

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: King's College London
Unit of Assessment: 30: History
Title of case study: Happy Families? Embedding history in policy making at the Department for Education
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>In early 2013, a policy review across the DfE created five new 'policy tests' which govern policymaking and which asked civil servants to include historical perspectives and sources in how they frame and evaluate policy making. The five tests were summarised in the October 2013 report of the Policy Profession Board, <i>Twelve Actions to Professionalise Policy Making</i>, and are currently recommended as good practice for all departments. Their development was informed by the experience of working with Prof. Pat Thane and the History and Policy unit at King's. Following the publication of Thane's <i>Happy Families? History and Family Policy</i> in 2010, History and Policy was invited by the Director of Children's Services and Departmental Strategy Directorate at the Department for Education to lead a series of history seminars designed to provide DfE civil servants with a deeper knowledge of up-to-date historical research relevant to their policy areas. This case study documents the direct impact of <i>Happy Families</i> in informing the work of the DfE and on the thinking of NGOs including the national childcare charity, the Daycare Trust. At the same time, it shows how <i>Happy Families</i> has contributed to a demonstrable change in policy-making culture at the highest levels, through the institutionalisation of historical thinking amongst civil servants.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research that triggered the engagement with DfE was Pat Thane's <i>Happy Families? History and Family Policy</i> (British Academy, Oct 2010), which argued that the life-long, early and stable marriage typical of the 1950s and 60s was a historical anomaly rather than a state of normality to which society should be encouraged to return. This research, and the three talks given by Prof. Thane in the DfE/H&P seminar series, on the history of early years care (Oct 2011), family policy (Nov 2011) and adoption (Oct 2012), were based on several years' research and on her then ongoing project on the history of unmarried motherhood, published May 2012 as <i>Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England</i>, with Tanya Evans (OUP).</p> <p>As the reviews have commented, this is the first book to describe the real lives of unmarried mothers in England during the past century. As the reviewer in the journal <i>Population Studies</i> put it: 'This book provides us with a complex and nuanced account of the changing perceptions of unmarried motherhood and the experiences of unmarried mothers over the course of the twentieth century...Thane and Evans make an important contribution to deconstructing the often negative stereotypes of both unmarried mothers themselves and also the milieu in which they became pregnant out of wedlock.'</p> <p>The book is original in combining the story of a voluntary organisation, founded in 1918 as the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child (still active today, as Gingerbread), and its work to support women and children, with that of the families themselves and government policy towards them. As the review in <i>Journal of Social Policy</i> put it: 'the book deserves a wider audience as the idea of unravelling the history of a particular group alongside a long-standing voluntary organization...could usefully be applied to other groups'. The book documents an example of the long-term co-operation between voluntary organisations and state welfare, between the 'Big Society' and the 'Big State', which has characterised British welfare policy over the past century but which has been all too little studied or recognised. The review in <i>Times Higher Education</i> (by a social scientist at LSE) concluded 'One of the many excellent aspects of this fine book is that it allows the reader space to consider connections between past and present in which we endlessly recreate, albeit in different forms, moral arguments about family and parenthood'.</p> <p><i>Happy Families</i> is a shorter (80pp) booklet, published by the British Academy Policy Centre as part of its mission to connect research in the Humanities and Social Sciences with policymaking. It links the new research in <i>Sinners</i> with a survey of other research on the history of the family in Britain to challenge the view, common in current government rhetoric that the stable, two-parent families and restrained sexual culture that were supposedly once a norm have been 'broken' in recent decades, since the 1960s. Rather, it points out how over past centuries pre- and extra- marital sex was by no means uncommon and how families were broken, above all by early death, particularly of fathers,</p>

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and by separation, even when divorce was hard to obtain. It warns against romanticising past, illusory 'golden ages' in policy-making, and points out that panics about the breakdown of family life have recurred over time. This work convinced senior civil servants in the Children's Services Directorate at DfE that briefings on recent historical research relevant to their policy areas could valuably inform their work.

Key researchers: Pat Thane joined King's College London as Research Professor in September 2010. She is a co-founder of H&P, part of the Institute of Contemporary British History, which merged with King's College London in August 2010 (the merger has been recognised and approved by the HEFCE REF team for purposes of this impact assessment). Dr Tanya Evans was Research Fellow on the project until Oct 2009, at the Institute of Historical Research.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 *Happy Families? History and Family Policy* (British Academy, Oct 2010). 80-page booklet published by the British Academy Policy Centre: <http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Happy-families.cfm>;

3.2 *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints? Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England*, with Tanya Evans (OUP). 223pp book ISBN 978-0-19-95850-4.

