

**A LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTER-AGENCY WORK
WITH A PARTICULAR FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

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CAAB RESEARCH: REPORT NO. 4

December 2009



An Bord Comhairleach um Achtanna na Leanaí
Children Acts Advisory Board



Table of Contents

FOREWORD

RESEARCH QUALITY

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY I

1 INTRODUCTION..... 1

1.1 BACKGROUND..... 1
1.2 SCOPE OF THE CURRENT STUDY 2
1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY..... 3
1.4 METHODOLOGY..... 4
1.5 SOME ISSUES ARISING 5
1.6 REPORT STRUCTURE..... 6

2 AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REVIEWS ON INTER-AGENCY WORKING 7

2.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION 7
2.2 THE THEORY OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 8
2.3 DEFINITIONS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 9
2.4 MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE FOR INTER-AGENCY WORKING 12
2.5 OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 14
2.6 STRUCTURES AND FORMAL CO-ORDINATING MECHANISMS 14
2.7 PROCESSES 15
2.8 MODELS AND TYPOLOGIES OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 17
2.9 TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR CO-ORDINATION AT THE SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL 21
2.10 ACTORS 22
2.11 THE BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 23
2.12 SUCCESS AND ENABLING FACTORS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING 27
2.13 INHIBITING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES TO INTER-AGENCY WORKING 28
2.14 ALTERNATIVES TO INTER-AGENCY WORKING 32
2.15 KEY CHAPTER FINDINGS 33

3 THE EMERGENCE OF INTER-AGENCY APPROACHES IN IRELAND 35

3.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION 35
3.2 CURRENT POLICY FRAMEWORK 37
3.3 DEFINITIONS 39
3.4 RATIONALE FOR INTER-AGENCY WORKING 40
3.5 REMIT AND OBJECTIVES 41
3.6 STRUCTURES IN INTER-AGENCY WORKING 43
3.7 PROCESS AND MODELS 44
3.8 TOOLS TO SUPPORT INTER-AGENCY WORKING 46
3.9 ASSESSING THE BENEFITS OF INTER-AGENCY APPROACHES 47
3.10 INHIBITING FACTORS 49
3.11 OVERCOMING INHIBITING FACTORS 51
3.12 LESSONS FROM SPECIFIC INITIATIVES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR 52
3.13 KEY CHAPTER FINDINGS 61

4	INTER-AGENCY WORK IN CHILD PROTECTION, CHILD WELFARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT	62
4.1	CHAPTER INTRODUCTION	62
4.2	CHILD PROTECTION, CHILD WELFARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES	62
4.3	THE RATIONALE FOR INTER-AGENCY WORK	63
4.4	DEFINITIONS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING	67
4.5	THE BENEFITS AND ENABLING FACTORS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING.....	68
4.6	FORMAL CO-ORDINATING STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES	71
4.7	STRATEGIES FOR CO-ORDINATION AT THE SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL	76
4.8	ACTORS	77
4.9	INHIBITING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES TO INTER-AGENCY WORKING.....	84
4.10	THE MYTH OF INTER-AGENCY CO-OPERATION.....	87
4.11	KEY CHAPTER FINDINGS.....	88
5	INTER-AGENCY WORK IN EDUCATION.....	91
5.1	CHAPTER INTRODUCTION	91
5.2	DEFINITIONS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION.....	94
5.3	RATIONALE	94
5.4	OBJECTIVES/KEY ACTIONS	97
5.5	FORMAL STRUCTURES.....	98
5.6	ACTORS	99
5.7	ACTIONS	101
5.8	BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES.....	102
5.9	INHIBITING FACTORS.....	106
5.10	FACILITATING FACTORS	107
5.11	KEY CHAPTER FINDINGS.....	109
6	INTER-AGENCY WORK IN YOUTH JUSTICE	111
6.1	CHAPTER INTRODUCTION	111
6.2	GARDA JUVENILE DIVERSION PROGRAMME, GARDA YOUTH DIVERSION PROJECTS, RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING PROJECTS AND FAMILY CONFERENCING	112
6.3	RATIONALE	113
6.4	DEFINITIONS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING	116
6.5	FORMAL CO-ORDINATING STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES	116
6.6	STRATEGIES FOR CO-ORDINATION AT THE SERVICE DELIVERY LEVEL	120
6.7	ACTORS	121
6.8	THE BENEFITS AND ENABLING FACTORS OF INTER-AGENCY WORKING.....	122
6.9	INHIBITING FACTORS AND OBSTACLES TO INTER-AGENCY WORKING.....	122
6.10	KEY CHAPTER FINDINGS.....	123
7	CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	126
7.1	CHAPTER INTRODUCTION	126
7.2	CONCLUSIONS	127
7.3	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	134
	APPENDICES.....	140

