

A REVIEW OF RESEARCH ON LOCAL AREA COORDINATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The brief for this paper requires a review of previous research studies into Local Area Coordination (LAC) in Western Australia that (a) summarises the findings of these studies, and (b) provides a short, non technical description of their methodological adequacies.

Over the past 12 years, some 24 reports containing evaluations of LAC, or aspects of it, have been written. Of these, 17 were selected for analysis in this report. The others were deemed to be more a part of the ongoing operational work of DSC than predominantly part of a research enterprise, not that the two domains are mutually exclusive.

In an attempt to keep within the length limit placed on the paper, the concluding observations that emerge from the summary of findings and analysis of methodological adequacies of the individual reports will be outlined in this executive summary rather than at the end of each of those two sections (3 and 4) of the paper.

Findings of the 17 reports

Section 3 of the paper presents summaries of the findings of each of the 17 reports. The following observations can be made about them.

Positive

Collectively, the findings of the 17 reports portray LAC as a success story. The positives far outweigh the negatives. Even the few reports that do document more than minor concerns about LAC found that, on balance, the program comes close to being exemplary in some ways. A few reports raise virtually no concerns or problems relating to LAC. Most reports, however, point to some aspects of the operation or structure of LAC that warrant attention. None of these points seems to suggest that LAC is fatally flawed and in need of radical structural change. Rather, they come across as issues that can be addressed by adjustments within the nature of the existing program.

Consistent over time

The 17 research studies analysed in this paper have been spread evenly across the last 12 years. There are no long intervals between them. From the time of the first LAC review (1990) to the latest (2002) there are only three years when a report has not been released. During those three years (1995, 1999, 2001), research took place and was reported the following year. So, the positive evaluations of LAC can be regarded as continuous, enduring, long term and consistent over time, rather than intermittent, short lived and volatile.

Comprehensive

The findings of the LAC reviews are wide ranging. They include context evaluations, process evaluations and product evaluations. They cover the implementation and operation of LAC in country and metropolitan sites. They focus on the appropriateness of LAC for the areas of intellectual, physical and sensory disabilities. Within these categories, as will be discussed below, the LAC reviews focus more on some aspects than others so it would be wrong to say that they cover all bases. Nevertheless, the 17 reviews represent a comprehensive evaluation of LAC.

Comparatively high ratings

Most of the reviews make some comparison between LAC and other disability service programs. The internal reports, and some external reports, make comparisons with agencies within the DSC. National comparisons tend to be reported within the external reviews. From these comparisons, LAC emerges as one of the highest rated programs within the DSC and one of the top rated disability service programs across Australia.

Context evaluation

Most of the reports provide some information about the context within which LAC was introduced. Pieced together this information portrays LAC as a program introduced to satisfy a grass roots appetite for localised and individualised services and support rather than a top down reform imposed on an unwilling people. It also constitutes a case for extending LAC to areas not covered by a local community-based disability service; eg. some remote Indigenous communities throughout Australia. Across the 17 reports, little mention is made of any deep seated opposition to LAC, possibly because there was none. To the extent that some contestation could be expected, there is scope for a wider context evaluation of LAC, perhaps from alternative perspectives, such as critical theory.

Process evaluation

With respect to processes of change implementation and daily program operations, the evaluations in the 17 reports commend LAC for:

- the way it was piloted and phased in.
- its role in devolving choice closer to consumers, determining eligibility for various services, acting as a budget holder, and using appropriate accountability controls.
- the relevance, flexibility, quality, short and long term value, and continuity of its services and support.
- the combination of practical or instrumental support, information and advocacy support and emotional support that it offers.
- the high degree of trust and respect developed between families and their local area coordinators.
- the many roles served by local area coordinators, such as advocate, guide, supporter, broker, consultant, community worker, partner, resource, problem solver, and source of direct help.
- the capacity and willingness of local area coordinators to be accessible, gain access to funding, arrange quality services, and generally be reliable, quick to respond,

informative, understanding, supportive, accountable, easy to talk to, compassionate, trustworthy, resourceful, perceptive, practical, not confrontationist, able to network, not judgmental, and helpful in developing parents' own ability to provide support.

Relatively little of the process evaluations focus on local area coordinators in action, or provide thick rich descriptions of local area coordinators' work. Most of the case studies are of clients and their families/carers, not local area coordinators.

Product evaluation

Most of the product evaluations of LAC centre on outcomes for clients and their families/carers. For example, the studies found that LAC gave clients and their families:

- greater peace of mind and increased security.
- increased optimism about the future.
- improved functioning and well being.
- enhanced self sufficiency and competence to organise their own services and supports.
- more choice and control of services,
- a more diverse and customised array of support to meet their needs; for example, in-home respite, out-of-home respite and vacation support, supported holidays, skill development, employment support, domestic help, home modification, equipment, carer travel, transport assistance, therapy services and psychological services.

The evaluations also suggest that LAC has benefited DSC and the broader community by, for example:

- making society more inclusive; increasing community acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities; overcoming the problem of them being labelled, devalued and isolated.
- enabling people with disabilities to stay in their homes and local communities rather than have to find accommodation in Perth.
- helping establish community agencies, such as home and community care, competitive employment training and placement, a toy library, family support association, community living association, and family extension program.
- attracting additional funding from sources other than LAC such as various federal/state/local government and non government organisations.
- offering a better utilisation of scarce resources, being cost efficient, and displaying a high level of accountability.

Concerns about LAC

The 17 reports indicate that at various times over the past 12 years some concerns have been raised about LAC. Many of these concerns may no longer be live, but at the time they included:

- difficulties in making immediate personal contact with local area coordinators.
- AIH and Activ Foundation not working together closely.
- the lack of procedures to ensure that individuals/families approve the written contents of the funding plans.

- some local area coordinators ‘overstating the case’ to enhance the chance of funding.
- perceived cuts within the tied funding process; (a factually incorrect perception apparently).
- a lack the knowledge and expertise, among some individuals, carers and families, to cope with the complexities of obtaining and managing funds.
- length of time taken to process funding.
- difficulties in monitoring standards of care.
- perceived inconsistencies in grants to people in similar circumstances.
- funding linked to programs that don’t meet individual, holistic needs, in some cases.
- some individuals not being aware of the availability of individualised funds.
- a range of other issues, such as those surrounding paid causal support people, the use of natural support networks, human resource management of local area coordinators, the use of AIH discretionary funding, and duty of care.

Summary of recommendations

Section 3 ends with a summary of the recommendations made in the reviews. This summary does not reflect the coherence of the reports because most of them do not systematically formulate explicit recommendations from the findings. Thus, readers are left to identify any implicit ‘recommendations’ embodied within the reports. For the same reason, the summary of recommendations does not do justice to the comprehensive coverage of the LAC reviews. Consistent with the findings, however, none of the recommendations, explicit or implicit, questions the need for LAC or proposes that LAC should be radically restructured. Rather, they represent a view that improvements should be approached by reforms from within. As such, the ‘recommendations’ represent a form of endorsement for the broad philosophical and structural settings of LAC.

Methodological adequacy of the LAC reviews

Are the positive findings of the LAC reviews too good to be true? Section 4 of the paper seeks to provide a basis for answering this question by analysing the methodological adequacy of the studies that produced the findings. This analysis was informed by the assumption that the credibility of program evaluation findings increases (a) when they are based on large amounts of well analysed, high quality, independently collected evidence from multiple sources and (b) when they have been validated by various tests of trustworthiness.

Multiple types and sources of evidence

Between them the 17 reviews scrutinised LAC from a variety of angles that involved:

- multiple research paradigms: quantitative and qualitative studies of LAC.
- multiple types of researchers: public service staff, private sector consultants, university academics.
- multiple time periods: longitudinal studies of LAC over several years and snapshots of LAC at a particular point in time.
- multiple sources of data: individual and group interviews, private and public meetings, phone-ins and written submission, field observations and documentary records, case studies and consumer surveys, and literature reviews.

- multiple frames: LAC as a stand-alone program and LAC as an integral part of a broader set of programs.

The variety of angles afforded by this degree of triangulation provides numerous opportunities for particular strengths and weaknesses in LAC to be detected, or, not go undetected.

Amount of evidence

Collectively, the 17 reports contain a large amount of evidence – over 750 pages. Individually, most of the reports are substantial documents – 70 pages on average for the reports that focus only on LAC. It is not possible to determine the precise number of LAC clients and their caregiving families who provided input for the reviews because of possible duplication of participation and often unspecified size of families. What can be said is that across the 17 studies there have been over 850 submissions from clients/families, 158 submissions from agencies and 381 submissions from other stakeholders.

Quality of evidence

The quality of evidence declines if it is highly selective, biased, or ‘doctored’. It is difficult to detect the influence of any such manipulation in the 17 LAC review reports with respect to the process and product evaluations. Generally, the sampling methods used for these evaluations are transparent and they comply with the principles set for quantitative and qualitative research. The same applies to methods for collecting data. In numerous cases, the people who gathered data received special training, the surveys and interviews allowed for open-ended responses, and participants were given a chance to corroborate transcripts of their input.

Analysis of evidence

In most cases, the 17 reports give only brief accounts of the methods used to analyse the data collected for the studies. The two LAC consumer satisfaction survey reports (Donovan 1997 and Q-EQUAL /& Donovan 2000) document in some detail the technicalities of the approach they used to process statistical information. Less detail is provided in the other quantitative studies. With respect to the qualitative studies, only the 1996 Lewis report spends more than a few lines outlining how interview transcript data was analysed. In the reports that present only minimal information on how data was analysed, the accounts of the findings are written in a disciplined manner - an observation which suggests that the evidence was systematically analysed, even if the system for doing so was not reported.

Independence of the research

Some of the internal reports make explicit the importance attached to the need for independent research. Their claims to independence receive support from a number of practices, such as:

- including people from outside DSC on the steering committees.
- appointing non LAC staff at DSC to conduct the research.

- using outside researchers to be part of the evaluation team.
- including some critique of LAC rather than only affirmations of its strengths.
- making explicit the process and basis used for selecting independent researchers.

The external reviews of LAC, though, are in a stronger position to claim independence for their evaluations because the researchers work at some distance from DSC, conceivably enjoy a freer hand than their internal review colleagues, and are less likely to have a vested interest in the findings or a need to engage in advocacy for LAC.

Trustworthiness of the findings

In varying degrees the 17 LAC reviews used a number of processes to validate their findings. A few used ‘member checks’ by giving participants drafts of the research and asking them to say whether the researchers had ‘got it right’. A few left an ‘audit trail’ and asked outsiders to follow it and comment on the authenticity of the findings. Some studies involved a team of researchers, which added to the ‘triangulation’ processes referred to earlier in this paper. And a few reports indicated that their findings, or the findings of previous reviews, had been trustworthy enough for people in power to act upon them.

