child that she would try to enrol the child as he had a right to education the same as any other child in the local authority area. Within a week, the child had access to a school place and had started school.

## Barriers and challenges for implementing the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service

### Building relationships with local authorities and other stakeholders

The biggest challenge, and therefore the biggest opportunity for the ICTA service lay in the ways that it negotiated the amount and type of work and built working alliances across the 23 local authorities and all relevant public services within them. In a few instances where Barnardo's services were long established and perceived as effective, and where local authority single points of contact (SPOCs), strategic managers and operational staff were aligned about the value of the trial, entry into processes and systems was fluent. In one local authority where advocates were embedded alongside social workers, the ICTA service received high numbers of referrals.

On the other hand one local authority declined to refer internally trafficked child sexual exploitation cases to the ICTA service, on the basis that it already had established services for such children. There were also many instances of the service negotiating with local authorities about what an advocate could offer in addition to existing interventions. When faced with zero allocations to the trial, or lower than expected numbers, the service continued to prompt local authorities about engagement. This resulted in a mild increase in numbers of referrals in some but not all instances.

In instances where SPOCs changed over time, or there was lack of alignment between operational and strategic staff in public authorities about the value of the advocacy service, tensions emerged. One broad worry was that the ICTA service was, in effect a replacement social work service, a type of ‘Trojan horse’.

*“None of this [advocacy work] is what I wouldn’t expect to see my social workers doing in a good to outstanding service.”* (Strategic stakeholder, interview)<sup>47</sup>

This respondent was concerned about any future advocacy service undermining the social work role, and suggested that an implicit message from the Government appeared to be that social work as a profession had little to offer trafficked children overall, and was somehow inept and unskilled in managing the multiple complexities that these children brought with them. In the face of feeling demoralised by such a position the respondent rejected this criticism and confirmed that:

*“... my real position would be if we’re going to invest in something, let’s invest in better quality social work rather than bringing another set of individuals.”* (Strategic stakeholder, interview)

At an operational level, a few social workers expressed this worry about displacement, alongside a suspicion of advocates somehow attempting to take over their role and tasks. They guarded their professional borders, and were wary of newcomers. As one social work respondent noted via the second survey:

*“I believe the child was more confused as a result of having a Barnardo’s advocate because there was no clear divide between who was responsible for the child’s welfare and rights. In my experience the Barnardo’s advocate tried to assume responsibility for the child over the social services and the foster carers roles. It is not fair for the child to [have] several sets of expectations from various sources, especially when they are in conflict with the local authority guidelines.”* (Respondent, survey 2)

Whilst not seeking in any way to minimise the importance of a critical view of a specialist advocacy service, these were very much in the minority in terms of the overall pattern. A small minority of all online survey respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences of the ICTA service (see Annex Chart A17).

## Working in the absence of legal powers

‘Legal powers’ refers to two linked responsibilities as stated in the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

- Firstly, the independent advocate helping a trafficked child to obtain legal advice, assistance and other representation, including, where necessary, appointing and instructing lawyers to act on the child’s behalf (Modern Slavery Act 2015 s48 (5)).
- Secondly, for public authorities that provide services for or make decisions about the children who the advocate is working with to pay ‘due regard’ to the advocate’s

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<sup>47</sup> To an extent, this view evokes a long-standing invitation for any social worker to be *“... A single champion and companion through the changing scenes and vicissitudes of a local authority childhood”* from **Utting, W.** (2003) ‘The role of the child’s social worker’. In *Be My Social Worker: The Role of the Child’s Social Worker*, BASW. As the evaluation progressed, the many pressures on local authorities became clear, with increasing work demands and decreasing resources eroding social workers’ capacities to live up to such an expectation. In one instance, claims were made of the excellence of service standards, but the local authority declined to allow access to case file data so that such claims could be independently tested.

functions. The authorities should provide information to the advocate that will enable them to undertake their functions effectively (Modern Slavery Act 2015 s48(6)(e)). However these legal powers had not come into effect during the trial.

At the interim stage of the trial, the ICTA service encountered resistance from some public authorities when challenging or questioning decisions. Instances of resistance continued during the latter part of the trial. In some cases advocates were not routinely given relevant information about a child or invited to formal meetings. Rather, they were seen as ‘troublesome zealots’, finding more than there was visible to other stakeholders. There were many difficulties associated with advocacy work where speaking up for a child required nimble and diplomatic manoeuvring, rather than being able to draw on a legal authority to contribute to looked after children reviews, pathway planning meetings, personal education plan meetings, age assessments, NRM referrals and meetings with lawyers.<sup>48</sup>

## Issues with accommodation for trafficked children

Throughout the trial period, the ICTA service gave examples of accommodation that they perceived to be unsuitable. These sometimes became trigger points of disagreements about the safety of the children. In such circumstances the service provided many accounts of the children being disadvantaged in relation to their rights to a service, in particular if they were on the cusp of adulthood, and required continuing practical and emotional support, rather than being discharged from care. The ICTA service reported that it had made attempts to generate coherence by seeking to put multiple threads together to understand a child and plan a viable protection and care strategy, which it felt was thwarted by agencies taking protectionist and segmented positions. In having to take supplicant positions with powerful stakeholders, advocates confirmed that:

*“Without these legal powers, we have relied on good faith and prising information from public bodies.”* (Advocate, case study notes)

Public authorities, according to the ICTA service, either ignored requests or refused to listen, with rebuttals and rejections routinely used. Around these positions, the ICTA service said that it perceived mild to acute hostility at times, or bemusement at its presence, with questions about its function and legitimacy.

