


Using the voluntary
sector to support
children and families
with complex needs –
what are the benefits
and risks?



Dr Andrew Percy

School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work

23rd October 2019



Research Question 1

What are the main issues with the commissioning, governance and delivery of services by the voluntary sector?



Research Question 2

What is currently known about how services provided by the voluntary sector can influence family outcomes and does this differ depending on the model of delivery and/or governance used?



Research Question 3

Does the voluntary sector supplement, hinder or substitute statutory social work services?

Methodology

Stage 1: Rapid reviews (x2) of the international research literature

A: Commissioning, governance and delivery of services by the voluntary sector

B: Voluntary sector service provision and family outcomes

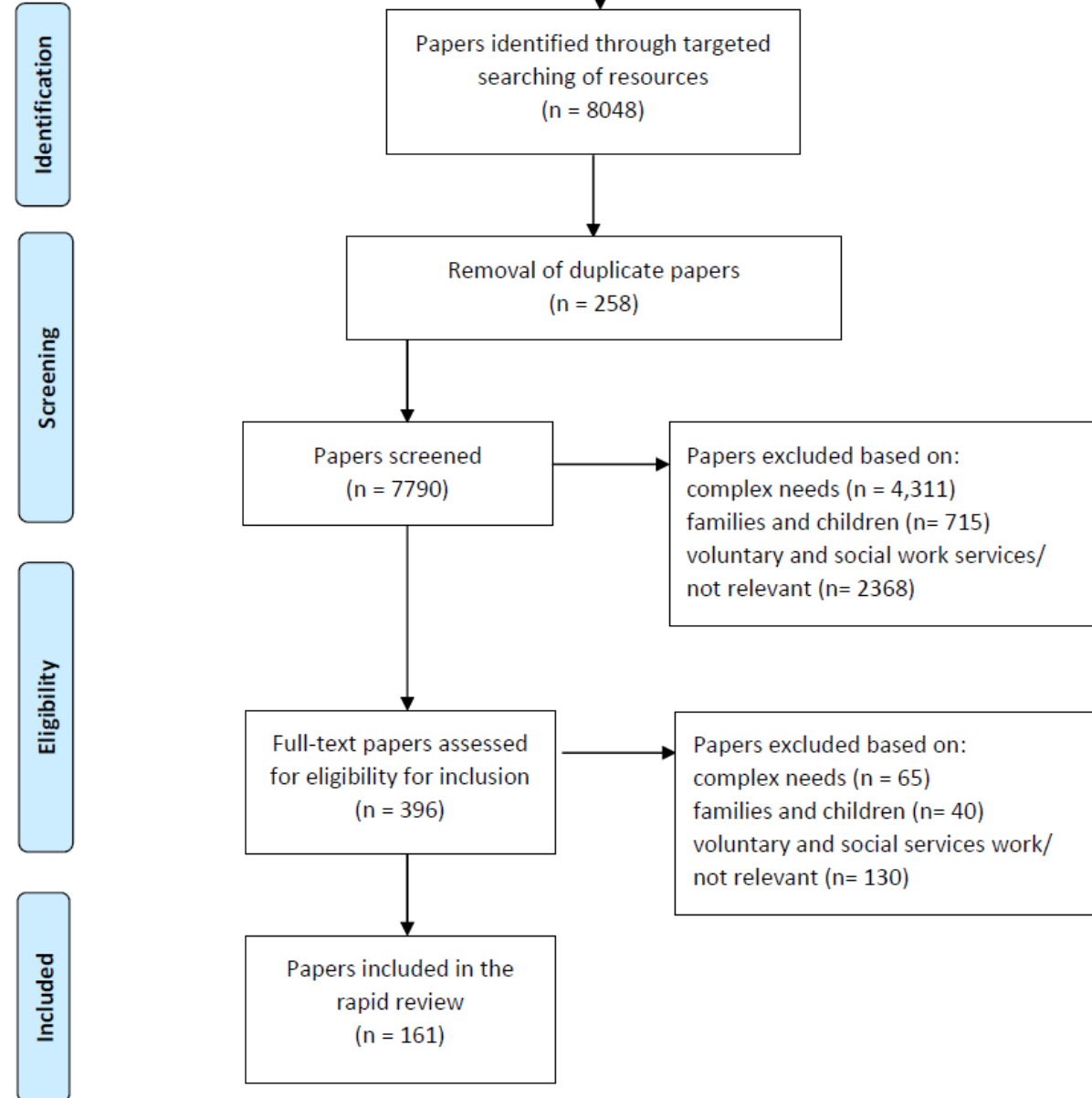
Stage 2: Knowledge exchange

Stage 3: Final review and consolidation

1. Rapid Reviews (x2)

A: Screened around 7,500 papers
Detailed assessment of 400 papers
Included 161 papers in review

B: Screened around 7,000 papers
Detailed assessment of 121 papers
Included 71 papers in review