Broad utility of the reviews

Section 4 of the paper concludes by suggesting that another approach to examining the methodological adequacy of the LAC reviews is to ask, ‘adequate for what’? For example, how adequate are the reviews for accountability or program development purposes? A case can be made to suggest that for political or bureaucratic accountability the external reviews of LAC are more appropriate than the internal reviews. The internal reviews, however, may serve as a more powerful instrument of professional accountability. With respect to LAC program development, the internal reviews seem to contain more data to inform operational decisions while the qualitative external reviews might contain more data to inform decisions on broader policy settings.

Summary of factors influencing perceptions of methodological adequacy

The six factors influencing perceptions of methodological adequacy listed in Table 1 refer to the following questions. Did the report of the review indicate that:

1. Multiple types and sources of evidence were used.
2. A ‘substantial’ amount of evidence was collected. (eg. a survey of more than 150 people OR a survey of more than 100 people plus more than 10 hours of case study interviews OR a survey of more than 50 people plus more than 15 hours of case study interviews OR more than 20 hours of case study interviews OR more than 100 pages of documentary material).
3. Measures were taken to secure quality evidence (eg. two or more of the following processes - transparent sample selection, trained data collectors, open ended responses, member checks)
4. The processes for analysing data were adequately documented.
5. Arrangements made the research largely independent of the DSC.
6. At least two processes were used to test the trustworthiness of the findings (eg. member checks, triangulation, audit trails, working in a research team, etc).

With respect to the codes, ✓ means ‘yes’ and x means ‘no’. The sub-totals show that, overall, there are 53 affirmative answers (✓) and 31 negative answers (x). These figures suggest that, collectively, the LAC reviews are methodologically adequate to make the review findings credible. This conclusion receives added support when three observations are factored in. Firstly, ‘no’ (x) means that the factor was not reported; it does not necessarily mean that the factor was absent in the conduct of the study. Secondly, a ‘no’ (x) does not necessarily reduce the integrity of the study. From the quantitative research paradigm perspective, a study based only on statistical survey data can be methodologically legitimate. From a qualitative research paradigm perspective, a study based only on ethnographic data can be methodologically legitimate. Thirdly, while internal reviews conducted under the auspices of DSC might be perceived as less independent than external reviews, an overly deterministic view should be avoided because researchers have the power of agency to recognise and manage structural influences that place their personal and professional autonomy at risk.

Table 1 and other considerations documented in this paper also suggest that future evaluations of LAC might consider a number of ideas, such as:

- extending the review repertoire to include action research, overseas comparative studies, and program evaluation models that employ different approaches, such as, advocacy team technique, goal free evaluation and connoisseur-based studies.
- making more explicit the theoretical, conceptual and ideological frameworks that inform the evaluations.
- conducting context evaluations from alternative perspectives, such as critical theory.
- conducting process evaluations that provide thick rich descriptions of the challenges that local area coordinators face and how they manage them.
- documenting in more detail the procedures used for data analysis.
- documenting in more detail the processes adopted to confirm the trustworthiness of the review findings.
- specifying whether the evaluations are intended to be formative or summative.
- ensuring that the purposes for which they are designed are made clear – eg. eg. whether they are designed for accountability, program development, advocacy, policy analysis purposes, etc.

Table 1: Factors influencing perceptions of the methodological adequacy of the LAC reviews

Year	Report	Factors influencing methodological adequacy***					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1990-1993	Country area evaluations*	x	✓	✓	x	x	x
1992	Lewis	x	✓	✓	x	x	x
1992-1993	Metropolitan evaluations**	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
1993	Lewis	x	✓	✓	x	x	x
1993	Jones	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x
1994	Lewis	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓
1996	Lewis	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	✓
1996	Yeatman	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
1997	Donovan	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1998	Stanton & Cameron	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	x
1998	Productivity Commission	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x
2000	E-QUAL & Donovan	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2002	Nucleus Group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2002	Rapanaro	x	✓	✓	x	x	x
	SUB TOTAL ✓	7	14	13	4	8	7
	SUB TOTAL x	7	0	1	10	6	7

* The country area evaluations are outlined in Lewis (1990, 1992, 1993).

** The metropolitan evaluations are outlined in English & Lindsay (1992, 1993).

*** The six factors in brief:

1. Multiple types of evidence.
2. Adequate amount of evidence.
3. Processes to get quality evidence.
4. Processes to analyse data.
5. Independence from DSC.
6. Tests of trustworthiness.

Reference details for the reports reviewed in this paper

- Lewis, G. (1990). *Two year evaluation of local coordination*. Perth: Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons.
- Lewis, G. (1992). *Local area coordination: Status report*. Perth: Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons.
- English, B. & Lindsay, A. (1992). *Local area coordination pilot project: Evaluation study report*. Perth: Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons.
- English, B. & Lindsay, A. (1993). *Local area coordination metropolitan evaluation: Final report*. Perth: Authority for Intellectually Handicapped Persons.
- Lewis, G. (1993). *An evaluation of the effectiveness of local area coordination and its approach to individualised funding*. Perth: Disability Services Commission.
- Jones, P. (1993). *The experience of local area coordination*. Perth: Geoffrey P Jones Associates
- Lewis, G. (1994). *Individual needs analysis and individualised funding: Report of an independent evaluation of its application within local area coordination*. Perth: Disability Services Commission.
- Lewis, G. (1996). *Local area coordination and individualised funding: An evaluation of its operation and impact across disability types and geographic settings*. Perth: Disability Services Commission.
- Yeatman, A. (1996). *Getting real: The final report of the review of the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Donovan Research (1997). *Consumer satisfaction survey*. Report to Disability Services Commission. Perth: Author.
- Stanton, J. & Cameron, J. (1998). *Review of the Disability Services Act 1993*. Report to the Ministerial Review Steering Committee. Perth: Jo Stanton Consultancy and Jill Cameron & Associates.
- Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (1998). *Implementing reforms in government services 1998*. Canberra: AusInfo.
- E-QUAL & Donovan Research (2000). *National satisfaction survey of clients of disability services*. A report prepared for the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision and National Disability Administrators. Canberra: AusInfo.
- E-QUAL & Donovan Research (2000a). *National satisfaction survey of clients of disability services: Jurisdiction report*. A report derived from E-QUAL & Donovan Research (2000).
- Nucleus Group (2002). *Review current responses to meeting service needs of people with a disability and the effectiveness of strategies to support families*. www.nucleusgroup.com.au
- Rapanaro, C. (2002). *Home environment services follow-up study: Experiences and outcomes relating to carers seeking an accommodation/residential care placement*. Perth: Disability Services Commission.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

Local Area Coordination (LAC), a Western Australian initiative, began in Albany in 1987. By 2000, the Disability Services Commission (DSC) had achieved “LAC coverage of 100% of metropolitan and country areas throughout the state” (Rapanaro, 2002, p.9). Over the past 12 years the growth of LAC has been accompanied by numerous research studies. The terms of reference for this paper require an analysis of these studies in order to (a) “present a survey of previous findings regarding the program” and (b) “provide a short and non technical description of the methodological adequacies of the previous research.”

Data for the paper came only from the written reports of the research studies. No interviews or conversations were held with the authors of the reports or participants in the studies. For the purpose of this paper, research is defined as “systematic inquiry made public.” Therefore, the paper only analyses reports made available in the public domain. Table 2 lists 17 such reports selected for analysis. Of these reports:

- 10 are internal, written under the auspices of DSC.
- 7 are external, written by researchers outside of DSC.
- 10 focus almost exclusively on LAC.
- 7 focus on a wider range of areas, of which LAC is but one.
- 5 are predominantly quantitative in approach.
- 8 are predominantly qualitative in approach.
- 4 are based on a fairly even mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

In addition to these 17 reports, the findings of which are summarised below, a number of DSC documents contain evaluations of LAC, or aspects of it. These documents include the Annual Reports of the DSC, External Standards Monitoring Reports, Consumer Liaison Service Annual Reports, a Review of the LAC Framework of Vision, Charter, Principles and Strategies, and a submission on LAC by the DSC for the Service Design – Delivery category of the 1998 Premier’s Awards. These documents tend not to read like research reports. And they appear to have been completed primarily for management purposes rather than predominantly as research studies. At the same time, they contain useful data for research studies, some of which has been used in a few of the 17 reports selected for analysis in this paper.

Table 2: List of reports analysed in this paper

<i>Year</i>	<i>Authors</i>	<i>Short title of the report***</i>	<i>Characteristics**</i>		
1990	Lewis	Two year evaluation of LAC (Lower Great Southern)	I	L	Qn
1991	Lewis et al*	Review of LAC (Goldfields, Mid West, Midlands, Upper Great Southern)	I	L	Qn
1993	Lewis et al*	Review of LAC (South West)	I	L	Qn
1992	Lewis	LAC: Status report	I	L	Qn/Ql
1992	English & Lindsay	LAC pilot project evaluation study report	I	L	Qn/Ql
1993	English & Lindsay	LAC metropolitan evaluation: Final report	I	L	Qn/Ql
1993	Lewis	Evaluation of LAC effectiveness and individualised funding	I	L	Qn
1993	Jones	The experience of LAC	E	L	Ql
1994	Lewis	Individual needs analysis and individualised funding	I	L	Ql
1996	Lewis	LAC and individualised funding	I	L	Qn/Ql
1996	Yeatman	Review of CSDA	E	B	Ql
1997	Donovan	Consumer satisfaction survey	E	B	Ql
1998	Stanton & Cameron	Review of Disabilities Services Act	E	B	Ql
1998	Productivity Commission	Implementing reforms in government services	E	B	Ql
2000	E-QUAL & Donovan	Client satisfaction survey	E	B	Qn
2002	Nucleus Group	Review of responses to meeting service needs and effectiveness of strategies	E	B	Ql
2002	Rapanaro	Home environment services follow up study	I	B	Ql

*** The list of reports at the end of this paper provides the full title.

** I = internal report; E = external report; L = focuses only on LAC; B = focuses on a wider range of areas of which LAC is but one; Qn = mainly a quantitative study; Ql = mainly a qualitative study; Qn/Ql = a fairly even mix of quantitative and qualitative research.

* Greg Lewis was a member of the evaluation teams that conducted these two studies. Information on them is documented in two of his reports (Lewis 1992, 1993) which comprise the source of data on the two evaluations for this paper.

SECTION 3: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS OF LAC REVIEWS

The following summaries provide a brief outline of the scope and findings of the various evaluations of LAC contained in the 17 reports.