However, the data more broadly suggest a different angle to this picture presented by the ICTA service. Public authorities seemed to be facing increasing scrutiny to be financially efficient, and were charged with the statutory responsibilities of making fair and consistent decisions on the basis of available evidence. This meant they sometimes made decisions that balanced resources and needs, rather than being needs-led. One of the strategic stakeholders was strongly clear on the matter of challenges by the ICTA service, noting that challenges by the service were sometimes apt and at other times misplaced. This stakeholder noted that many factors had to be considered by many people in an organisation before reaching a decision about levels and types of services for specific trafficked young people. No amount of nascent enthusiasm would necessarily shift views, and the advocates needed to balance passion with

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<sup>48</sup> A respondent to the second survey from a national service noted: “I think that there is a real problem to be addressed in the area of local authority transparency, co-operation, and accountability to someone other than themselves in how they perform in this area. Practice failures are not dealt with constructively and learning is not captured in a way that leads to change. Central government is actually willing to help, but local government rarely comes forward with issues it has identified or proposals it wishes to see endorsed.” This evaluation neither endorses nor criticises this perspective, but includes it as an example of a stakeholder view about other stakeholders around the ICTA service, where antipathy can linger.

dispassion in order to be persuasive.

## Case study: The absence of legal powers

A Vietnamese child was referred to the ICTA service after being found in a cannabis farm, arrested, charged and placed in a young offenders institution. The service submitted an NRM referral. The child received a positive reasonable grounds NRM decision on which grounds the judge in the case released the child back into local authority care. The advocate supplied a comprehensive report to the court that the child should be placed in accommodation that was safe and suitable for that child. Examples of such accommodation were provided within the report. The advocate also identified standards of safe accommodation for the local authority to ensure that safety measures could be put into place to decrease the risk of the child being re-trafficked.

The local authority placed the child into a flat that the child could leave of his own accord. The care provider was given a pay allowance for 12.5 hours support per week to ensure protection and care for the child. The provider recognised that this was not enough support and voluntarily gave an additional 12.5 hours of their time. They also provided all the food for the young person as the local authority refused to buy him food. The young person went missing after one week in the accommodation. Subsequent information led the ICTA service to believe that the child was re-trafficked back into cannabis farming. The ICTA service was not able to persuade the local authority about the standards of safe accommodation in this case, and had no legal powers to ensure that its view that the accommodation provided was unsuitable and unsafe was given due regard.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that the legal powers to give 'due regard' indicated in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 may not have made any material difference to the local authority decision in this case, or in other cases where the ICTA service disagreed with public authorities in relation to the protection and care of a trafficked child. In the Act there is no intention and no power to enable an advocate to overturn or mandate another professional to do what the advocate is putting forward as suitable, at least without the advocate instructing legal representation and taking the case through the courts. The intention is not for an advocate to replace public authorities' powers to determine specific outcomes. So the definition of how 'due regard' is interpreted for the benefit of a vulnerable trafficked child remains open to further scrutiny. The example here merely illustrates an instance of how a child could have been better protected, had the local authority given 'due regard' to the advocate's assessment in a particular case.

## 8: Conclusions

The Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service was implemented in different ways across the local authorities in the trial, depending in part on how well established other services were. There was some evidence that the hub and spoke model was successful in providing a service across trial areas. Where workers in local areas were convinced of the value of the trial, the systems worked well.

Advocates worked mostly in social care, followed by immigration and criminal justice. Working independently at the hub between these areas appeared to allow advocates to see a holistic view of the child and their life, and coordinate actions between agencies. The advocates spent time with the children, helping them with practical matters as well as providing a central focus in the children's lives.

One of the key questions about an advocacy service is whether it adds value to existing services. The evidence in this evaluation suggests that advocates provided a service that was seen to be beneficial to children and many other stakeholders. As the trial progressed, and those experiencing the work of advocates widened to immigration and criminal justice services, evidence of the benefits to the children and other service providers accrued; tightening the strings and filling gaps helped trafficked children to be visible and kept safe. In such complex and fast moving environments, the function of an ICTA service appears to be important in ensuring **clarity, coherence and continuity for the child, as well as for other services responsible for the child, over time and across contexts.**

There were questions by some stakeholders about whether the role of an advocate extended beyond that of a good specialist social worker. There was also evidence of some friction between the roles of advocate and social worker, given the wider public accountability of the local authority social worker. However, the available evidence suggests that child trafficking advocates worked hard at reducing the noise around the child so that the sound of what was important could be heard as clearly as possible. The advocates were dedicated, had sufficient expertise, and enough time to make it work for many stakeholders, including the children.

This evaluation's main conclusion is that the specialist ICTA service has been successful as measured in relation to several beneficial outcomes for trafficked children. Specifically advocates:

- assisted in keeping trafficked children safely visible once they started working with them;
- sought and made relationships of trust and credibility with the children and other stakeholders;
- shared developing expertise in trafficking and case specific information in purposeful ways;
- by working across domains, helped the children to orientate to and navigate their ways through complex circumstances;
- spoke up for the children when necessary;
- maintained a momentum in a case that was suitable to the child's needs, including planning for a sustainable future; and
- improved the quality of decision making.

## 9: Issues raised for further consideration

Among the operational issues that require further work, this evaluation notes the following.

**Scale and scope:** The scale of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service and its scope of work require detailed scrutiny. While it was important for advocates to have sufficient time to spend with the children, and so were given relatively low caseloads, there is the potential for a new service to be easily overwhelmed if issues of scale and scope are not thoroughly considered. For example, if all local authorities had referred all cases of child sexual exploitation to the ICTA service in this trial, then the service would have struggled to manage numbers. In that context, the core of effective independent advocacy remains the capacity to spend time ‘by the child’s side, and on their side’, focusing on providing the children with companionship and support over an extended period of time, suitable to the child’s evolving needs. Caseloads need to be sufficiently small to enable sustaining relationships to develop over time.

This evaluation also suggests that further thought is given to the ways a future advocacy service might work with internally trafficked children and cross border trafficked children. The types of children requiring an advocate will highly influence the numbers of advocates required and the range of work they undertake. Particularly, the cross border trafficked – isolated and involved in immigration systems, and in this trial forming the majority of cases – may require additional advocacy resources and time. An advocacy service may therefore require a workload management system to ensure that cases are weighted and allocated according to levels of risk and complexity.