Foreword

Following establishment in 2007 the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) was charged with ‘the promotion of inter-agency co-operation including the sharing of information’. From our earliest ventures into this complex domain it was evident that there was little or no direction or guidance available for agencies and individual practitioners who wished to work in this way.

With the ultimate objective of developing such guidance the CAAB engaged in a number of processes to inform our deliberations.

The purpose of this study was to produce a summary analysis of research literature on inter-agency co-operation in public services, with a particular focus on inter-agency co-operation in children’s services. I hope the many policy makers, managers and practitioners who struggle with inter-agency working will find the conclusions of this process helpful in their work with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of children and their families. I believe the report will also be particularly useful to the research community and to the academic institutions who prepare professionals and other practitioners to work in this field.

I want to thank Dr. Carmel Duggan and Ms. Carmel Corrigan of WRC Social and Economic Consultants Ltd. for the excellent work they have produced. I also want to thank Robert Murphy, Head of Research and Information, who along with Ciarán Ó Searcaigh, Advisory Officer, skilfully directed and supported this project.

Aidan Browne

Chief Executive

Children Acts Advisory Board

Research Quality

Two important elements of the CAAB's research quality assurance are the use of a Steering Committee to 'guide' a project and using an independent peer review process - see below.

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Acknowledgements

The **authors** would like to thank all of those individuals and agencies who contributed their documents and their expertise to this work. Particular thanks go to the members of the Research Steering Committee: Ms. Marian Brattman, Dr. Helen Buckley, Mr. Tony Donovan, Mr. Robert Murphy, Dr. Dermot Stokes, Sergeant Andy Tuite, Ms. Clare McGuinness and Ciarán Ó Searcaigh.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

Inter-agency co-operation between government departments, State agencies and NGOs has, in recent years, come to be seen as somewhat of a gold-standard in the development of public policy and services. As in other sectors, this has been evident in the children's sector, with recent policy documents stressing the importance of this approach. The National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (Government of Ireland, 2000) refers to such co-operation as a key part of the 'engine for change' necessary to meet the goals and objectives of the strategy. The *Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007) and the national agreement, *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland, 2006) further emphasise and promote inter-agency working.

The current study has been commissioned by the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB). The overall objective of the current literature review is to produce a summary analysis of research literature on inter-agency co-operation in public services, with a particular focus on inter-agency co-operation in children's services. Specific objectives of the review are:

1. To identify completed research in relation to inter-agency co-operation in the public sector and, in particular, inter-agency co-operation in children's services;
2. To identify, summarise and analyse key findings, conclusions and recommendations in the research by key themes including definition, rationale, forms, objectives, tools and policy context of inter-agency working, as well as the benefits and obstacles of such working arrangements;
3. To identify key areas for consideration in order to enhance inter-agency co-operation, based on the findings from the literature reviewed and an understanding of the CAAB's objectives (as per CAAB's Strategy 2008 to 2010).

In line with the overall objective of the research, an analytical approach to the review of literature on inter-agency working generally, with the principal focus being on children's public services in Ireland, was adopted. While a number of synthesis reports reviewed are of an international nature, the primary focus was on Irish literature. The overall analytical framework was distilled from the specific objectives of the research.