Country area evaluations: 1990-3

Between 1990-93 DSC staff conducted three evaluations of LAC in country areas. These evaluations “surveyed 160 country families, 50 people with an intellectual disability and 50 agencies Selected across six of the eight country divisions in which 90% of eligible persons reside” (Lewis, 1993, p.17). The findings of the evaluations are comprehensively positive. In general, clients and their families rated LAC’s individualised and localised approach to service delivery as more user-friendly, and responsive than the traditional visiting team approach. More specifically they:

- gave LAC an average rating of six out of seven across 14 dimensions.
- commended local area coordinators for being reliable, personable, quick to respond, individually focussed, informative, understanding, supportive, accountable, easy to talk to, compassionate, trustworthy and effective.
- rated LAC services and support highly for relevance, flexibility, quality, short and long term value, and continuity.
- valued LAC for empowering them (clients and their families) to participate in decisions, exercise real choice, take more control of services and supports, and enjoy a higher quality of life in terms of being more self sufficient, secure, supported, satisfied and optimistic about the future.

Between them, the three studies found that LAC helped establish community agencies, such as home and community care, competitive employment training and placement, a toy library, family support association, community living association, and family extension program. They also document how these agencies and programs attracted additional funding from sources other than LAC such as various federal/state/local government and non government organisations.

With respect to inclusion, the studies found that since the introduction of LAC no pre-school child had entered a segregated primary school and no individual or family had been forced to leave their local community to find accommodation in Perth. During the first five years of LAC (1987-1992), the number of country individuals eligible for metropolitan accommodation services increased 20% but the take up rate decreased by almost 20%. By remaining at home or within their own local community these ‘at risk’ individuals consumed, “An average of \$8,000 per year – a significant reduction on the average special care or large hostel bed cost of \$70,000 per person per year (nett administration costs)” (Lewis, 1993, p.18).

On a less positive note, some consumers said that during the early days of LAC:

- making immediate personal contact with local area coordinators proved difficult at times.
- AIH and Activ Foundation could have worked together more closely.

Metropolitan evaluations 1992-3

The Authority for the Intellectually Handicapped Persons (AIH) commissioned a two year evaluation (1992-3) of a pilot study in Perth to inform its implementation of LAC in metropolitan areas. The evaluation involved a survey of 176 clients, ten family case studies, and focus group discussions with key informants. The findings of the evaluations were presented in two reports (English & Lindsay, 1992, 1993). As a predominantly formative evaluation, this study focused more on a review of the context and process of LAC than its outcomes.

Context evaluation

The context evaluation in the two reports provides statistical information on the socio-economic situation, age, schooling, social contacts, and services accessed by clients and their families in five LAC sites. It also documents key stakeholders' perceptions of the need for LAC in terms of:

- lack of access to needed services and supports.
- people with an intellectual disability being labelled, devalued and isolated.
- lack of financial resources to meet ordinary needs.
- lack of community acceptance of responsibility for the well being of people with an intellectual disability.

Overall, the context evaluation demonstrated that clients, families, local area coordinators and agencies perceived LAC as a program introduced to satisfy a grass roots appetite for localised and individualised services and support rather than a top down reform imposed on an unwilling people.

Process evaluation

The process evaluation documents participants' perceptions of factors affecting the success of LAC. It covers enabling conditions related to planning (targeting groups, setting priorities, identifying needs, providing support), the application of discretionary funding, the role and qualities of local area coordinators, and strategies for implementing LAC. It also covers a range of concerns about the implementation of LAC raised by local area coordinators, parents, Irrabena regional staff, Irrabena's principal consultants, paid support workers and generic agency staff. These concerns occupy 16 pages in 1992 report and are more extensive than those raised in any other review of LAC. They do not, however, represent a judgement that LAC is seriously flawed but are presented as an agenda of issues to be worked through.

Outcomes evaluation

The following comments from the two English & Lindsay reports contain evaluations of a more summative nature. They make claims about the outcomes of LAC for clients and their families and for the broader community.

The introduction of Local Area Coordination is seen as valuable by all informants and there is very positive feedback made by the Local Coordinators to date (1992, p.50).

The recognition and validation of parents' needs has been one of the greatest contributions by LAC (1993, p.22).

The Local Coordinators are seen (by parents) to be resourceful, available, perceptive, practical, helpful not confrontational, able to network, understanding, not judgmental, provide support rather than taking over, and helpful in developing parents' own ability to provide support (1993, p.11).

Generic agencies felt that LAC had raised their awareness of intellectual disability (1993, p.6).

The evaluations confirmed that the majority of families appreciated and found useful the support provided by the Local Coordinator. This support was seen to be complementary to the services provided by specialist providers eg AIH (1993, p.19).

LAC is able to offer a more flexible support for families than specialist and more structured services and is capable of faster response in regard to certain family needs.....Helping families access services was seen to be a key area for Local Coordinators who felt that the LAC program was developed to eliminate 'red tape' and to assist services to be responsive to individual needs rather than requiring families and individuals to fit the services being offered (1993, p.20).

Local Coordinators' work in setting up networks and in joint use of resources is also a very effective approach which results in the better utilisation of scarce resources. The creative and less orthodox approach to services was also more likely to meet certain family needs which may have had little attention in the past (1993, p.21).

They (parents) thus welcomed the approach of LAC which ensures that their views are very much a part of decisions concerning their sons and daughters (1993, p.22).

Community acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities appears to be increasing with the benefits being felt through the development of community networks. LAC is seen as a way of overcoming some of the problems of people with an intellectual disability being labelled, devalued and isolated. In particular LAC is seen as a way of facilitating the push toward community acceptance and integration at a time when there seems to be a growing willingness on the part of some community agencies to assist people with an intellectual disability who live in the general community (1993, p.22).

Overall, the findings of the LAC metropolitan evaluation could be summed up as being positive, demonstrating an authentic need for LAC, justifying the expansion of LAC, and showing that LAC does some things better than the specialist services approach.

Lewis 1992 & 1993

The Lewis 1992 and 1993 reports contain a similar mix of material, some of which involves considerable duplication. Both reports provide information on the background, principles, activities and directions of LAC. Both reports document (in the text and in appendices) details of the country area and metropolitan evaluations of LAC. Both reports document, in appendices, individual profiles of LAC support, strategies and budget details. The appendices are lengthy – as long as the main text in the 1992 report and three times as long as the main text in the 1993 report. Much of the material in the appendices seems to be original research data, but it is left largely unanalysed, and how and on what basis it was collected is left largely unexplained.

Jones 1993

In 1993, Jones Associates interviewed ten families, five local area coordinators and other key informants over a six month period to investigate their experience of LAC. In broad terms, the study found that (pp.iv-v):

- very positive relationships existed between the families and their local area coordinators.
- LAC was “an improvement compared with other recent experiences of AIH services.”
- the families rated “the methods of individual need assessment used by LACs as very worthwhile.”
- some families over the period of the study became more self-sufficient and competent with regard to organising their own services and supports.
- local area coordinators facilitated “the inclusion of people with disabilities into particular local generic services for the first time.”
- the ten families used separate services and supports in almost 200 instances during the six months of the study; 60% of these instances focussed on respite, LAC activities and professional supports.
- LAC was promoting a move towards increased integrated and local services.
- almost 50% of the services and support “were provided through specialist disability services” (most of these were not integrated or local); almost 25% “were provided through generic agencies” (most of these were integrated and local); about 13% were provided either informally or by voluntary services; and about 13% were provided by “individual workers on a contract or sessional basis” (most of these were integrated and local).

On a critical note, the Jones’ study claimed that the expansion of LAC requires the resolution of issues surrounding paid causal support people, the use of natural support networks, human resource management of local area coordinators, and the use of AIH discretionary funding.

Lewis 1994

In 1994, Lewis interviewed seven families three times over a 15 month period to explore the “interaction between individualised funding and individual needs analysis within local area coordination” (1994, p.7). A number of major themes emerged from this study, namely, that:

- local area coordinators and family members developed close relationships characterised by a high degree of trust and respect.
- within this relationship, local area coordinators served many roles, such as – advocate, guide, supporter, broker, consultant, community worker, partner, resource, problem solver, and source of direct help.
- LAC enabled families to select a diverse and customised array of supports to meet their needs.
- family-focussed LAC supports included in-home respite, out-of-home respite and vacation support.
- individual-focussed LAC supports included community access, supported holidays, skill development, employment support, domestic help, home modification,

equipment, carer travel, transport assistance, therapy services and psychological services.

- these supports varied over time, therefore individualised funding needed to be flexible and remain maximally fluid.
- all participants said that since the introduction of individualised funding within LAC they felt more optimistic about the future and/or better off.

Overall, Lewis found that individual needs analysis and individualised funding reflects “the values and philosophies underpinning local area coordination ... (and) its charter of building individual, family and community self-sufficiency to enable people with disabilities to remain within their family home or their community of choice” (1994, p.112). He also found that individual needs analysis and individualised funding “is generally perceived as a personalised, responsive, flexible and effective mechanism for supporting individuals and families across various socio-geographic settings and individual circumstances” (1994, p.112).

No complaints about LAC seem to be made across the seven case studies. However, different sub sets of parents/carers expressed concerns about:

- the lack of procedures to ensure that individuals/families approved the written contents of the funding plans.
- some local area coordinators ‘overstating the case’ to enhance the chance of funding.
- perceived cuts within the tied funding process; (a factually incorrect perception apparently).

Lewis 1996

In 1996, Lewis and a five person evaluation team completed a two year study that reviewed the expansion of LAC and individualised funding into physical and sensory disability areas. Their research involved four separate investigations: 15 case studies of families caring for a member with a physical or sensory disability; surveys of 112 families caring for an individual with a physical, sensory or intellectual disability and 57 people with one of these disabilities; an analysis of 704 families and 174 individuals who received individualised funding; and a financial analysis of LAC and individualised funding programs costs for the 1994/5 financial year. In brief, the study found that:

- the experiences and needs of people with a physical and sensory disability, and their families, were similar to those with an intellectual disability.
- the primary concern of people with disabilities, and their families, was not only the well being of the person but also the family as a whole.
- according to case study participants, LAC led to improvements in (a) the functioning and well being of the person with a disability and the family, (b) the provision and coordination of care and support, and (c) the quality and quantity of the services delivered.
- individualised funding proved vital in enabling LAC consumers to purchase goods and services not otherwise accessible in their local community.
- individualised funding gave LAC consumers flexibility, versatility and choice and was administered simply, promptly, and with a high level of accountability.

- the per capita cost of LAC was \$2,200, across all consumers; 54% (\$1,184) for service coordination; 38% (\$852) for individualised funding; and 8% (\$168) for administration.