**Training and regulation of advocates:** While this evaluation was satisfied that the advocates were trained and supported effectively during the trial, further consideration should be given to the potential benefits of certificated training, or an accredited and registered status for advocates. The importance of systematic, rigorous, certificated qualifications that child trafficking advocates must have over time is emphasised, in order to develop expertise across the domains of social care, criminal justice and immigration.<sup>50,51</sup> The foundations on which expertise is built therefore require further specification within the regulations. Consideration should be given to the content and duration of such a training programme, using European benchmarks for comparison, as specified by the Fundamental Rights Agency.<sup>52</sup> In addition, the ways an advocacy service is monitored, reviewed and regulated, while remaining independent of public authorities, also requires consideration.

**Referrals:** The referral system was an outcome of the structure of the trial and was not effective in ensuring timely referrals. The referral of the children to an advocate by a local authority within a two-hour time frame did not appear to happen in practice, and may not be realistic. Further

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50 Prior to the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the Minister for Preventing Abuse and Exploitation referred in the *Modern Slavery Bill Factsheet: Child Trafficking Advocates* to advocates having “expertise across immigration and public children law legal and support systems”. See [CTA factsheet](#).

51 In Northern Ireland the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland (DHSSPSNI) has put forward a consultation document that focuses on whether independent guardians should be, *inter alia*, qualified social workers with five years post-qualifying experience. See the regulations consultation [here](#).

52 See **FRA** (2014) *Guardianship for children deprived of parental care*. Part 3.5, [here](#).



consideration needs to be given to a system where:

- referral times to an advocacy service can be shortened;
- referrals can be made directly to advocates; and
- the sources of referral can be widened to include other agencies.

Leads within local authorities, immigration, health and criminal justice services with whom an advocacy service or advocate can cooperate in joint working of individual cases would be helpful.

**Missing children:** There is not a conclusive picture of the ways that advocacy mediates the risk of children going missing. Vietnamese nationals appear particularly prone to disappearance, as in previous studies. Further research needs to be undertaken to identify how and why children are lost and found, how to prevent children from going missing; and the ways an advocacy service could become part of a coordinated response to missing children, whether EU or non-EU nationals.

**Visibility of a service:** Throughout the trial, the provider (Barnardo's) appeared to work hard to ensure that the ICTA service was known within the 23 local authority areas by all relevant public services. In the light of the responsibilities as defined in the Modern Slavery Act 2015 section 48, independent advocates should be visible, nationally, regionally and locally. Further consideration should be given as to how advocates can be part of formal systems and networks of care and protection, with the duties and responsibilities of advocates understood by all key stakeholders.

**Independence:** Given the benefits identified during the trial of advocates working independently across different areas, and considering the views of many stakeholders, it is important for advocates to maintain independence from other services. Evidence has accrued over a number of years, across many European contexts that the focus on a child's best interests is easier to maintain and promote if a child advocacy agency maintains its independence.

However, the place of advocates among established services needs to be carefully crafted in order to allow advocates to work independently in ways that are child-centred *and* support the work of other services, so that gaps and overlaps of responsibilities are clearly understood by all parties, in order to avoid ambiguity and to enhance collaboration. The points of intersection (whether points of collaboration or potential conflict) with other agencies need further consideration.

**Implementation:** The use of the volunteers and the 24-hour helpline require further testing over a period of time to prove their additional value, particularly as there was limited use of the 24-hour helpline. The rationale for both is to provide trafficked children with easier entries into day-to-day life and to provide a safety net available at all hours, should an emergency arise.

A new advocacy service should give consideration to both these approaches, in addition to its normal services, so that the children do not feel as if advocates and their assistants are out of reach at times of need.

**Legal powers of a child trafficking advocate:** The Modern Slavery Act 2015 provides for public authorities to "*pay due regard to the advocate's functions*" and for advocates to be able to instruct legal representation for the child. However, it is difficult to predict whether, on the basis of this evaluation's findings, independent advocates will be able to persuade public authorities more easily than at present, given the many ways 'due regard' can be interpreted. Further

consideration is needed as to how to ensure that all the players in a child's life collaborate and how to secure improved legal services for them. This matter needs close inspection for a period of time, and should be reviewed if the statute's intent does not live up to its expectations of improving decision making in the lives of trafficked children.

**Transitions:** Because of the short-term nature of the trial there were insufficient data on the ways that trafficked children transition from an advocacy service to other services or to independent living. It is recommended, therefore, that the children's transitions out of an advocacy service are researched further to identify what happens in practice and to consider the ways that exit strategies are managed by an advocacy service effectively.

## Data Tables

**Table A1: Total number of children allocated to the trial**

	Advocacy group	Comparator group	Total
Number of children allocated to the trial	91	76	167
Number discounted from trial <sup>†</sup>	-5	-4	-9
<b>Total number of children in trial</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>158</b>

\* Nine cases were discounted from the trial: four cases where allocation to the trial did not lead to a referral to the ICTA service; three following confirmation as 'adult cases'; and the final two where there were no known trafficking indicators following allocation.

**Table A2: Number of case files examined**

	Advocacy group	Comparator group	Total
Number of fully analysed case files	86	55	141
Number of cases with limited information	0	17	17
<b>Total number of case files examined</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>158</b>

**Table A3: Age and gender of the children in the trial**

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
18	0	4	4	2.5
17	18	24	42	26.6
16	25	13	38	24.1
15	17	16	33	20.9
14	7	8	15	9.5
13	1	6	7	4.4
12	0	2	2	1.3
11	1	1	2	1.3
10	1	0	1	0.6
9	1	0	1	0.6
8	2	0	2	1.3

Age	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
7	1	0	1	0.6
6	0	2	2	1.3
3	1	1	2	1.3
0	1	2	4*	2.5
Unknown	2	0	2	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>158*</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Including one unborn child (see also Table A5 below).