Despite the importance inter-agency working has now assumed in policy and public services, extensive searches by both the CAAB and the researchers yielded what can only be considered to be limited research and evaluation literature that focuses specifically on the contribution of inter-agency working to the achievement of better service development and delivery. It should also be noted that a considerable amount of the research and evaluation evidence focuses more on some themes, such as obstacles to inter-agency working and the actors involved, and less on others, including the objectives of inter-agency working and the merits of any one inter-agency structure over another. Further, the available literature did not lend itself to the identification of good practice: moreover, one of the clear issues to arise is the extent to which inter-agency initiatives are determined by their



context, making the identification of generic good practice difficult *per se*. Nevertheless the analysis of the available literature presented here allows for the identification of key learning from a wide range of initiatives and presents this in terms of its relevance to children's services in Ireland. Before presenting this key learning two points must be noted. The first of these is that this document reviews available literature on inter-agency working, it does not claim to be a comprehensive account of contemporary inter-agency practice. The authors are aware that there are developments underway in a number of policy areas, including the development of new regional educational structures and measures to transfer learning from local youth justice initiatives to the national level. There are also significant new developments in practice in a number of areas. These should impact positively on collaborative practice in these areas. However, as there is no analytical literature available on these, they have not been included here. The second point relates to the critique of inter-agency work and in particular the negative assessments that are referenced throughout this document. This should not be misconstrued as criticism of inter-agency work *per se*, but rather as evidence of the need for a robust, clearly articulated approach to inter-agency work that is informed by past experiences.

2 Key Findings

2.1 *An Overview of Literature Reviews on Inter-agency Co-operation*

Chapter 2 provides an overview of previous literature reviews on inter-agency working in the international context. It focuses on identifying the main headings under which most of the literature easily sits, and on drawing out a number of recurring themes from this. Although the literature reviews assessed here vary substantially in their focus and their detail, the following key areas can be identified and provide a framework for considering the divergent approaches to inter-agency working. These areas are:

- definitions;
- motivation/rationale for inter-agency working;
- objectives;
- structures;
- processes;
- strategies/models;
- tools;
- benefits/outcomes (for clients, agencies, professionals);
- actors;
- success/enabling factors;
- inhibiting factors;
- alternatives to inter-agency working.

The material examined draws together a number of reviews at the international level and highlights several issues which are replicated also in the Irish context. Of particular note is the lack of consensus regarding definitions within the literature – this draws attention again to the extent to which the nature of inter-agency working is determined by its context. In this regard, the concept of a continuum or hierarchy of levels of inter-agency working appears to be more useful in guiding practice. There is



also some evidence that a strong theoretical basis to inter-agency work is important. The material points to a number of key issues which can inform the ongoing understanding of and development of inter-agency working.

The literature reviewed allows for the identification of the following key issues:

Uncritical Consensus: There appears to be a broad consensus in the literature that inter-agency working is good in and of itself. The principal rationales are cited as achieving solutions to complex problems, attaining collaborative advantage, economies of scale and policy cohesion. With a small number of exceptions, there is little critical consideration of whether these rationales hold firm, particularly in the context of limited evaluations which unambiguously identify their impact.

Identifying the Most Appropriate Tools, Structures and Strategies: The literature points to a range of potential tools, structures and strategies that can be used in inter-agency working. What are less obvious from the literature, however, are the relative merits and weaknesses of particular tools, structures or strategies in responding to specific circumstances, groups or issues. It appears clear that more work is required to establish the circumstances or contexts in which one structure, tool or strategy should be the preferred, most appropriate and most cost-effective one or when it should in fact be avoided.