Generally, the consumers rated their local area coordinator highly for their support, good back up, accessibility and availability, personal approach and willingness to get involved, access to funding, quality of services arranged, ability to meet clients' needs, and the "resultant positive impacts on both the person with a disability and the family as a whole" (Lewis 1996, p.vi).

Individuals and their caregiving families raised very few concerns about LAC. Those that did emerge were cited by one or two individuals, and they were not put forward as serious problems. For example, two families suggested that more access, availability and contact with local area coordinators would strengthen LAC. One family wanted more funding that it was currently receiving. But these concerns fade into the background when placed against the comprehensive level of satisfaction with LAC reported by Lewis in this study.

Yeatman 1996

In 1996, Professor Anna Yeatman conducted a review of the first Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement (CSDA). The review aimed to evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency and outcomes of the CSDA and inform the setting of strategic directions for the provision of disability services in the future. The review began by commissioning five supporting studies for the evaluation and continued with an additional round of consultations, submissions and investigations. Part of this study examined the wider implications of service development for remote Aboriginal communities. In doing so, it identified two imaginative and appropriate service responses for such communities, namely: the disability support work undertaken through the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council in Central Australia; and the Western Australian LAC mode of service delivery. "In both cases," says Yeatman, "there was an attempt to develop viable local community-based service responses so that:

- (a) people with disabilities in rural or remote locations were not forced to leave their families and move into either residential accommodation or foster families in cities or towns; and
- (b) the design of the service response was not sited in an urban, expert-driven institution where many assumptions were made that could not be sustained in the bush, but was located in the community which shaped the need in question." (Yeatman, 1996, pp.53-4).

At the same time, Yeatman emphasises that governments across Australia have little experience in supporting these kind of community-embedded service responses and the "Western Australian Local Area Coordination model is still under-appreciated for its demonstration effect and significance" (p.54).

Donovan 1997

In 1997, the DSC commissioned a private research company (Donovan Research) to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey. The survey had two purposes: to meet the DSC's program level reporting requirements to the Auditor-General; and to identify, from the viewpoint of clients and next-of-kin, how DSC services could be improved. The study

involved interviewing 442 carers and clients. Tables 3 and 4 (Donovan, 1997, pp.40-41) document the major findings with respect to LAC.

Table 3: Overall satisfaction with LAC

<i>Level of Satisfaction</i>	<i>Carers</i>	<i>Clients</i>
	134 %	134 %
Very Good	54	34
Good	27	26
Just OK	10	10
Poor	4	3
Very Poor	4	1
Don't Know	2	25
Satisfaction differential	+47	+30

By way of comparison with seven other DSC service areas, LAC scored a carer satisfaction rating of 81% in the 'very good' and 'good' categories while Respite scored 83%, Accommodation 77%, General Medical Services 75%, Specialist Health 70%, Social Workers/Trainers/Psychologists 69%, and Therapy Services 56%.

Table 4: Satisfaction with Aspects of Service from LAC

<i>Specific aspects of LAC service</i>	<i>Satisfaction level</i> (% rating by carers with an LAC. N = 134)			
	<i>Very good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Just OK</i>	<i>Poor/very poor</i>
Ease of contacting LAC	50	34	10	6
LAC's knowledge of services available	57	28	5	5
LAC's efforts to understand particular situations	60	22	9	8
LAC's ability to get things organised	54	21	9	9

Donovan (1997, p.41) sums up the key results by noting that, "The service provided by the LAC is of a high standard and.... (is) a strong contributor to the high Overall Satisfaction (with DSC)." Less than 10% of carers rated any of the four aspects in Table 3 as poor or very poor, a result that leads Donovan to say, "This strong performance on each aspect helps explain the overall high level of satisfaction with the LAC – there are no 'weak points'."

Stanton and Cameron 1998

In 1998, two private consultants, Jo Stanton and Jill Cameron, reviewed the Disability Services Act 1993 as part of a Ministerial review of the operation and effectiveness of the Act. Based on their report, the Steering Committee of the review formulated a set of recommendations for the Minister who, in turn, made a submission to Parliament. Stanton and Cameron collected information from submissions written by 235 agencies and individuals, ‘phone-ins’ over a four week period, 220 people at nine public forums, and discussions with a range of organisational stakeholders. An analysis of all this data led them to the conclusion that LAC (Part 1, p.19):

- enhanced consumer choice and control over services and supports.
- increased flexibility for consumers and portability of funding for individuals.
- provided high quality support options for consumers, tailored to individual need.
- offered additional services and supports.
- increased security for carers.
- demonstrated a high level of public accountability, as determined by regular auditing.
- met the Principles of the Act with respect to the provision of funding.

On a critical level, the following areas of concern about LAC emerged from their analysis of data:

- a possible lack the knowledge and expertise, among some individuals, carers and families, to cope with the complexities of obtaining and managing funds.
- duty of care issues.
- length of time taken to process funding.
- individualised funding, in some situations, imposing an additional burden on some families.
- difficulties in monitoring standards of care.
- perceived inconsistencies in grants to people in similar circumstances.
- funding linked to programs that don’t meet individual, holistic needs, in some cases.
- some individuals not being aware of the availability of individualised funds.

On balance, Stanton and Cameron’s study found that. “Direct consumer funding had clear benefits for the individual and their family and for Government. The benefits were clearly evident in rural and remote areas where formal services are not available” (Part 1, p.19).

SCRCSSP 1998

In 1998, the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSSP) investigated how government funded human services can be improved by better use of resources rather than simply increasing resources. As part of this research, the Productivity Commission, which acts as the Secretariat for the SCRCSSP, prepared four case studies of exemplary programs. One of these was LAC in Western Australia.

Apart from some evaluation of the context that led to the adoption of LAC, the case study prepared for the SCRCSSP focuses predominantly on a review of the processes of implementing LAC. From this review, it draws four main conclusions about implementing reforms in government services:

- the DSC approach to piloting and phasing in LAC has a number of advantages over the ‘big bang’ approach.
- the LAC principles of devolving and delegating choices closer to consumers gives a program more flexibility and responsiveness.
- improving coordination in a service like LAC can involve providing information, offering advocacy support, determining eligibility for various services, and acting as a budget holder.
- as modelled by LAC, the advantages of delegating and devolving decisions need to be balanced by appropriate accountability controls to reduce the impact of possible adverse events.

Towards the end of the case study, two future issues are tabled for further research. One focuses on whether or not consumers of LAC should be allocated to local area coordinators according to criteria such as language, ethnicity and gender rather than geographical area. The other focuses on whether or not contracting out the role of local area coordinators would achieve efficiency gains.

E-QUAL & Donovan 2000

In 1999, the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision and the National Disability Administrators commissioned E-QUAL and Donovan Research to conduct a national satisfaction survey of clients of disability services. This survey aimed to provide evaluation data for making comparisons across jurisdictions and informing policy development.

Of all the disability services surveyed across Australia in this study, four areas of superior performance by jurisdiction were identified. One of these was service coordination in WA. The survey (p.104) found that compared with other states, service coordination in WA stood out because in this state:

- more families were satisfied with service coordination. (77% in WA; 64.5% nationally)
- less families expressed dissatisfaction. (6% in WA; 12% nationally)
- more staff did what they said they would do.
- fewer families wished to change their coordinator. (2% in WA; 9.9% nationally)
- more effective communication took place between coordinators and families.

These findings and figures support the observation by E-QUAL & Donovan that, “Western Australian services were made distinctive by the performance of service coordination” (pp.104-5).

While service coordination in WA benefited from national comparison, it was also part of a survey that found across Australia the results on service were disappointing. More specifically, “Even in the jurisdictions with well developed service coordination, there was no evidence from the family survey that those completing the service coordination section had:

- fewer unmet needs;
- any increased access to, or reduced demand for, additional services;

- any better information about services;
- any greater participation in the planning of services;
- any more choice about services;
- experienced particularly good communication with service coordinators; or
- expressed greater satisfaction with services.” (E-QUAL & Donovan, 2000, p.99).

Nucleus Group 2002

In 2002, the Nucleus Group reviewed current responses across Australia to meeting the service needs of people with a disability and the effectiveness of strategies to support families. The study focussed on service responses to meet needs at an earlier stage, than current services, in order to identify current and future initiatives that represent a preventative approach.

For this study, the Nucleus Group identified key components of successful responses and grouped them into three broad approaches – service coordination, family support and independent living. Within the service coordination approach, they selected six components. One of these is coordination, for which they considered five strategies. For each component and strategy across the three approaches, an Australian example is cited and described. LAC in Western Australian was chosen as the example to illustrate the case management and service brokerage strategy within the coordination component of the Service Coordination approach.

The first part of the Nucleus Group’s report describes and illustrates the various approaches, components and strategies that the researchers selected as having the potential “to improve service responses to the needs of families and individuals over the long term” (p.73). The second part constructs a framework for analysis consisting of 15 principles and then examines how the Australian services cited in Part 1 might meet these principles. Table 5 below indicates each principle that LAC is cited and described as illustrating. Of the 13 practice examples used in Part 1 to illustrate Service Coordination, LAC is cited most frequently as illustrating the 15 principles and those citations are described in more detail than any of the other 12 practice examples.

Table 5: Framework principles for service coordination

Principles	Illustrated by LAC
<i>Builds resilience across the lifespan</i>	
1. Adopts a strengths-based approach to building the resources of individuals and families	Yes
2. Provides supports and resources in ways that encourage, develop and maintain healthy, stable relationships among family members with focus on early intervention and encouraging help-seeking behaviour.	Yes
3. Demonstrates a lifespan of long-term perspective, providing support either within or through transition between life stages with clear links to future outcomes.	Yes
4. Seeks to transfer decision-making power to people with a disability and their families and carers	Yes
5. Complements and works alongside informal supports to strengthen	Yes

informal support networks for families (rather than depending solely on professional support systems).	
6. Provides information and learning opportunities, including skills development.	No*
<i>Impacts on need and environmental factors at community, family and individual levels.</i>	
7. Encourages ‘linked’ action across all areas of government activity, improving access to generic as well as specialised services across the diversity of community living; eg. housing, transport, and employment.	Yes
8. Takes into account the individual’s environment (i.e. recognises the interplay of individual and environment characteristics) including the total family situation and needs.	Yes
9. Decentralised decision-making provides flexibility and autonomy for workers including opportunities to spend time on inter-agency coordination.	No*
10. Incorporates a very strong principle of understanding and being guided by the individual or family’s lifestyle, values and daily routines and accommodations.	Yes
11. Services are extensive, flexible and provide an individualised range of supports, with timing of interventions to converge and support multiple needs.	No*
<i>Increases efficiency and effectiveness of service provision</i>	
12. Increase cost effectiveness of service delivery.	Yes
13. Incorporates elements of training and support for professionals, staff and volunteers involved in the delivery of services.	Yes
14. Applies referral and assessment tools that are appropriate to the level of need and minimises (where possible) duplication in assessment and eligibility requirements.	Yes
15. Improves access to under-represented groups including indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, geographically or socially isolated families and country communities	Yes

* “No” means LAC was not selected to illustrate the principle; not that it does not meet the principle.