**Table A4: Age assessments undertaken up to 31 July 2015**

	Advocacy	Comparator	Total	Percentage
No	52	33	85	60.3
Yes	19	12	31	22
Proposed but not yet	8	3	11	7.8
Unclear	4	0	4	2.8
Data missing from case files	3	7	10	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100</b>

Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

**Table A5: Country of origin and gender of the children in the trial**

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
EU				
Bulgaria	1	0	1	0.6
Czech Republic	0	2	2	1.3
Greece	1	0	1	0.6
Lithuania	0	1	1	0.6
Netherlands	1	1	2	1.3
Poland	2	0	2	1.3
Republic of Ireland	0	1	1	0.6
Romania	1	4	6*	3.8
Slovakia	1	2	3	1.9
UK	3	25	28	17.7
Total EU	10	36	47	29.7%

	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Non-EU				
Afghanistan	3	0	3	1.9
Africa (country unspecified)	0	2	2	1.3
Albania	17	11	28	17.7
Angola	0	3	3	1.9
Canada	1	0	1	0.6
China	1	0	1	0.6
Congo	1	3	4	2.5
Egypt	2	0	2	1.3
Eritrea	2	0	2	1.3
Ghana	1	2	3	1.9
Iraq	1	0	1	0.6
Kosovo	1	0	1	0.6
Malaysia	1	0	1	0.6
Nigeria	2	0	2	1.3
Pakistan	2	0	2	1.3
Palestine	1	0	1	0.6
Sri Lanka	2	1	3	1.9
Tunisia	1	0	1	0.6
Uganda	1	1	2	1.3
Vietnam	27	18	45	28.5
Zambia	0	1	1	0.6
Zimbabwe	0	1	1	0.6
Total Non-EU	67	43	110	69.5%
Unknown	1	0	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Including one Romanian national unborn child, gender unknown.

**Table A6: Characteristics of the British children in the trial**

Characteristics		Total	Group	
			Advocacy	Comparator
<b>Total number of cases</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12</b>
Gender	Male	3	2	1
	Female	25	14	11
Age (years)	12	1	0	1
	13	3	1	2
	14	5	5	0
	15	8	5	3
	16	6	2	4
	17	4	3	1
	18	1	0	1
Primary exploitation type	Criminal exploitation	2	1	1
	Multiple exploitation	5	3	2
	Sexual exploitation	20	12	8
	Unknown exploitation	1	0	1

**Table A7: Characteristics of the missing children in the trial**

Characteristics		Total	Group	
			Advocacy	Comparator
<b>Total number of cases</b>		<b>27</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>12</b>
Gender	Male	21	12	9
	Female	5	2	3
	Not yet born	1	1	0
Age (years)	0	1	1	0
	14	3	2	1
	15	5	3	2
	16	11	6	5
	17	7	3	4
Country of origin	Albania	1	0	1
	Pakistan	1	1	0
	Romania	2	2	0
	Vietnam	23	12	11
Primary exploitation type	Criminal exploitation	13	10	3
	Labour exploitation	7	2	5
	Multiple exploitation	1	0	1
	Sexual exploitation	1	1	0
	Unknown exploitation	5	2	3

**Table A8: National Referral Mechanism referrals, advocacy and comparator groups (case files only\*)**

	Advocacy	Comparator	Total
NRM referral made following local authority allocation to the group	32	14	46
NRM referral made prior to local authority allocation to the group	27	5	32
<b>Total referred to NRM</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>78</b>
Decision pending (not yet made)	18	6	24
Unclear from case file	5	12	17
Information missing from case file	1	10	11
Decision made not to refer	3	3	6
Local authority decision to treat as child sexual exploitation cases, not referred to NRM	0	2	2
Referred to another agency to make referral	0	2	2
NRM referral not applicable	0	1	1
<b>Total not referred to NRM or unknown whether referred to NRM</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>55*</b>	<b>141</b>

\* Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

**Table A9: National Referral Mechanism decisions, as at 31 July 2015, advocacy and comparator groups (case files only\*)**

	Advocacy	Comparator	Total
<b>Total NRM decisions</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Reasonable grounds decisions</b>			
Positive reasonable grounds	35	8	43
Pending reasonable grounds	6	5	11
Negative reasonable grounds	2	0	2
Suspended reasonable grounds	3	0	3
Unknown	13	6	19
<b>Total reasonable grounds decisions</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Conclusive grounds decisions</b>			
Positive conclusive grounds	10	1	11
Negative conclusive grounds	5	1	6
<b>Total conclusive grounds decisions</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>17</b>

\* Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

**Table A10: Criminal justice involvement of the children in the trial (case files only\*)**

	Advocacy	Comparator	Total
As victim	34	10	44
As offender	6	2	8
As victim and offender	4	2	6
No criminal justice involvement	17	10	27
Not applicable	0	2	2
Unclear	5	16	21
Missing from case file	20	13	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>141</b>

\* Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

**Table A11: Contact with traffickers by the children in the trial (case files only\*)**

	Advocacy	Advocacy %	Comparator	Comparator %
Yes	27	31.4	13	23.6
No	29	33.7	9	16.4
Possibly	5	5.8	1	1.8
Not known	25	29	21	38.2
Missing from case file	0	0	11	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

**Table A12: Time between referral made by local authority to Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service and allocation of an advocate for advocacy group cases**

Time in days	Number of cases	Percentage
0	72	83.7
1	12	14.0
2	2	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>



**Table A13: Time between date case was referred to local authority and local authority referring case to a named social worker for comparator group cases (case files only\*)**

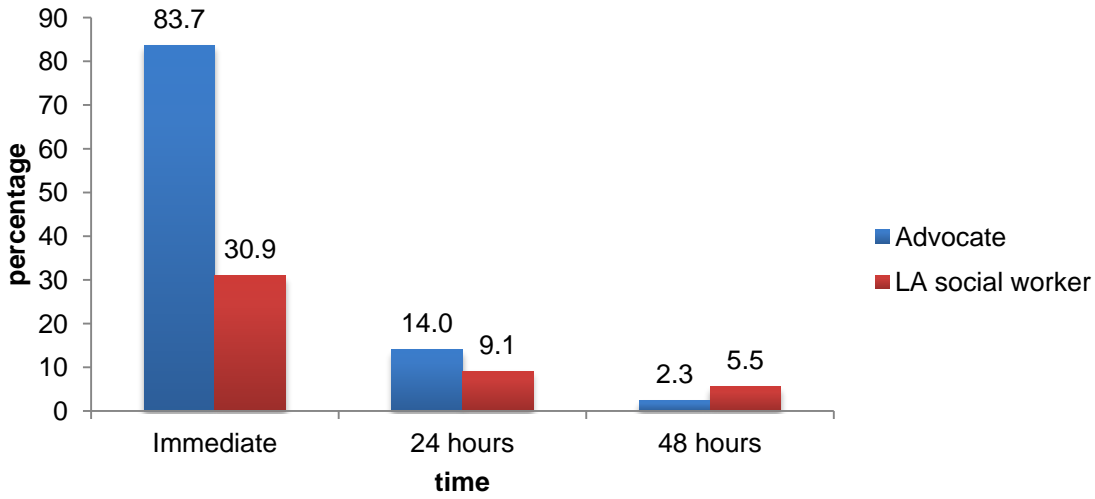
Time in days	Number of cases	Percentage
Immediate	17	30.9
1 day	5	9.1
2 days	3	5.5
3 days	2	3.6
5 days	1	1.8
6 days	1	1.8
10 days	1	1.8
2 months	1	1.8
3 months	3	5.5
Not allocated	3	5.5
Unknown	18	32.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Only cases for which the research team had access to case files in the comparator group have been counted in this table. The 17 cases where there was limited access have been excluded.