Enabling and Inhibiting Factors: There is an extensive literature on the enabling factors in inter-agency working and many of these are common across a number of studies. These include effective leadership, commitment, adequate resources, good communication and a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. They also include flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, appropriate stakeholder involvement and the recognition of obstructive actors. Inhibiting factors tend to be the reverse of these enabling factors and include poor leadership, lack of commitment, poor role definition, lack of understanding of responsibilities, obstructive professional and agency culture and lack of inter-agency training opportunities.

Benefits of Inter-agency Working: The research points to the extent to which benefits of inter-agency working accrue to organisations and individual professionals. Organisations and individual staff benefit from an increased understanding of each other's roles, improved relationships and interactions, raised profiles and improved job satisfaction, although the inverse of these are also reported. The limited attention paid to service users within evaluations is marked, as is their limited involvement in planning. In the context of the National Children's Strategy, this issue has particular relevance.

2.2 *The Emergence of Inter-agency Approaches in Ireland*

An overview of the literature on inter-agency approaches in Ireland, particularly in relation to combating socio-economic disadvantage, is provided in Chapter 3. This is significant here for two reasons:



- The evolution of inter-agency approaches in the children's sector, in so far as it has occurred, was heavily influenced by the concepts, models and practices that emerged within the broader social inclusion context.
- Many of the issues identified by the relatively extensive literature on these broader examples are evidenced also in the less plentiful documentation that exists on inter-agency practice in the children's sector. A review of the broader literature therefore can help elucidate the issues for inter-agency work in relation to children's services.

Contemporary inter-agency work emerged in the context of the economic and employment crisis of the 1980s (Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Rourke, 2007). In this context, inter-agency work had a very specific focus on combating unemployment (especially long-term unemployment) and poverty. This in turn was reflected in the targeting of specific groups identified as being most vulnerable such as early school leavers, the low-skilled and people with disabilities (Chanin, 1992). Four key features of the inter-agency working arrangements that emerged at this time were:

- the inclusion of new actors, including the community and voluntary sector;
- the incorporation of an area-based or district approach;
- the development and embedding of the concept of partnership – drawing heavily on discourses of social partnership at the national level (Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Sabel, 1996); and
- the establishment of new organisations or structures at local level (rather than simply developing working relationships between agencies, for example). It has been argued that this resulted in a proliferation of organisations within certain areas, leading to what has been called a 'crowded institutional landscape'.

The key issues to arise from the discussion in Chapter 3 of the main report are:

More Systematic Approach to Management Emerging: Inter-agency working has evolved in somewhat of an ad hoc way, notwithstanding a number of very highly structured strategies. However, there is evidence that a more systematic approach to managing inter-agency work at national level is emerging.

Fragmentation of Services: The evidence suggests that benefits are being delivered both to the participating agencies and to the service users, and frequently too to the wider community. However, research also suggests that significant deficiencies remain in achieving integration, particularly at the level of service delivery and that the fragmentation of services continues to be a major problem for service users.

Importance of Context: Context is important in determining the nature of inter-agency working and there is a need for flexibility and autonomy at local level in establishing the most appropriate processes.



Commitment, Participation and Planning: Common learning across the initiatives looked at in Chapter 6 indicates the need for commitment, strategic planning, resources and appropriate participation at all levels, including government and community levels.

2.3 Inter-agency Work in Child Protection, Child Welfare and Family Support

Chapter 4 in the main report is concerned with the child protection and welfare system and inter-agency work in this field. It focuses primarily on child protection as opposed to child welfare and family supports. This reflects the available literature and the length of time for which child protection has been the focus of policy and practice, with attention to child and family welfare having developed much more recently.

In the context of inter-agency working it is notable that the Health Services Executive (HSE) clearly differentiates between child protection, which is concerned with risk, and child welfare, which is concerned with need. The primary services included under child protection are social work services. The services offered under the child welfare and family support heading are more extensive and include Springboard, social work interventions, family support worker services, community child worker, community mother, home help, family centres, pre-schools, community groups or referral to other professionals. Also relevant in the context of inter-agency working is the degree of involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of services. McKeown *et al.* (2003) states that 69% of family support services are delivered by community and voluntary organisations with funding from the relevant health authority. Such extensive involvement of voluntary and community organisations does not occur in the field of child protection where the vast majority of agencies involved are statutory.