Rapanaro 2002

This year (2002), Cher Rapanaro completed a follow up study of 21 carers/families involved in the 1987 Home Environment Study. Eight of these participating families “care for their family member at home, seven have placed their family members into residential care and for the remaining six, the family member now lives in a community setting” (p.i). Rapanaro’s study explored experiences and factors that led to different outcomes for carers in these different types of situations. In relation to LAC, the study found that:

- LAC provides all three main types of formal support service available to carers – practical or instrumental support, information and advocacy, and emotional support – a combination that carers highly value.

- Some families have received LAC support only recently; prior to that they found other ways to manage demands; however, since receiving LAC support they have experienced greater peace of mind, knowing that LAC help and advice is available “at the very time it was most needed” (p.33).
- In 2002, the average cost per person supported by LAC was \$2,289 which is “a cost efficient means of supporting carers” (p.54).
- Overall, LAC is one of the most valued sources of support for carers who provide care in the family home.

Summary of recommendations

Two of the reports contain formal recommendations. One is the Donovan (1997) consumer satisfaction survey. It makes numerous recommendations with respect to policy and future satisfaction surveys. The only one relevant to LAC states: “The results would suggest that if any one (DSC) service expansion should take priority, it should be that of the LAC scheme” (p.70).

The other report that includes formal recommendations is the Jones' (1993) study. It recommends (pp 34-42) that consideration be given to implications of the review’s findings for:

- the skill development and employment relationships of casual workers within LAC.
- the capacity of LAC to serve the out-of-home respite needs of families.
- the future workloads of local area coordinators.
- the performance appraisal, support and working conditions of local area coordinators.
- further investigation into the use of AIH discretionary funding to facilitate access to non-individualised specialist disability services.
- further investigation of relatively high barriers to families gaining access to essential services such as respite, compared with medical and therapy services.
- a review of the reliability and usefulness of the current system of support categories and sub categories.
- a review of the main files and documentation they contain in light of LAC developments.

The other reports do not make formal recommendations. Most of them, however, present aspects of the findings in a way that might be seen as representing informal or implicit recommendations. For example, Lewis (1992, p.28) ‘recommends’ re-profiling local area coordination in these terms:

Thus, it does not appear feasible (due to time demands) or fruitful (due to minimal savings) to focus the efforts of local area coordinators on residential repatriations. It would be preferable to project manage each individual repatriation at the facility end and use the relevant local area coordinator as a local resource, advocate for the person/family and post-repatriation service coordinator.

In the same report, Lewis (p.32) documents fourteen ‘threats’ to LAC and then says, “It is imperative that each of the above threats be acknowledged and addressed in the process of expanding local area coordination.”

English and Lindsay (1993, pp24-26) use phrases such as “it is important that”, (individual findings) “highlight a need for...”, (some concerns are) “probably best addressed”, and “it would be expected that”, to make ‘recommendations’ such as:

- An appraisal system should be developed to independently monitor the performance of local area coordinators. (p.24)
- Plans for the implementation of LAC in new areas should take into account resistance from some people committed to a specialised, profession-driven service. (p.24)
- An ongoing debate on the “philosophy and practice of providing support to families” should be conducted to ensure that “current practice development is congruent with policy.” (p.25)
- The inadequate capacity of generic services to support people with an intellectual disability should be addressed at the system level. (p.25)
- Families, parents and individuals should have input into the development of “quality assurance in LAC and a say in its future directions as a service strategy. (p.26).

As indicated earlier, Lewis (1994) reported a number of parents’/carers’ concerns about LAC that “suggest ways in which the current individual needs analysis and funding process could be improved” (p.110). In his discussion of possible improvements, Lewis makes an observation that could be construed as a ‘recommendation’, namely: “It is vital to the integrity of individualised funding (and, indeed, local area coordination) that individuals/families come to attach the same degree of security to tied funding as they would to bricks-and-mortar services such as hostels or group homes” (p.112).

Lewis integrates ‘recommendations’ into the discussion of his 1996 study findings by suggesting that further research should explore:

-the relationship between the needs assessor and the individual or family and its influence on the needs analysis process. (p.155)
-whether reactions to the local area coordination service does vary significantly across individuals with physical/sensory versus intellectual disabilities. (p.166)
-whether the outcomes achieved by local area coordination in country areas translate to metropolitan settings. (p.166)

In a similar way, Lewis (1996) also ‘recommends’ that:

- Relevant government departments should cooperate to extend a system of building appropriately designed houses that suitable people can live in rent free in return for providing respite. (p.159)
- Individualised funding allocations should be made to local area coordinators to fund community based supports for the increasing number of people with disabilities who move from residential facilities back into the community. (p.162)
- With the LAC, a balance should be maintained between service coordination, individualised funding and administration costs. (p.177)
- The future local area coordinator to consumer ratio of 1:50 should be maintained. (p.178)

Yeatman (1996) does not make formal recommendations with respect to LAC but in one of her concluding statements she does say, “It is preferable, where possible, that the expert-professional go to the community rather than the individual be extracted from his

or her local context in order to go to the professional in an entirely different setting” (p.54).

Stanton and Cameron’s (1998) review of the Disabilities Services Act 1993 includes a section on agency and individualised funding. In the discussion of data presented in this section they ‘recommend’ that, “Comments in respect to funding focused on factors impacting on their effectiveness and could be addressed at a policy level rather than through the Legislation” (p.18).

As indicated earlier, the SCRCSSP (1998) report draws four conclusions from the LAC case study and discusses several options for the future development of LAC. The nearest it comes to a recommendation, though, is the observation that, “Where services are available from, and funded by, a range of organisations, there may need to be some cooperation among these organisations to minimise problems such as cost shifting” (p.113).

Some findings from the E-QUAL and Donovan (2000) national satisfaction survey of clients of disability services embody implications for further evaluations of LAC (eg. p.99) but the report itself does not make explicit what these implications might involve.

The Nucleus Group report (2002) uses a framework of 15 principles to analyse the service coordination approach used for meeting the needs of people with disabilities. It concludes the analysis by identifying eleven “Aspects of this approach that should be emphasised in order to better meet needs and manage service demand” (p.83). These aspects, however, tend to be presented in terms of factors affecting the success of service coordination in general rather than action recommendations for LAC in particular.

Finally, the conclusions summarised in pages ii-iii of the Rapanaro report (2002) contain the following statements about LAC that might be seen as having the status of recommendations:

In terms of service delivery, there is a need to consider additional interventions to complement traditional services (such as flexible family support, and Local Area Coordination), which can address and enhance the personal resources of carers and their capacity to provide care. (p.ii)

The LAC network should continue, given that the service entails *both* a practical and emotional component to the support offered, which addresses a range of carers’ needs and is therefore highly valued by carers/families. (p.iii)

Section 3 ends with a summary of the recommendations made in the reviews. This summary does not reflect the coherence of the reports because most of them do not systematically formulate explicit recommendations from the findings. Thus, readers are left to identify any implicit ‘recommendations’ embodied within the reports. For the same reason, the summary of recommendations does not do justice to the comprehensive coverage of the LAC reviews. Consistent with the findings, however, none of the recommendations, explicit or implicit, questions the need for LAC or proposes that LAC should be radically restructured. Rather, they represent a view that improvements should be approached by reforms from within. As such, the ‘recommendations’ represent a form of endorsement for the broad philosophical and structural settings of LAC.

Closing comments

Closing observations about the findings of the 17 reports summarised above appear in the Executive Summary at the beginning of this paper.

SECTION 4: METHODOLOGICAL ADEQUACY OF THE LAC REVIEWS

Are the positive findings of the reviews of LAC too good to be true? Does the methodology used to produce these findings provide grounds for accepting them as credible? To answer this questions, the 17 reports will be now examined in terms of:

- types and sources of evidence.
- amount of evidence.
- quality of evidence.
- analysis of evidence.
- independence of the research.
- validity or trustworthiness of the findings.
- broad utility of the findings.

Given the limit of 20-25 pages (plus executive summary) imposed by the terms of reference, this paper will examine the collective methodological adequacies of the 17 reports, rather than examine them one by one. In doing so, it will refer to aspects of the individual reports to illustrate and support observations made about them as a set.

Types and sources of evidence

As a general rule, the credibility of positive program evaluations increases when they are based on multiple sources and types of data, when they are conducted from a variety of angles by a variety of people using a variety of methods; that is, when triangulation is evident. Collectively, the data collected for studies involving reviews of LAC comes from a diverse range of sources, paradigms and processes. For example, of the 17 studies listed in Table 1:

- 10 were conducted and/or controlled by staff and agencies internal to DSC; 7 were conducted and/or controlled by researchers and agencies external to DSC.
- 13 were studies of services within WA; 4 were national studies of services across Australia.
- 12 were conducted by staff working in the public sector; 5 were conducted by researchers in the private sector.
- 8 were predominantly qualitative and 5 predominantly quantitative in design; 4 were based on a fairly even mix of qualitative and quantitative research approaches.
- between them, the studies involved the collection and analysis of data from:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ individual interviews ❑ focus group discussions. ❑ large public meetings. ❑ phone-ins. ❑ written submissions. ❑ documentary analyses. ❑ case studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ key informants. ❑ social surveys, ❑ consumer surveys. ❑ written records and reports. ❑ literature reviews. ❑ observation.
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The degree of triangulation afforded by these multiple sources of data could be measured by comparing them with the range of data sources used for evaluating alternative programs to LAC. For example, do the evaluations of non LAC programs across Australia employ a wider range of types of data than those listed above? Another

indication for the degree of triangulation could be gained by identifying types of data that LAC reviews seldom call upon, such as those discussed below.

Action research. Given the number and regularity of reviews into LAC over the past 15 years, its development might be seen as representing an overall ongoing process of action research. Sustaining such a view, however, would require a detailed look at whether LAC program developments have been informed by the findings of research reviews into LAC, rather than other influences. At a less broad sweeping level, it can be noted that none of the 17 reports examined in this paper reflected an action research approach.