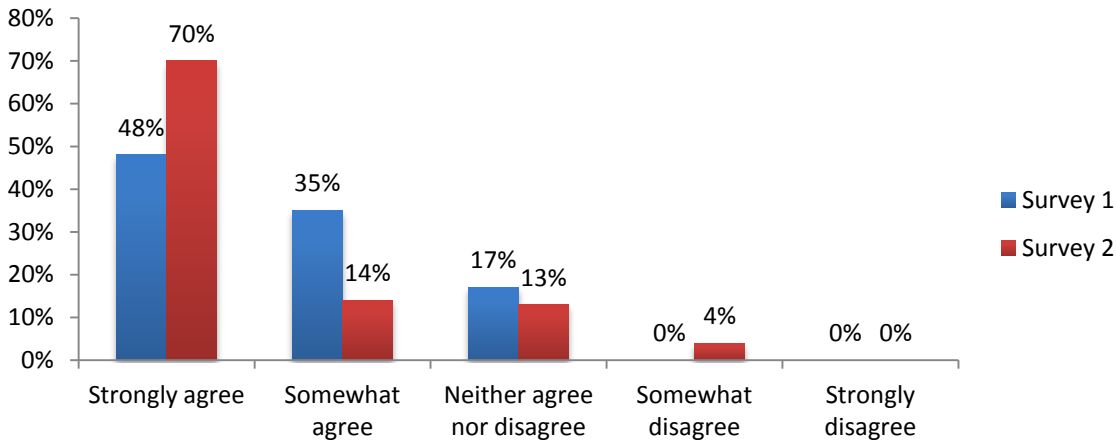
**Table A14: Time taken to refer a child to the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service**

Time	Number of cases	Percentage
Immediate	16	18.6
1 day	4	4.7
2 days	7	8.1
3–7 days	13	15.1
8–13days	18	20.9
2 weeks to 3 months	20	23.3
Unknown	8	9.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>100</b>

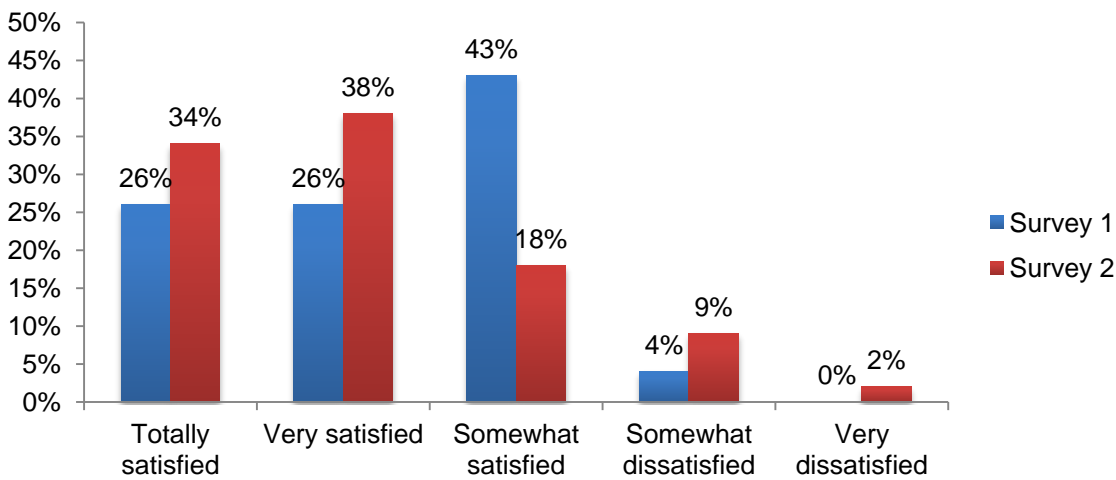
**Figure A1: Speed of allocation to an advocate or social worker within first 48 hours**



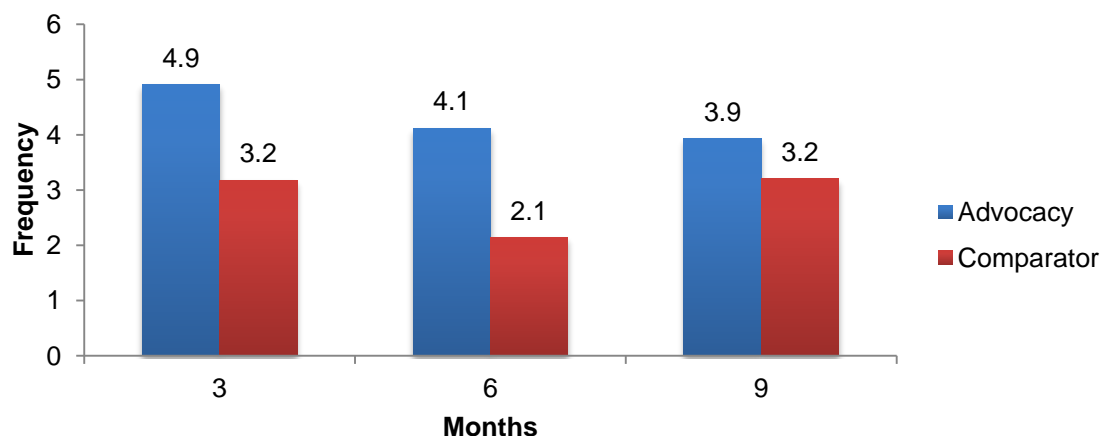
**Figure A2: Stakeholder survey: Agreement that advocates act in the child's 'best interests' (as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3)**



**Figure A3: Stakeholder survey: Satisfaction with professionals' experience of the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service**



**Figure A4: Face to face contact with child at three, six, and nine months after allocation (with advocate for advocacy group and with named social worker for comparator group)**



As noted in the main body of the report (footnote 37) the amount of contact at three and six months was statistically significant. Data for month nine were limited, as many cases had not matured to that point during the course of the trial, but showed the same trend as at earlier stages.