A number of reasons for the development of inter-agency approaches to child protection and development have been posited in the literature. These include the increasing involvement of medical technology and staff in the diagnosis of abuse, a recognition that both abuse and welfare cases are multi-dimensional, and a desire to streamline the services to better meet the child and family's needs. Policy and official practice guidelines tend to assume that effective inter-agency working is possible and desirable. Yet there is little empirical evidence to support this and research invariably highlights the difficulties and challenges that inter-agency work embodies. This points to the need for the implementation of policy and practice in this area to be better informed, advised and supported. Currently, the views of many policy makers appear to be based on an idealised view of how child and family protection and welfare needs are identified, and of how services work to address these, rather than on knowledge of how agencies and services actually work on the ground.

The following key issues emerge from the literature discussed in the main report:

Views of Children and Families Missing: The discussion of benefits of inter-agency working predominantly focuses on benefits accruing to the organisations or professionals involved, as well as their views on benefits. The views of families and children are notable by their virtual absence. Only



Buckley (2007) reports directly on the views of service users and identifies the lack of inter-agency communication as a difficulty for service users who have to repeat their stories to a variety of agencies and professionals.

Enabling Factors and the Value of Training: A number of enabling factors are identified in both child protection and child welfare studies. These include good communication, mutual understanding, agreement of goals and positive professional attitudes. While difficulties are acknowledged, it is suggested that inter-agency training be adopted as a key strategy in overcoming these. Buckley (2002) states that training can only have this positive impact if it is underpinned by agreed strategies, commitment at senior level and a shared responsibility and ownership of the work.

Professional Differences: The available literature highlights the contradictory views of those involved in child protection case conferences. What is clear is the frustration of social workers in particular. While social workers are generally happy with the case conference process, they feel that they are left with the responsibility of implementing what are often untenable action plans. Other professions, such as public health nurses (PHNs) and general practitioners (GPs) are less than willing to accept responsibility for the 'dirty' hands-on work of child protection because they feel it compromises their primary roles and ethics.

The Exaggeration of Hierarchy: The lack of shared responsibility is exacerbated by what Buckley (2003b) calls the exaggeration of hierarchy. This refers to the privileged position afforded to the views of higher professionals such as doctors and psychiatrists, over those of the workers that are in closest contact with children and families such as social workers and PHNs. A number of difficulties were also raised in relation to the working relationships between Gardaí and social workers, despite the existence of official national guidelines on such working relationships.

Reliance on Inter-Personal Relationships: Much inter-agency and multi-disciplinary work on the ground in both child protection and welfare is dynamic, informed by and based on personal relationships between staff members. This is a less than ideal scenario as inter-agency work can falter due to staff changes and turnover. This can also result in inconsistent services across geographical areas depending on the nature of the personal relationship between staff in different organisations. Such informal relationships are important in inter-agency work but need to be supported by more formal linkages. The lack of such formal linkages as well as the absence of accepted joint rules and procedures, power imbalances among professionals and lack of a mandate to work co-operatively all contribute to what Buckley (2003b) calls the '*myth of inter-agency co-operation*'.

Inhibiting Factors: A wide range of inhibiting factors and obstacles is documented in the literature and can be classified under three headings: professional obstacles, primarily a lack of clear professional roles, responsibilities and capacity; psychological obstacles, including professional rivalries, stereotyping, professional self-image, perceived power and 'baggage' from previous experiences; and structural or organisational obstacles, most significantly the lack of a mandate for



organisations to work on an inter-agency basis, the duty system operated by health sector social workers, and poor communication.