Overseas comparative data. Several of the 17 reports refer to and provide some information on overseas models relevant to LAC (eg. Lewis 1996, Nucleus Group 2002). None of them, however, involve researchers visiting other countries to collect comparative data for evaluating LAC. None of them refer to anyone outside of the reviews who has made such a visit.

Program evaluation models. The literature contains a number of program evaluation models that so far have not been employed in LAC reviews. For example, models that employ the advocacy team technique, goal free evaluation, connoisseur-based studies, Delpi technique, and sociodrama, to mention a few.

Critical theory perspective. The type of data that researchers collect depends partly on their ideological perspective. Very few of the reports on LAC discussed in this paper make explicit the ideological framework underpinning the research they document. Judging from the discourse, they appear to be based on liberal, pluralistic, interactionist perspectives rather than alternative perspectives such as critical theory.

There may be sound reasons why the LAC reviews have not been designed to seek data from these four sources or methodological approaches. Of interest here would be whether these data sources have been used in evaluations of non LAC programs across Australia.

Amount of evidence

The credibility of positive program evaluations depends not only the diversity of evidence but also on the amount of evidence. This includes the number, size and scope of the evaluations. If the other DSC reports involving evaluations of LAC are added to the 17 analysed in this paper, then over the past 12 years at least 24 reports have covered LAC. This averages out at two per year. Of the 24 reports, at least half focus exclusively on LAC. The number of pages in these reports is indicated in Table 6. Some of the reports contain little more than summaries of the others. For example, the 1992 and 1993 Lewis reports are largely accounts of the three country and the metropolitan evaluations. Also the SCRSSP case study relies heavily on information from the DSC reports.

Table 6: Length of some reports that focus only on LAC

<i>Year</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>No. of pages</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>No. of pages</i>
1990	Lewis et al	26	1993	Jones	62
1992	Lewis	61	1994	Lewis	124
1992	English et al	55	1996	Lewis	270
1993	English et al	26	1998	SCRCSSP	25
1993	Lewis	64			

Table 7 suggests that the number of LAC clients/families who had input into the LAC reviews totals over 850. The precise number is difficult to determine because in some studies the number of individuals in each family who participated is not specified. In addition to clients/families, Table 7 suggests that some 539 other people have had input into reviews of LAC in WA. However, it can be noted that while collective sample for the clients/families across the studies in Table 3 totals over 850, this does not necessarily mean 850 separate individuals because some individuals may have participated in more than one study.

Table 7: Number of participants in the reviews of LAC

<i>Report</i>	<i>Clients/families</i>	<i>Agencies</i>	<i>Other stakeholders</i>
1990 Lewis	60	9	
1991 Lewis	56	30	
1993 Lewis	94	11	
1992/3 English & Lindsay	147	34	
1993 Jones	10		
1994 Lewis	22		
1996 Lewis	183		
1997 Donovan	143		
1998 Stanton & Cameron		74	381*
2000 E-Qual & Donovan	129		
2002 Rapanaro	21		
TOTALS	856	158	381

* 161 written submissions from individuals and 220 people at forums; some of these may have been LAC clients and their families.

Quality of evidence

The credibility of positive program evaluations based on large amount of evidence from multiple sources can be brought into question if that evidence is poor in quality; for example, if the evidence is highly selective, biased, and 'doctored'. The methods of sample selection and data collection provide an indication of the quality of the evidence.

Sampling for quantitative surveys

The quantitative evaluations of LAC fall into four groups: the two consumer surveys conducted by Donovan and E-QUAL (1997, 2000); the 1996 Lewis study; the metropolitan evaluation (1992-3); and the three country evaluations (1990, 1991, 1993).

The 1997 and 2000 consumer surveys provide more detail, than the other 15 reports, on the nature of their sample and the sampling process. The level of that detail (three pages for the 1997 survey and nine pages for the 2000 survey) suggest that appropriate steps were taken to ensure that the sample of LAC consumers surveyed was representative, defensible and selected according to principles of quantitative research.

The 1996 Lewis report devotes three pages to outlining the process for selecting the survey samples and the methodological rationale for the process. In doing so it makes explicit some of the restrictions that apply and ways in which the final sample was not entirely representative. In this study, the sample was structured, rather than random, but in a way that was academically accountable and transparent.

The 1992-3 metropolitan study reports spends 2.5 pages describing the sampling process. It indicates that 129 individuals/families were selected from five LAC areas and that the response rate was about 55%. No information is provided to indicate whether the sample within each site was selected on a random or structured basis.

Some of the early reviews of LAC in country areas were able to sample a high proportion of eligible participants (LAC clients/families) because LAC covered a relatively small number of the total constituency. For example the first study (1990) evaluated LAC in the Lower Great Southern Division. All 81 individuals/families in that division who used a service provided through LAC were selected for the survey, 77 were able to be contacted and 60 consented to an interview.

Data collection for quantitative surveys

Survey data for the quantitative studies discussed above was collected by a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews. The interviewers for the 1991, 1996, 1997 and 2000 surveys received training that ranged in length from one hour to half a day. Their training was designed to prepare them for administering surveys to people with disabilities. Presumably the 1992-3 metropolitan survey was administered by professionally qualified staff in the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Branch of the AIH. The accounts of the 1990 and 1993 country evaluations provide no indication of whether or not the interviewers received any training.

The 1997 Donovan survey collected responses almost entirely by telephone interviews. In the 2000 client survey, 54% of interviews were by telephone and 46% by face to face conversations.; the family survey used mail outs to collect information.

The interviewers for the 1997 and 2000 surveys were independent of LAC. 75% of the interviewers for the 1996 Lewis survey were independent of LAC.

The 1997 and 2000 reports provide considerable detail on how the survey instruments were developed through a multi-stage approach that involved pilot studies, tests and refinements. The other quantitative survey reports do not provide this type of information.

Qualitative study samples and data collection

The qualitative studies of LAC divide into two broad types: those that used a mix of interviews, focus group discussion, and documentary data; and those that only used documentary data (eg. SCRCSSP 1998; Nucleus Group 2002). Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions play a central role in five studies, namely: English & Lindsay (1992), Jones (1993), Lewis (1994), Lewis (1996), and Rapanaro (2002). The data for these studies could be regarded as representative, unbiased and as capturing the real and enduring views and experiences of the participants to the extent that it was collected by:

- purposive sample selection based on the principle of maximum variation.
- the use of interview questions that allow for open ended responses.
- interviewers whom participants feel enabled to say what they really think.
- opportunities for participants to corroborate and amend what they say by allowing them, for example, to read transcripts of their interview comments or summaries of focus group discussions.
- a series of interviews over time, rather than one off snapshot interview sessions.
- interviews/focus group discussions that continue until data redundancy, saturation, the law of diminishing returns is reached.

English & Lindsay 1992-3. This study included two separate qualitative investigations. The sample for the first comprised the five local area coordinators of the five sites under review; that is, a sample of 100%. Each local area coordinator was interviewed twice within a month according to an interview guide. No information is provided on the nature of this guide or the length of the interviews, though from the detail in the findings it can be inferred that the interviews were one to two hours in length and allowed open ended responses to questions. The five LACs received transcripts of their interviews for corroboration and amendment. Staff of the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Branch of the AIH conducted the interviews for this investigation. Presumably these staff were trained and experienced research interviewers.

The sample for the second English & Lindsay investigation comprised 47 key informants, namely:

- 18 parents chosen from a list compiled by local coordinators on the basis of maximum variability.
- all four principal consultants at Irrabena; that is, 100% of the constituency.
- 12 Irrabena staff, nominated by local coordinators to represent a range of perspectives.
- 6 support workers, from a group of 11, nominated by local coordinators.
- 7 agency staff, from a group of 10 nominated by local coordinators.

“The key informant groups were selected to ensure that views were obtained from as wide a range of consumers and providers as possible” (English & Lindsay, 1992, p.24).

Staff from the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Branch of the AIH conducted a focus group discussion with each key informant group using open ended questions based on the aims of the study. Notes taken during these discussions were returned to participants for comment and verification.

Jones & Associates 1993. The sample for this study comprised ten families who were considered by the local area coordinators to fit one or more of six nominated situations; that is, the sample was selected to represent a range of these situations. Information on each family was gained from four sources: the families themselves, their local area coordinator, a support person not working in AIH, and an Irrabena team member. Participants from each of these four sources were interviewed twice (six months apart) for two to three hours each time. "Interviews were conducted by an experienced interviewer using a set of structured interview schedules designed for each type of key informant" (Jones, 1993, p.3). The families and local area coordinators completed detailed probe sheets as part of the data collection. In addition to the probe sheets, the families were asked to keep a diary and a year planner (p.3).

Lewis 1994. This report documents case studies of seven families who were selected because they best fitted the focus of the study; that is the sample was structured rather than random. The researcher, who was Director of LAC at the time, interviewed 22 members of these seven families on three occasions (May, November, July) over a 15 month period. The interviews ranged in length from 1-3 hours and were conducted in the participants' homes. A telephone conversation took place between the second and third interviews to maintain contact and obtain additional information. Judging from the written findings for the study, the research used a semi structured interview schedule based around the objectives of the study. Using notes taken during the interview, the researcher wrote a draft 'story' of each family's experience and sent them to the relevant participants for corroboration and amendment.

Lewis 1996: This study was conducted by an evaluation team comprising three interviewers (university academics with expertise and experience in the field), two raters (parents of children with disabilities) and the team leader (report author and Director of LAC). The evaluation team selected a sample of 12 families and three individuals (15 cases) to reflect "disability types, family structures, community types and support systems" characterising consumers of LAC (p.45). Participants in the 15 cases were interviewed three times over two years. The first interview followed an informal conversational approach. The second and third interviews began with a review of issues that emerged from the previous interview so that participants could validate their authenticity, and then a structured conversation took place within a general interview guide.

Rapanaro 2002. Of the 38 participants eligible for inclusion in this study, 21 agreed to take part, 10 declined, four could not be contacted and three did not respond. Data for each of the 21 participants came from documents (client files and DSC data bases) and face-to-face interviews. The researcher, a DSC officer, used a semi structured interview approach to explore the diverse circumstances and experiences of the carers/families included in the study. The participants were phoned to gain informed consent to take part in an interview in their home. The report does not specify the length of the interviews but judging from the detail in the findings, they probably lasted for 1-3 hours.

Overall. These five thumbnail sketches of data collection processes used in the qualitative reviews of LAC indicate that most of the studies met most of the conditions, listed earlier, that lead to high quality evidence. In cases where some conditions seem to be missing, the absence may, or may not, be more in the reporting than in the research.

An alternative reading of the reports might raise several questions. One relates to the absence of snowball sampling. In an emergent qualitative research design, additional participants can be added to the sample as leads ‘emerge’ during successive phases of the research. Most of the five qualitative studies of LAC discussed above selected a fixed sample at the beginning of the research.