## Methodological approach

This evaluation deployed a range of quantitative and qualitative tools to gather data in relation to outcomes for the children in the trial, as well as the process of delivering the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates (ICTA) service. Here each tool is briefly described in the context of setting out some preliminary data associated with the use of that tool.

## Allocation of the children to the trial

An alternate allocation process was used as a basis for comparing the children supported by advocates relative to those supported by existing provision. All the children identified as potentially trafficked were referred to the local authority for assessment and allocation to the trial.<sup>53</sup> Following referral to the local authority, a designated single point of contact (SPOC) within each local authority was required to record basic demographic information about each child on an allocation spreadsheet and to allocate the child alternately into one of the two groups:<sup>54</sup>

- **'advocacy'** group – where the child was then referred (within two hours where practical) to Barnardo's for the allocation of an advocate; or
- **'comparator'** group – where the child continues to receive services as usual, based on the local authority's practices and policies.

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<sup>53</sup> Using local authorities as hubs for allocation does not show the children who could have been allocated, but were not. So this report is based on the children who were visible to allocators as potentially trafficked. The research team did not know about, and cannot comment on, the lives and circumstances of the children who may have slipped through the allocation process. It is entirely possible that some children were diverted to mainstream services (for example, in relation to child sexual exploitation), and others remained unnoticed as trafficked during the course of the trial.

<sup>54</sup> Spreadsheets, designed by the evaluators, were sent to each SPOC with a covering letter detailing how the spreadsheet should be used as an allocation tool. SPOCs designated by local authorities, were, in the main senior managers in children's services.

The first allocation in each area was to the advocacy group. An exception to the alternate allocation was made in some cases, for example, where siblings were identified and kept together in one of the two allocation groups. Subsequent allocations were adjusted to maintain an even distribution over time.

## Research ethics

The research team faced a formidable task in seeking to gain ethical approval from 27 research ethics committees from 23 local authorities, Barnardo's, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and within the University of Bedfordshire. From these 27, 25 were submitted. Two local authorities did not make the ethical application process known to the evaluation team. Most submissions for ethical approval were made at the commencement of the trial, and the remaining applications were made once the process of gaining ethical approval was made known to the evaluation team. From 25 applications made, 24 ultimately gained ethical approval, with one local authority refusing.

A primary ethical consideration was to ensure that any potential 'harm' or distress to the children and young people who had experienced trafficking were minimised. To do this, the focus of the evaluation on services rather than any experience of abuse and exploitation was made clear from the outset. Age- and language-appropriate information sheets and informed consent forms were used to ensure that the evaluation gained the 'informed consent' of all the participants. Guarantees of confidentiality to the children were made on the basis that any threat of imminent or immediate harm would need to be disclosed to their advocate or social worker.

## Interviews with the children

For the evaluation the research team interviewed 30 children (21 in the advocacy group and 9 in the comparator group). Interpreters were used in 20 cases, sourced from approved services by Barnardo's and the local authorities. The initial target was to complete 40 interviews, 20 in each group. This target was exceeded in the advocacy group. However, it was not possible to secure more than nine in the comparator group despite strenuous efforts during the course of the trial.

In interviewing the children the focus was on issues of trust building, safety, information that they received and understood about what was happening to them, who they thought was 'on their side' within their complex environments, the links they formed with supportive networks of protection and care, and how time was managed by them and on their behalf, particularly in relation to planning a sustainable future. For advocacy group children specific questions were asked about the role that the advocate played in addressing such issues. For the comparator group these issues were covered within a more diffused focus on the people that looked after them.<sup>55</sup>

Given the complexities of their lives, many children understandably declined the invitation to be interviewed. In some instances those responsible for their care did not believe it was the right moment for them to take part in an interview. Further reasons for non-participation included:

- the child or young person going missing;

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<sup>55</sup> As with any interview dependent on respondents volunteering themselves, the research team has drawn only on those who wanted to participate. There is no way of knowing the views of the children who declined interviews, even though their broader experiences were noted through examining case files as part of for the evaluation

- cases being closed if a child reached 18 years before care leaver duties came into force;
- being confirmed as an adult case;
- being returned to the country of origin
- being reunited with family; and/or
- simply being too young to take part in an interview.

## Interviews with the advocates and external stakeholders

Each advocate was interviewed, as well as individual operational and strategic stakeholders who were familiar with and could comment on the advocates' work, or the work of the ICTA service overall. The target of 6 advocate interviews, 12 operational stakeholder interviews, and 6 strategic stakeholder interviews was met. These 24 individual interviews focused on the experiences of delivering the service, or witnessing its impact.

Advocate interviews focused on the ways advocates thought they kept trafficked children visible and safe, and how they assisted the children to orientate and navigate their ways through complex systems. They were asked about:

- the ways the enacted 'advocacy' built trust with the children;
- the challenges they faced;
- how they paced their work to meet a child's needs, including helping the child to think ahead;
- how they explained their roles to other professionals;
- how they tried to build and sustain effective working relationships with other professionals;
- the ways that they responded to organisational challenges, both internal and external to Barnardo's; and
- their view of supervision and training, and how it affected their effectiveness.

Operational and strategic stakeholders were asked to respond to two main areas:

- to describe their own work with trafficked children, and any contextual issues that enabled or hindered such work; and
- to appraise the work of the ICTA service, to consider its 'value added' if any, and its overall impact on outcomes for the trafficked children.