2. Knowledge exchange

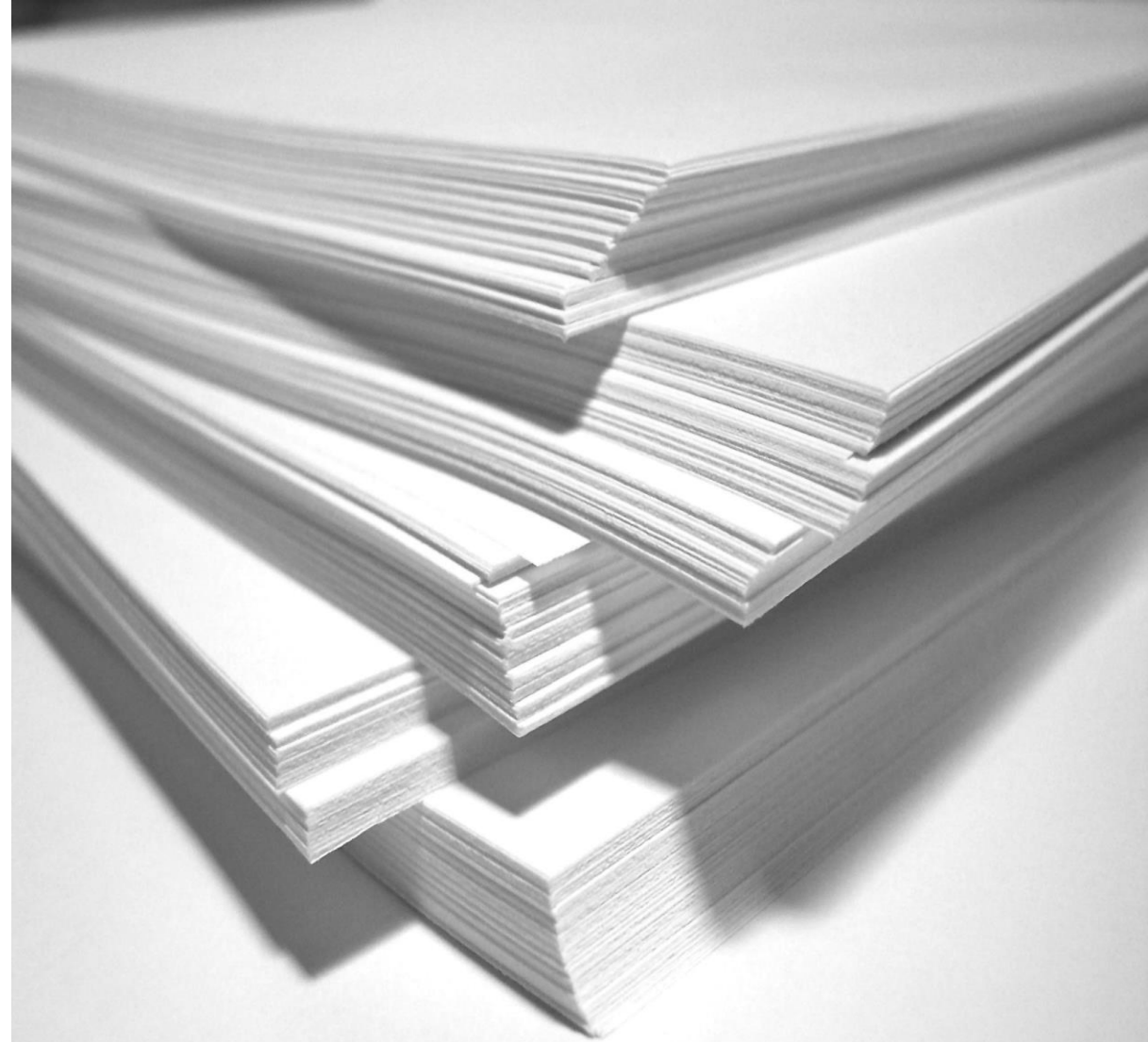
1. Distribution of the **written report** on review findings to stakeholders
2. **Verbal briefings** on the review findings for evaluators undertaking the learning reviews of funded projects
3. **Discussions** on the extent to which these review findings were applicable to the services that were being reviewed and how these findings could be used to inform ongoing and/or future learning reviews.



3. Final review and consolidation

Analysis of seven learning reviews of the VS services funded by the EITP

- To identify commonalities across the voluntary sector services
- To compare learning reviews with the findings emerging from the rapid reviews
- To provide insights into the extent to which these international findings may be applicable to the Northern Ireland context.





Findings: Benefits

Commissioning the voluntary sector to provide services to children and families with complex needs was **largely beneficial**,

- Better matched service to user needs
- Increased creativity in service design
- Increased trust between providers and service users
- More successful advocacy for those with complex needs.

HOWEVER.....

Findings: Commissioning

Commissioning processes can have a negative impact on VS services:

- Contract culture (categorical funding)
- Loss of political and financial independence
- Commissioning is highly complex
 - Mismatch between needs and services
 - Admin burden (on all parties)
 - Fosters competition not collaboration
- Competitive tendering does not always result in a more cost-effective or efficient service provision





Findings: Governance

Concerns were identified in the literature regarding governance and oversight:

- Quantity vs quality
- Quantity vs complexity of needs
- Fostering interagency collaboration and partnership (power imbalances)
- Limited expertise in programme evaluation

Findings: Improving outcomes

Engaging with hard to reach clients

Providing personalised service for complex needs

Promoting interagency collaboration

- Co-location
- Shared resources
- Improved communication
- Shared decision-making
- Service user involvement
- Case coordinators

Commissioning can inhibit this work





Substitute, Supplement, or hinder

Substitute: the ability of VS to assume sole responsibility for providing services depends on the willingness of officials to allow voluntary organisations to assume this responsibility

Supplement: Where the state is unable to provide services or clients unwilling to engage with them (political conflict) VS can supplement

Hinder: No barriers to effective services are unique to VS, but rather linked to the wider challenges involved in developing effective interagency collaboration and organisation culture.

Gaps in the knowledge base

Studies tend to be:

- small sample size,
- focused on the perspective of staff
- Limited engagement with children and families
- Lacking a multi-disciplinary perspective
- Little work linking performance indicators with actual outcomes

More research is required





**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

SCHOOL OF
**SOCIAL SCIENCES,
EDUCATION AND
SOCIAL WORK**