A second question relates to DSC staff serving as the researchers. At each stage in the data collection process - eg. selecting the sample, constructing the interview questions, interviewing, probing, prompting, recording – researchers can wittingly or unwittingly ensure predetermined findings, in ways often difficult to trace. Some indicators of such partiality within the text of research reports include:

- emotive discourse.
- explicit value judgments.
- monolithic findings when pluralistic perspectives could be expected.
- no questioning, deconstruction of underlying values and interests.
- no identification and discussion of options and alternative perspectives.
- no explicit declaration by researchers of their ideological position on the issues under investigation and whether or not conducting the research presents them with a conflict of interest.

This matter will be discussed in more detail in the section on ‘independence of the evidence’. What can be pointed out now, though, is that in the five qualitative studies examined above, data was collected by a mix of private consultants, university academics and DSC staff. And in nearly half of the studies conducted by DSC staff, the researchers worked in sections outside of LAC.

Analysis of evidence

Unless adequately analysed, large amounts of high quality evidence from multiple sources may appear fragmented and lack impact. Put differently, to be meaningful and credible, research data needs to be rigorously analysed by methods appropriate to the paradigm used to collect it.

Quantitative surveys

The approach used to analyse data in the early quantitative studies (eg. the three country area evaluations) consisted of adding up the responses to calculate what percentage of them fitted various points on a Lickert type scale and to calculate mean ratings on this scale. The later quantitative studies (eg. Donovan 1997 and E-QUAL & Donovan 2000) discuss some issues involved in interpreting raw satisfaction scores and explain their approach to addressing these issues; eg. the construction of ‘satisfaction differentials’. The 2000 report contains an eight page explanation of the approach used to analyse the

raw quantitative survey data (E-QUAL & Donovan, 2000, pp201-8). The explanation addresses the allocation of respondents to MDS codes, the weighting procedure and weights applied, the statistical significance tests that were undertaken, and the estimation of sampling error and standard error.

Qualitative studies

The appropriate method of data analysis for qualitative research studies designed to explore participants' experiences and definitions of particular situations is to let themes, patterns and issues emerge from the data, rather than try to fit the data into predetermined frameworks. The literature on qualitative research methodology documents various strategies of coding and categorising data that enable such analysis to proceed in a disciplined way. As the following accounts indicate, some reports indicate awareness and adoption of these strategies; others less so.

English & Lindsay 1992 provide virtually no explanation of how interview and focus group discussion data was analysed. The only mention of data analysis method occurs in three sentences:

The information from the discussion was analysed and revealed a number of recurring themes from the different perspectives of key informants. This confirmed the process as valuable in identifying key issues and concerns. This method of comparison across key informants is a useful and recognised method for ensuring validity in qualitative research. (p.25)

Jones 1993 used File Maker Pro to organise all the data collected on the 10 families into two major databases: an Interview database and a Probe database. The following comments represent all that this report says about the method of data analysis used in the study.

The Interview data-base enabled the consultant to quickly access all verbatim responses to interview questions that related to specific evaluation questions....After visual inspection and highlighting critical comments the consultant could write the section of the report relating to the particular evaluation questions....The Probe data-base which included some forced choice and financial data was used in a similar way... Electronic spreadsheets were used to provide descriptive statistics where required. (p.3)

Lewis 1994 states that, "The method chosen for the evaluation was a naturalistic inquiry after Lincoln and Guba" (p.16). The report does not go on to indicate what Lincoln and Guba's method of qualitative data analysis involves or provide explicit indication of how it was used. It does point out, however, that for each case, the researcher assembled the interview notes "into a 'story' of the applicant's experiences" (p.17) under a series of headings chosen by the researcher. Another part of the data analysis process involved the researcher meeting with "an evaluation reference group comprising HHLGCS staff (from Perth and Canberra) and DSC staff to identify the key issues emerging from the initial interviews" (p.18). The 'discussion' chapter following the case studies begins by stating that, "A number of themes emerge from the family stories" (p.108) but the process used to identify these themes remains undescribed.

Lewis 1996 provides the most detailed account of the approach used to analyse data. The following passage (Lewis 1996, pp50-2) indicates the difference in the degree to which

this report explicitly outlines the data analysis processes used, compared with the other qualitative reports.

After the completion of each interview, the interviewer sent the original audiotape of the interview to the team leader. A full text of the interview was transcribed from the audiotape and a copy of each was sent to the interviewer and the assigned rater. The interviewer and the rater independently listened to their audiotapes of the interview and recorded the various issues that were raised by respondents. Each separate issue was written onto a 15cm by 10cm “study card”. Each card was coded using interviewer or rater initials, consumer initials and interview number.

The evaluation team reconvened in June 1993 to collate the issue cards from the first six case study sites into general themes – keeping responses from families and individuals separate. Duplicative statements (i.e., the same issue heard and recorded by both the interviewer and the rater) were jointly identified by the interviewer and rater. One or other of the redundant cards was then discarded from the analysis.

The theme analysis process began by separating cards into different piles on the basis of what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call “look-alike” or “feel-alike” features. As cards in the pile accumulated a covering rule and category properties were developed. Once developed each card in that provisional theme category was reviewed against the rule for inclusion. Any misfits were placed in a “miscellaneous” pile for re-allocation to another, or a new, provisional category.

Once a full category set had been developed (i.e., all cards were assigned to a category from the available cards), the categories were then compared for possible overlaps or over-inclusion. Some categories were sub-divided, or even trisected, and some were combined. At this point each category was provisionally named. This process was continued as cards from the remaining seven sites were received.

The evaluation team met again in August 1993 to integrate the issues from case study sites seven to twelve into the provisional theme categories developed out of sites one to six. New categories were generated and some existing categories further sub-divided. The process was repeated for the final two case study sites at the evaluation team meeting in December 1993.

No discrete new theme categories emerged from the final two sites – suggesting, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) predict, that around this stage in the expansion of case study sites, new information would become progressively more scarce and more expensive to collect.

Having reached agreement as to the number, nature and content of each theme category, the evaluation team then gave each provisional category a final, suitably descriptive title. Each theme title and each issue under that theme title were then loaded into a computerised database (Microsoft Filemaker Pro). Thus, each issue identified by the interviewer or rater was separately recorded on the database and coded by family/individual, interviewer/rater, interview number and theme category. (pp.50-52)

Independence of the research

If researchers are given, and take, a ‘free hand’ they can investigate and report findings without ‘fear or favour’, without ‘pulling punches’, without compromising the truth they would speak to people in power. A number of the internal LAC reviews and DSC briefing notes explicitly claim that the research they report is independent or has been conducted by independent researchers. For example (*italics added*):

Two *independent* consultants examined aspects of the program and a meta-evaluation of the process was carried out by an *independent* researcher. (English & Lindsay, 1993, p.ii)

The case study format entailed an *independent* interviewer....The process of selecting the *independent* interviewer involved an advertisement in the West Australian newspaper calling for written applications to undertake the research. (Lewis 1994, pp16-17)

Individual needs and individualised funding: Report of an *independent* evaluation of its application within local area co-ordination. (Title of Lewis 1994 report)

An *independent* evaluation team was assembled to perform the case study and survey tasks of the evaluation. (Lewis 1996, p.iii)

Customers (through *independent* evaluations) are telling us that there have been significant improvements in their well being..... Other *Independent* Reviews. (DSC Premier's Award Submission 1998, pp. 2 & 8)

This report was prepared by a monitoring team comprising two *independent* monitors. (DSC 2001, Standards Monitoring report, cover page)

The following program review and reporting strategies have been used; *independent* evaluations of country and metropolitan operations. (DSC Ministerial Briefing Note 15/2/2001)

Since the start of LAC it has been subject to *independent* evaluations of country and metropolitan operations. (LAC Review briefing note for this paper, p.1)

Various features of the internal reviews of LAC conducted under the auspices of DSC add support to their claims to be independent. For example, in some cases:

- the steering committee included outsiders from universities and other government agencies (eg. English & Lindsay 1992,1993).
- the evaluation was conducted by DSC staff who worked outside of LAC (eg. English & Lindsay 1992, 1993; Rapanaro 2002).
- part of the evaluation was conducted by researchers from outside agencies such as universities (eg. Lewis 1996).
- the reports contain comments that also critique rather than only confirm aspects of LAC operations. (eg. English & Lindsay 1992, p.1993)
- the process of selecting an independent investigator is made explicit in the report (eg. Lewis, 1994).

At the same time, several features of these reports provide a basis for questions about claims to independence. Firstly, in some cases the chair and a clear majority of steering committee members were DSC staff. Secondly, most of the chief investigators or research team leaders were DSC staff, in some cases senior LAC managers with a clear interest in positive findings from the LAC reviews. Thirdly, with a few exceptions, the reports rarely contain any evidence of substantive input from the outside research consultants on the steering committee.

What helps and what hinders a researcher to be independent? One view is that extensive expertise and experience in the field enhances the capacity to be independent, as suggested in the selection process for the 1994 Lewis study researcher. An alternative view is that if there are contested views in the field, then independence requires researchers to be non aligned, to not take sides, to bring no baggage with them, to have

no vested interest in the findings of the study. From this viewpoint, extensive expertise and experience in the field might be seen as reducing the capacity to be independent.

Apart from the personal and professional attributes of the individual researcher, the independence of program evaluations has an institutional dimension. Institutional independence often depends on who is funding the research, who sets the terms of reference, who selects the researcher, who controls access to relevant data, who supervises the work of the researcher, who exercises the power of veto, who controls the release of the research findings. These types of issues can sometimes place internal reviews at risk of being perceived as vehicles for self interested advocacy rather than non partisan research. The internal reviews of LAC show an awareness of this danger by professing to be independent and by taking steps that might assure readers that the findings are trustworthy (see next section in this report).

During the first ten years of its operation, nearly all of the reviews of LAC were internal. Over the past five years, aspects of LAC have been studied by external reviewers. Are these external reviews more independent than the internal reviews? In principle, it might be argued, they should be because they are not subject to impositions on their independence faced by internal reviews. In practice, however, the independence of external reviewers of LAC might be affected by a range of factors, such as:

- whether or not the DSC funds the external evaluation and has a controlling say on the steering committee and how much it exercises that control.
- the extent to which the external reviewers wish to gain further commissioned research grants from DSC.
- how dependent the external reviewers are upon data collected or supplied by DSC.
- the basis on which the external reviewers are selected by DSC, in cases where DSC makes the selection.
- whether or not the external reviewers negotiate with DSC to make their findings public.
- whether the review is state-based or part of a broader national study.