## Focus groups within Barnardo's

At three monthly intervals during the course of the trial three focus groups were conducted, each with advocates, their 'hub' managers, and strategic managers within Barnardo's. Towards the end of the trial an additional focus group was conducted with volunteers who had joined the ICTA service.

The first and early set of these ten focus groups asked respondents to reflect on their aspirations for the ICTA service, and to identify resources that would assist them during the course of the trial. The second set of groups considered some of the emergent complexities they faced, including responding to challenges and invitations from established service providers. The third set of groups asked respondents to look back on the trial period, and to explain their trajectories of work as part of the service, any points of good practice, and any aspects of 'value added' they considered as key to a specialist advocacy provision for trafficked children.

## Stakeholder surveys

In order to allow as wide a spectrum of contributors to comment on the advocacy service, an anonymised online survey was conducted at two different time intervals, approaching potential stakeholders from criminal justice, immigration, social care (including health and education), legal services, community and faith organisations, foster and residential care providers, and relevant non-governmental organisations. Potential respondents were identified through the ICTA service case files, and by nominations from the trial's Advisory Group and Home Office staff.

Across both surveys 116 responses were received (Survey 1, n=26, Survey 2 n=90) from local, regional, and national sources.<sup>56</sup> The surveys asked respondents to identify the amount and type of contact they had with the ICTA service, and to appraise the quality of work by advocates. By using a single survey on two occasions, the research team tracked the ways respondents' views changed or remained the same over time in relation to the service.

## Case files

In systematically examining case files in the advocacy and comparator groups the evaluation focused on four main areas. Firstly, the child's characteristics – including age (claimed, assessed, assigned and disputed), gender, nationality, immigration status, primary exploitation type, and information on whether the child was missing or had missing episodes. Secondly, we examined the formal networks of care and protection around the child within the domains of social care, criminal justice, and immigration, and the ways these were maintained, for example in relation to placement stability, and plans related to the management of risk and the provision of services and resources for care, health and education. Thirdly, we counted the frequency of contact between the allocated worker and the child and with other service providers, over 3, 6 and 9 months from the start of a case. Fourthly, we examined any case file information relevant to several factors – including promptness of contact between the allocated worker and the child, whether the child was helped to understand what was happening, and the ways an allocated worker ensured the child's rights to fair treatment.<sup>57</sup>

## Operational documents

Documentary evidence related to training received by advocates (prior to and during the trial) was examined, along with the frequency of supervision given to advocates, the training and deployment of volunteers, and the usage of a 24-hour helpline offered by Barnardo's for advice and assistance for the advocacy group children.<sup>58</sup>

The data cut-off points for the advocacy group was 31 July 2015. However, data for the comparator group continued to be gathered throughout August and September 2015, given the slower access through some of the participating local authorities.

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<sup>56</sup> The number of respondents for survey 1 was small at the earlier stages of the trial. As the numbers of formal contacts for the children grew during the latter stages of the trial, the research team was able to access a greater number of potential respondents

<sup>57</sup> Comparator group case files were particularly difficult to decipher given the range of different ways that local authorities organise their file structures. Some information was readily visible, despite these variations. However, there were instances of information not being visible in case files. A limitation of the case file examination is that the research team did not know whether some facts and actions were known in those cases, and not recorded, or whether they were simply not known and/or not recorded. These instances are presented as 'unknown' within the data expositions.

<sup>58</sup> During the early part of the trial the research team also deployed a standardised 'practice tool' to gather quantitative data on the emotional well-being of the children in the advocacy group in a longitudinal way across three time points. However, given the demands on the advocates' time, other priorities took over and the completion rate remained poor. About mid-way in the trial, this was suspended, and its results do not form part of the report here.

## Data analysis

Statistical data arising from the case file analysis and the two surveys were analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics software package Version 22. A test result of  $p = 0.05$  was considered statistically significant (that is, at a 95% confidence level). Chi square analysis was carried out on categorical data (age, gender, primary exploitation type) to see if there were any differences between the distributions for the advocacy and comparator groups, while independent *t* tests were used for continuous data, such as frequency of contact of advocate or social worker. All *p* values and sample size indicators for test results are included in the text to enable the reader to reach their own judgement about the relative importance of particular findings.

Qualitative data from focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in most instances (with the exception of a few children's interviews where they did not consent to the recording of interviews). Adding qualitative responses from the surveys, and notes from the children's interviews enhanced these primary data sources. Taken together, the qualitative data set was analysed using the software package *Nvivo10*. Together, data were coded thematically using a range of descriptive and analytic categories. Some were initially developed *a priori* (adapted from interview and survey questions, and the stated aims of the evaluation), and others emerged through the analytic process (a process of identifying, counting and grouping different types of experiences).

Analyses were conducted within and across cases to draw out a range of experiences and viewpoints of the children, advocates, their managers, and operational and strategic stakeholders, linked to the emergent themes. Each theme was then placed in the context of the 'whole' picture, and multiple perspectives arranged around each theme.

Detailed data sharing agreements (DSAs) were signed between the University of Bedfordshire, Barnardo's and 15 of the 23 local authorities to ensure that information for both the 'advocacy' and 'comparator' group children and young people was collated and stored securely.<sup>59</sup> All data collected were anonymised at the point of collection or prior to analysis.

## Relevant laws and policies in the UK and the European Union

### England and Wales

The Modern Slavery Act (England & Wales) 2015 contains an enabling mechanism for the Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service, which states: "*The Secretary of State must make such arrangements as the Secretary of State considers reasonable to enable persons ('independent child trafficking advocates') to be available to represent and support children who there are reasonable grounds to believe may be victims of human trafficking.*"<sup>60</sup> It also states: "*The Secretary of State must, no later than 9 months after the day on which this Act is passed, lay before Parliament a report on the steps the Secretary of State proposes to take in relation to the powers conferred by this section [of the Act].*" This evaluation aims to inform the Secretary of State's report, as well as the design and implementation of a national (England and Wales) scheme of child trafficking advocates if Parliament decides to implement a scheme.