Both were rigorously peer-reviewed.

Key research grant: 'Unmarried Motherhood in England and Wales, 1918-1990' ESRC Award No. RES-000-23-0545, £139,468, 2005-8. End of Award Grading: Outstanding.

There have been other published outputs from the research, including:

3.3 History & Policy paper no.107, '*Happy Families?*' *History and policy*:

<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-107.html>

3.4 *Women's History Review*. Twentieth Anniversary Special Issue, ed. Pat Thane and Tanya Evans: 'Lone Mothers', including articles by Pat Thane and Tanya Evans on aspects of the history of lone motherhood. Vol. 20, No. 1, Feb 2011.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Happy Families? was widely publicised and disseminated after publication, including through a BBC Radio 4 *Thinking Allowed* programme on 27 Oct 2010 and widespread newspaper and online media coverage. A copy was sent to the Children's Minister Sarah Teather who wrote saying:

I found the report very interesting... I was particularly struck by the chapter exploring past 'moral panics' about the family and its perceived disintegration. It is easy to romanticise the past, but your report brought home the reality that many of the issues we are dealing with today were also deep concerns to other governments in history.

Your report also highlighted how much more difficult it is for families to thrive when they are socially and economically disadvantaged. As a Government we recognise that this is still an important issue and one we are looking to tackle by protecting the most vulnerable... I will pass your report on to colleagues working on these policies, who will be very interested in these findings.

The publication of *Happy Families?* led directly to the request (by letter in June 2011) to Pat Thane and H&P to organise history seminars at DfE. Tom Jeffery, Director of Children's Services and Departmental Strategy Directorate (and for part of the period of engagement, acting Permanent Secretary) stated that: 'We were inspired to get in touch as [*Happy Families?*] was so succinct and clear, and covered so much relevant ground.' Introducing the first seminar in Oct 2011, he told the audience:

We live in an ahistorical world as we make policy as civil servants, with the press of daily business crowding out reflection.... this impoverishes the way we go about our business. I am really pleased to bring together eminent historians, people working in the practice of children's policy and civil servants to think about the evolution of policy over time.

Seminar topics were designed to inform DfE's current policy priorities:

- early years childcare (6 October 2011)*
- childhood (27 October 2011)*
- family policy (24 November 2011)
- youth policies (31 January 2012)
- adoption (11 October 2012)*
- disability, learning difficulties and education (26 November 2012)
- policies for children with emotional or behavioural difficulties (10 January 2013)

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- age, rights and responsibility (29 January 2013)
- social work with children (30 April 2013)

Pat Thane summarised her research in *three presentations to the series. Her knowledge of the research field and of active researchers, plus access to H&P's national network of 400 historians, enabled her to identify leading experts from 12 different HEIs (including two from King's College London) to provide policy-relevant presentations. All speakers' presentations are now available on the H&P website at: <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/engagement/seminars.html#dfe>.

The chief beneficiaries were civil servants in DfE, of whom up to 60 attended each event, including all the departmental Directors. Seminars took place in DfE's London headquarters and were streamed live to regional offices. Most were also filmed and made available on the DfE intranet (accessible to around 4,000 civil servants). H&P is now discussing with DfE how to make these videos available to a wider audience through its own website.

Feedback was systematically evaluated as part of H&P's monitoring and evaluation process, and through detailed feedback from the DfE organisers. Thane's initial presentation was highlighted by DfE Chief Research Officer Richard Bartholomew as a model for other speakers to follow, in making research accessible and relevant to a policy audience. Feedback from all events was overwhelmingly positive, as the evaluation documents show. An example is the feedback to the seminar on family policy, at which Prof. Thane spoke:

- All respondents said the event was 'definitely' or 'probably' well-organised and interesting.
- 80-90% said it was 'definitely' or 'probably' relevant to their work, provided the right balance between history and policy and was a good use of their time.
- 82% said they would attend future H&P events.