In 1997 a private market research company (Donovan Research) conducted an external review of LAC, a survey of consumer satisfaction. DSC commissioned Donovan Research to conduct the study and endorsed its findings. A DSC steering committee played a role in setting the terms of reference, assisting with various methodological procedures, having input into selecting the sample, and facilitating access to the participants from whom data was collected. DSC commissioned the research to gain data for meeting its program level reporting requirements to the Auditor-General.

A second external study of LAC, completed in 1998, was funded, controlled and conducted by the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth State Service Provision (SCRCSSP) based in Melbourne. At a governance level this study could claim to be more independent than the 1997 Donovan research. The SCRCSSP report contains four case studies, one of which focuses on LAC in Western Australia. According to the report, “The case studies drew on the experience of departmental officers from the participatory jurisdictions, as well as input from some providers, client groups and other stakeholders” (1998, p.3). The report provides no further details on the collection of data. Judging from sources acknowledged in the report, much of the information for the LAC

case study came from seven reports written by DSC. While not formally referenced, other material presented in the report could have come from interviews with DSC “departmental officers.” The researchers, however, were in a position to be selective in what aspects of DSC data they used and to independently analyse that data and place their own constructions upon it.

Another external study, completed in 1998, is the Review of the Disability Service Act 1993. Two private consultants conducted the review. The five person steering committee was chaired by a legal practitioner outside of DSC and comprised a ministerial adviser on disability services, two staff from the Ministry of Premier and Cabinet, and an executive officer who was a parent of a son with disabilities and a past DSC board member. In principle, the steering committee appears to be largely independent of DSC. In practice its independence depends to some extent on the nature of the links between the Ministry staff and the DSC. The steering committee had the opportunity to exercise influence because it advised the Minister on what recommendations his report to parliament could include. The DSC had input into the review. For example, “a number of respondents (mainly organisations) called for a review of Local Area Coordination. The Commission (DSC) provided documentation to show that this program has been extensively reviewed with consistently positive results” (Stanton & Cameron 1998, Part 1, p.8). Also, DSC’s written submission forms Appendix 2 in Part 3 of the report. The bulk of the data, though, came from sources outside the DSC, such as nine public forums, written submissions from 74 agencies and 161 individuals, phone-ins, and discussions with a range of government agencies.

A fourth external study that evaluated aspects of LAC was the National Satisfaction Survey of Clients with Disability Services, completed in 2000. It could claim to be independent on a number of grounds. It was commissioned by two national bodies, the SCRSSP and the National Disability Administrators, not the state DSC. It was conducted by a private consortium comprising E-QUAL and Donovan Research. It involved collecting original data rather than relying on information from DSC. And it covered a wide range of disability services across every state and territory in Australia. These factors place the study at some distance from DSC.

The fifth external study that investigated LAC was conducted by the Nucleus Group in 2002. The study involved constructing a framework of components of successful service coordination, family support and independent living programs and evaluating selected Australian approaches against that framework. LAC was one of these approaches. Was it independently selected? It is difficult to know because the report provides insufficient information on the selection criteria and process. The data used by the Nucleus Group to evaluate LAC came from documentary sources – DSC, SCRSSP (1998), and reports written by Yeatman (1996) and Cooper (2001).

Trustworthiness of the findings

For various reasons the findings of a research study may be untrustworthy. Some of the processes may not have been followed. Or, all of the expected processes may have been followed but not thoroughly enough. Or, all the expected processes may have been followed adequately to produce a large amount of well analysed, high quality, independent evidence, but the judgements or conclusions formed from the synthesis and

overall evaluation of the evidence may not be sound. For these reasons, it is important to ask: How can we know if the LAC reviews ‘got it right’? How can we know if their findings are to be trusted? According to the literature on research methodology, public confidence in the findings of research studies can be enhanced if researchers make member checks, leave an audit trail and use triangulation, and if people in power believe the findings enough to act on them. The absence of information in some LAC reviews about validation processes does not necessarily mean that these processes were ignored. They may have been undertaken but left unreported.

Member Checks

Member checks involve asking participants to read the findings of the study and say whether they think the researchers ‘got it right’. That is, asking the participants whether, for them, the reported results represent a recognisable reality. Some LAC reviews did this. For example, Lewis (1996) gave participants ‘progress reports’ on his research and the chance to comment on the validity of these drafts. Most of the LAC reviews, however, gave no indication of having done likewise. If participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the findings, there is no indication of what they said, or how the findings took into account what they may have said. For example, no reference is made in relevant parts of the text of the report to what they said, and any comments they might have made are not documented as footnotes or endnotes or in appendices. Rapanaro gave participants a brief summary of the results detailed in her report as a matter of ethical courtesy, but it is not clear whether this served the purposes of a member check.

Audit Trail

By providing information about the steps they took to obtain data and arrive at conclusions, researchers leave an audit trail for anyone who wants to check the authenticity of the findings. Some LAC reviews leave a clear audit trail. In one case (English & Lindsay, 1992, 1993), an external consultant (Dr Ralph Stratton) followed the trail and wrote a six page audit of the study. Lewis (1996, p.vii) acknowledges the contribution of “Associate Professor Jay Birnbrauer, for his critical comments during the planning, implementation and reporting of this evaluation.” Several reports indicate that the Steering Committees performed an audit in the form of ongoing feedback on draft accounts of the findings, though, they provide no examples or indication of what the feedback consisted of.

Some reports do not provide much detail to form an audit trail. However, the emphasis placed upon the need for ‘independent evaluations’ suggests the researchers expected the findings of their studies would be audited by public scrutiny.

Triangulation

Collectively, and in some cases individually, the LAC reviews involved a high level of triangulation. Also, most of them were jointly authored or involved a team of researchers at various stages in the study. It is conceivable that these teams provided a mechanism for internal checks and balances to help ensure the final report ‘got it right’

Acting on the findings

Perhaps the most powerful indication that the findings of a study are trusted is that people in power believe them enough to act upon them. Evidently, the findings of earlier evaluations of LAC informed decisions to expand it from one country area to another and from country to city locations. Also, some adjustments to aspects of LAC were made in response to consumers' concerns documented in these reports. For example, Lewis (1994, pp110-11) outlines how LAC management made reforms to ensure that individuals/families had the opportunity to approve the written contents of their funding plans and ensure that local area coordinators don't 'overstate the case' to improve the chances of funding.

The later reports, however, tend not to indicate whether recommendations or implications from previous reports have been implemented, shelved or rejected. This is not to say that the findings of the reports have been ignored. At a wider level, there is reason to believe that they were influential. For example, "Since 1998 LAC projects have been implemented by four other Australian states and one overseas country" (DSC Ministerial briefing Note15, February, 2001, JB/5489/MS). It might be presumed that at least some of them did so after examining the findings of LAC reviews in WA.

Broad utility of the reviews

Another approach to examining the methodological adequacy of the LAC reviews is to ask, 'adequate for what'? For example, program evaluations can be summative or formative. The information they provide can be used for the purposes of either program accountability or program development; that is, for the purpose of either proving and improving a program's value.

Program accountability

Given their greater independence, can external reviews claim a greater capacity to help LAC meet its accountability requirements than internal reviews? The answer may be 'yes' in terms of political and bureaucratic accountability, but 'not necessarily so' in terms of professional accountability. One characteristic of a professional community is a commitment by its members to "initiate their own improvement strategies, reflect upon their work, share their insights with one another, and collectively enforce high standards of performance" (Smith & Piele, 1997, p.5). Some interesting questions arise here. Can the internal reviews of LAC be seen as an exercise in self regulation with respect to quality assurance? While the internal reviews may make a contribution to professional accountability, can they, by themselves, be regarded as sufficient? Does full professional accountability require the work of LAC to be accredited at regular intervals by a broader professional body? If so, what professional body could claim the expertise to carry out such an audit?

Program development

Various factors can be considered when examining whether internal reviews of LAC provide more useful information than external reviews for the ongoing development and expansion of the program. First, the internal reviews tend to focus exclusively on LAC,

while most of the external reviews address a broad range of disability services of which LAC is but one part, in some cases a small part.

Secondly, the quantitative external reviews contain relatively little explanatory information. For example, the 1997 Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted by Donovan Research devoted only three questions to LAC. In somewhat abridged form these questions are:

1. Do you have a LAC?
2. How would you rate on a five point scale from 'very good' to 'very poor':
 - (a) ease of contacting/accessing LAC; ie. getting to see or talk to him/her.
 - (b) LAC's knowledge of services available.
 - (c) LAC's efforts to understand carers particular situation.
 - (d) LAC's ability to get things organised.
3. What do you think about the service you receive from you LAC overall?

Carers and clients were asked question three. Only carers were asked questions one and two. Apparently, respondents were not asked for any elaboration on their answers to these questions; they were not asked to provide any reasons, examples, details or recommendations. As a result the report of the survey simply provides the percentages of responses for each step on the five point scale. Unlike some other disability services surveyed in the study, the report provides no qualitative comments on LAC by the respondents. Only 8% of carers and 4% of clients rated LAC services overall as poor or very poor but, in the absence of further information, program developers are left in the dark about what specific matters, if any, require action.

Similar observations apply to the 2000 National Satisfaction Survey of Clients of Disability Services conducted by E-QUAL and Donovan Research. For instance, 9% of families indicated that service coordinators rarely helped them "to organise the services and supports they needed most of the time" (2000a, p.71). But the report provides no details of what these families might have had in mind. The same applies to the 128 respondents who made comments (2000a, p.74) about service coordination in the open-ended question section of the survey.

The 1998 SCRCSSP external case study of LAC in Western Australia differs from the two external satisfaction surveys (Donovan 1997; E-QUAL and Donovan Research 2000) by adopting a qualitative rather than quantitative approach. Because most of the data for the case study seemed to come from DSC, the case study may not say much of relevance for LAC program development in WA that DSC does not already know. The qualitative analysis of this data in the report, however, could be useful for other states seeking ideas and information on how to set up a system of LAC. The same might apply to the 2002 Nucleus Group report – though the literature review and case studies of service coordination approaches overseas and interstate in this report might assist consideration of further developments within LAC in Western Australia.

A third factor affecting the capacity of external and internal LAC reviews to assist program development is the extent to which they document concerns about LAC. Generally, both types of review focus on the positives, are highly complimentary of LAC, and present LAC as an exemplary program. Only a few of them raise more than minimal

concerns about aspects of LAC; eg. Stanton & Cameron (1998), E-QUAL & Donovan (2000) and English & Lindsay (1992,1993).

Closing comments

Closing observations about the methodological adequacy of the 17 reports appear in the Executive Summary at the beginning of this paper.

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