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59 Those without signed DSAs were mainly from local authorities with zero allocations to the trial or those with no, or less than two, eligible cases in the comparator group

60 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/30/section/48/enacted>

## Northern Ireland

In January 2015 Northern Ireland passed the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015. The Act provides for an independent legal guardian for trafficked and separated children who arrive in Northern Ireland without a parent or primary caregiver (and where that separation may put the child at risk of harm).<sup>61</sup> The law stipulates that the independent legal guardian will be employed by a registered charity and will act in the child's best interests, whilst those providing services to a child or making decisions about the child must pay 'due regard' to the functions of the guardian and provide access to information to allow the guardian to function properly.

The functions of the guardian include: ascertaining and communicating the views of the child, liaising with agencies providing services to the child, assisting the child to access legal or other advice and representation, including appointing and instructing legal representatives on behalf of the child where necessary, consultation with the child, contributing to care planning, attending meetings and assisting in contacting the child's family (if in the child's best interests). The law states that the independent guardian appointed in relation to a child must at all times act in the best interests of the child. Provision has been made for extending the guardian's role until the child reaches the age of 21.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety is currently (November 2015) drafting regulations regarding the training/qualifications required for guardians and about the support and supervision of guardians.

## Scotland

Scotland has operated a non-statutory system of 'guardianship' for children who arrive in Scotland unaccompanied (some of whom are trafficked). However, the Scottish Guardianship Service does not work with separated children from within the EU. According to the service: *"Guardians support the young people by helping them navigate the immigration and welfare processes, and feel supported and empowered throughout the asylum process, assisting them to access the help they need when they need it, and make informed decisions about their future."*<sup>62</sup> The service has developed a joint working protocol with local authorities and immigration staff in Scotland.

Legislation on human trafficking, which contains provision for a statutory guardianship service in Scotland, is currently (as at 17 June 2015) before the Scottish Parliament. It is expected that the legislation will be similar to that in Northern Ireland. However, it may not provide for Scottish national children who are trafficked to be allocated a guardian.

## The European Union

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), guardians are "one of the most important features of a protection system for children who are deprived of their family environment or who cannot have their interests represented by their parents ..." Research has shown a variation in the way that EU Member States interpret and apply legal guardianship. The NIDOS guardianship service in The Netherlands has long been viewed as a best practice model for unaccompanied children. Its service, commissioned by the Dutch authorities, provides

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<sup>61</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2015/2/section/21/enacted>

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.aberlour.org.uk/how\\_we\\_help/services/248\\_scottish\\_guardianship\\_service](http://www.aberlour.org.uk/how_we_help/services/248_scottish_guardianship_service)



temporary guardianship for all separated child asylum seekers who arrive in the country.<sup>63</sup>

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), Article 10(4), states that as soon as an unaccompanied child is identified as a victim, Member States must “provide for representation of the child by a legal guardian, organisation or authority which shall act in the best interests of that child”. The European Directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims (2011) strengthens and clarifies this further. It contains two clauses regarding child guardianship.

- Article 14(2) requires Member States to “appoint a guardian or a representative for a child victim of trafficking in human beings from the moment the child is identified by the authorities where, by national law, the holders of parental responsibility are, as a result of a conflict of interest between them and the child victim, precluded from ensuring the child’s best interest and/or from representing the child”.
- Article 16(3) specifically requires Member States to “take the necessary measures to ensure that, where appropriate, a guardian is appointed to unaccompanied child victims of trafficking in human beings”. In England and Wales, the Government is clear that existing provisions by local authorities under their statutory child protection obligations, including social workers and independent reviewing officers, fulfil the guardian requirements in the Directive.

In recognition of the diverse national practices across Europe in this area, in 2014, the FRA produced a handbook “to reinforce guardianship systems to cater for the specific needs of child victims of trafficking”<sup>64</sup> with the aim of clarifying the role of guardians and presenting a set of common principles and standards. It states the guardian’s work must be guided by four principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: the best interests of the child; the right of the child to be heard; the right to life and development; non-discrimination.

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63 ECPAT UK (2011) *Watch Over Me*. Available at: [http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/watch\\_over\\_me.pdf](http://www.ecpat.org.uk/sites/default/files/watch_over_me.pdf)

64 FRA (2014) *Guardianship for children deprived of parental care*. Available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-guardianship-children\\_en\\_0.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-guardianship-children_en_0.pdf)

**Table A15: Comparing legal provisions on advocacy and guardianship across England and Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland**

	Name	Which children?	Independence of child trafficking service from other public services?	Who can refer?	When?	Functions	Duration	Statutory standing	Must act in child's best interests	Can appoint legal representatives	Advocate or guardian access to information about the child
England/Wales Modern Slavery Act (England & Wales) 2015	Independent Child Trafficking Advocates service	All trafficked children (including British nationals)	Yes	To be specified in regulations or guidance	As soon as reasonably practicable	Some functions are specified within the Modern Slavery Act 2015, further functions to be specified in regulations and guidance	Provision up to age 18	Public authorities must give due regard to the advocate's functions	Yes	Yes	Public authorities must provide the advocate with access to such information relating to the child as will enable the advocate to carry out those functions effectively (so far as the authority may do so without contravening a restriction on disclosure of the information).
Northern Ireland Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015	Independent guardian	Trafficked children, when those with parental responsibility for the child are not in regular contact with the child, or are outside the UK, or are suspected of having committed a trafficking offence in relation to the child, or have interests which conflict with those of the child.	Yes (although not explicitly stated but organisation must be a charity)	To be specified in regulations or guidance	Before or after an National Referral Mechanism referral	Listed in legislation	Provision for up to age 21 (with the child's consent) or if relevant criteria cease to be applicable	Public authorities must give due regard to the guardian's functions	Yes	Yes	Yes
Scotland* Human Trafficking & Exploitation (Scotland) Bill	Independent child trafficking guardians	Children trafficked from abroad (not British nationals nor separated children)	Yes	List of relevant authorities	As soon as possible	To be determined in regulations	No specific provision for post-18-year-olds	Public authorities must give due regard to the guardian's functions	Yes	No provision for this	No reference to access to information

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