

# Modernising Adult Social Care for Vulnerable Adults in England: The Processes and Impact of Regulation

Dr Stephen Cope (University of Portsmouth) and Professor Judith Lathlean (University of Southampton) are jointly co-ordinating a research project examining the processes and impact of the regulation of adult social care in England. The research team comprises Jo Goodship (Research Fellow), Lynsey Plockyn (Research Secretary) and Matthew Gummerson and Kevin Jacks (Research Assistants) all based at the University of Portsmouth.

The team will be assisted by an Advisory Group of Experts (comprising academics and practitioners) and a Service Users' and Carers' Panel.

This three-year project started on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2003 and is funded by the Department of Health as part of its Modernising Adult Social Care Initiative (MASCRI) ([www.masc.bham.ac.uk](http://www.masc.bham.ac.uk)).

MASCRI is co-ordinated by Dr Carol Lupton in the Department of Health ([carol.lupton@doh.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carol.lupton@doh.gsi.gov.uk)) and has two academic advisers - Professor Janet Newman ([j.e.newman@open.ac.uk](mailto:j.e.newman@open.ac.uk)) at the Open University and Michael Hughes at the University of Birmingham ([m.p.hughes@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.p.hughes@bham.ac.uk)).

The overriding purpose of the research project is to assess the impact of regulation upon the provision of adult social care services, and the extent to which regulation works for key groups of vulnerable adults in England. It seeks to make recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of regulation in ensuring that a range of adult social care services are tailored to meet the required needs of vulnerable adults and their carers in England.

The present Labour Government's modernisation strategy has strengthened the key role of state-sponsored regulation in the delivery of public services - see, for example, the Department of Health's *Modernising Social Services* 1998 White Paper.

Regulation is a very significant form of managing public services, as central government increasingly relies upon regulatory agencies (such as inspectors and auditors) and regulatory mechanisms (such as national service standards and performance indicators) to measure and improve the performance of agencies providing public services.

The main stakeholders within the regulatory regime surrounding adult social care include:

- *Central government sponsors of regulatory agencies* (e.g. Department of Health.)
- *Regulatory agencies* (e.g. the Commission for Social Care Inspection.)
- *Regulated agencies* e.g. local authority social services department and other statutory, private and voluntary providers of adult social care, plus groups representing regulated agencies and their adult social care professionals and workers (e.g. Association of Directors of Social Services, Local Government Association, British Association of Social Workers).
- *Users of adult social care services (and their carers)*, plus groups representing service users and carers (e.g. Age Concern, Carers UK, MIND)

This research project addresses the following significant questions with regard to the regulation of adult social care, namely:

- *What are the processes of the regulation of adult social care as perceived by different stakeholders?*
- *What impact does regulation have upon adult social care?*

Specifically, the research project will:

1. Outline and examine the nature and role of regulatory agencies and mechanisms within the Government's modernisation programme for adult social care.
2. Survey the key changes in the regulation of adult social care services from the 'pre-modernisation' to the 'modernisation' phase, and monitor ongoing changes during the course of the project.

3. Compare and contrast the regulatory infrastructures of adult social care services provided by social care agencies in different sectors to different key adult groups.
4. Survey and evaluate existing criteria and measures of performance for adult social care services from the perspectives of key stakeholders.
5. Examine the extent to which the views of users of adult social care services are incorporated into the regulation of these services, and examine ways in which their incorporation can be improved.
6. Assess the impact of regulation upon relations between the centre and local delivery agencies in the implementation of central policy strategy surrounding the delivery of adult social care services
7. Examine the impact of the existing regulatory infrastructure upon adult social care and of existing arrangements for joined-up regulation upon adult social care involving inter-agency working.
8. Formulate and disseminate policy-relevant and practice-relevant recommendations on regulating adult social care based on our research findings.

The research project employs a hybrid research strategy involving a variety of research methods: documentary analysis, individual/group semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Case study areas will be selected using a dimensional sampling technique, based on matrix of criteria reflecting the geographical, local authority-type and performance categories of local authority social services departments. Interviews will be conducted with key adult social care stakeholders, including service users and carers, within each area.

The research project is divided into three phases: Phase One is mainly concerned with mapping out the processes of regulating adult social care, and Phase Two and Phase Three are mainly concerned with assessing the impact of regulating adult social care.