Representatives of NGOs also benefitted from attending relevant seminars at DfE. Having attended the first seminar on early years child care, Anand Shukla, CEO of the Daycare Trust, invited Pat Thane to give a talk at the Trust's annual conference on 21 Nov 2011:

We would be delighted if she could expand upon the talk she gave at DfE, looking at the history of early years care in the 20th century and drawing out lessons for policymakers. This is a major annual conference which will enable Pat to share her research and thoughts with policymakers and practitioners from the sector....

The clearest evidence of a positive reception was the request from DfE for Prof. Thane to lead a second seminar series (Oct 2012-Apr 2013). Richard Bartholomew commented that: 'We trust History & Policy to provide sound information and advice that informs the way we think about current policy issues'.

The events also impacted on policy-thinking within the department. During H&P's 'learning from policy' seminar on 13 May 2013, Tom Jeffery summarised the value of Pat's research and H&P's policy engagement for the DfE Review which he had led:

Two years ago we identified a need, and an appetite, for greater historical understanding in the department. There was a discussion in the departmental board in which we recognised how ahistorical the work of the civil service could be and that officials often did not refer to immediate predecessors' work, let alone what happened in the recent or more distant past. We made contact with Pat Thane and History & Policy and launched, on an experimental basis, a series of seminars on children's services – where historians came along and talked about their subject to civil servants. We have now done 9 seminars and they have been very successful. Those who have taken part have reflected positively on the experience. They appreciated the broad historical context which the seminars revealed, and thought they had gained a richer understanding of such issues as the changing nature of families; different perspectives on childhood over time; and the development of social work.

We have recently developed five 'policy tests', to help improve policy in DfE. One of these tests asks colleagues to consider whether they are 'providing world-leading policy advice based on the very latest expert thinking', and to 'delve into the archives to see how we

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tackled this problem last time it (or something similar) arose'. We want to stimulate policy-makers to think broadly about the evidence base in their policy and to look beyond Whitehall to develop a richer understanding of evidence. We want to develop an expectation of civil servants that they should understand the evolution of their policy area and the lessons of previous approaches.

Our work with Pat and History & Policy over the last two years has laid the foundation for that. We are keen to build on the success of our collaboration so far, and broaden its scope to the whole of DfE's policy agenda. We want to work with History & Policy to develop further seminar series covering not only children's services but also education and are exploring the possibilities of History and Policy providing tailored training for staff, developing reading lists on particularly policy areas, and facilitating closer contacts between DfE and a range of academics at KCL. We see History & Policy's continued expertise and support as a crucial part of our work to improve policy-making within DfE.

Travel expenses for speakers at the DfE seminars were funded by the AHRC. The seminars were planned and delivered with support from H&P Public Affairs Manager at King's, Mel Porter.

History & Policy paper no.107, '*Happy Families?*' *History and policy*:

<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/papers/policy-paper-107.html> has received 4332 unique page views since its publication (1 Oct 2010-13 June 2013), placing it in the top 20% most-viewed H&P papers. Of these page views, over 100 were directed from a link on the BBC Radio 4 *Thinking Allowed* web page for the 27 Oct 2010 programme (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00vhhjm>), for which Pat Thane was interviewed and which brought her research on the family to a wider public.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

All sources, including originals of uploaded statements, available on request from H&P office:

1. Letter from former Children's Minister to Chief Administrator, British Academy, 23 Dec. 2010 (uploaded statement)
2. Letter from DfE Director of Children's Services to Pat Thane and AHRC, 7 June 2011
3. H&P web page hosting outputs from DfE seminars:
<http://www.historyandpolicy.org/engagement/seminars.html#dfe>
4. Collated H&P evaluation material from the nine seminars
5. DfE document 'improving our understanding of policy history'
6. Emails from DfE Chief Research Officer, Director of Children's Services, and CEO of the Daycare Trust to Pat Thane and Mel Porter, discussing aims, themes, feedback and the value of the events to DfE and Daycare Trust (uploaded statements)
7. Notes taken at seminars by Mel Porter, including comments by Director of Children's Services
8. Transcript of H&P 'learning from policy' event, 13 May 2013
9. Google analytics figures for H&P website (www.historyandpolicy.org) 1 Oct 2010 – 13 June 2013
10. Pat Thane's presentation to the Daycare Trust, 21 Nov 2011:
http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/data/files/Annual_conference_2011/Pat_Thane.pdf