It should be noted that much of the research on which Chapter 4 in the main report is based pre-dates significant developments in the children's sector. These include the enactment of the Children Act, 2001, the development of the National Children's Strategy, the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the provisions of *Towards 2016*. These may provide a greater impetus for the development of inter-agency working in the child protection and welfare field by putting in place national and local structures to facilitate this. Without increased contemporary research, however, this remains unknown.

2.4 Inter-agency Work in Education

Inter-agency work in the field of education – and particularly in educational disadvantage – emerged as a result of a growing awareness of the relationship between educational disadvantage, unemployment and the risk of poverty. The potential benefits of greater integration between education and other services were documented by the OECD (1995, 1996, 1998). Other relevant factors driving greater integration are discussed by Stokes (1996), Cullen (2000), Conaty (2002), and Kelleher and Kelleher (2005). These include the shift in pedagogy characterised by a growing awareness that education extended beyond what took place within the formal system, a growing acknowledgement that educational disadvantage is rooted in the complex interaction of factors at home, in school and in the community, and the assertion that parents and young people had a right to be consulted in relation to their education.

In 1995 the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme (LDSIP) formally extended the remit of the Area Based Partnership Companies (ABPCs) into the field of education. In addition, the community and voluntary sector was demanding to have its voice heard in policy development and service delivery in a wide range of areas including education. The culmination of these factors can be seen in the report of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage. This advocated the promotion of partnerships, widespread collaboration and consultation and the development and expansion of local networks. Consequently, among the policy issues in education at that time were the development of partnerships and the co-ordination of government services (Boldt and Devine, 1998).

Subsequently, two distinct spheres of activity emerged which continue today. The first sphere is where inter-agency work is promoted by local development agencies which operate with a social inclusion remit. In this model, local schools are part of the inter-agency approach, but the lead agency is usually a local development or community organisation such as an ABPC. The second sphere of inter-agency activity is comprised of integrated programmes delivered by the Department of Education and Science (DES). Within these, national initiatives are implemented at local level by individual schools or networks of schools. Frequently these involve local level 'partnership' structures (usually committees) to oversee their implementation. The extent to which other agencies are involved varies across different initiatives, as does the involvement of parents as stakeholders.



There is some formal linkage between initiatives implemented by local organisations and those implemented by DES. For example, DES has funded posts of Educational Co-ordinator in the ABPCs and is represented on the board of Pobal.

Reflecting the literature available, Chapter 5 in the main report primarily focuses on interventions delivered within the local development sphere, although it must be noted that the abatement of research interest in inter-agency approaches generally, discussed in Chapter 3, is evident in this area too. While it is clear that inter-agency work in the field of education is both of long duration and extensive, the literature is patchy, much of it is out of date, and evaluative material in particular is scarce. Nevertheless, it is clear that the commitment to inter-agency work remains strong in this area and a body of knowledge has been generated with regard to at least some of the aspects of inter-agency working. Issues highlighted include the relevance of local structures over processes, the difficulties in ensuring systematic integration of school and community, the duality of focus between young people and the wider system and issues concerning professional development and other supports for teachers.

The following key issues emerged in the literature:

Value of a Theoretical Approach: Inter-agency working in the field of education is primarily informed by the need to address educational disadvantage, commonly measured by indicators such as early school leaving. However, a more critical approach to the rationale underpinning such inter-agency work as espoused by Sproule et al. (1999) suggests that identifying the source of the educational problem should inform the level, type and extent of inter-agency working. This echoes Montgomery and Rossi's (1994) argument regarding the value of a theoretical basis to inter-agency working.

Lack of Local Structures: There is a very wide range of actors involved in inter-agency work in the field of education and a corresponding diversity in actions undertaken on an inter-agency basis. However, the lack of local education structures and the relatively low level of engagement by DES with other agencies have been cited as barriers to systemic change in this field (Cullen, 2000b). Development of inter-agency as well as multi-disciplinary approaches is considered vital if the range of issues that underlie educational disadvantage is to be addressed.

Support and Capacity Building: Clear aims and objectives, support for parental involvement, adequate resources and supports for teachers, capacity building for schools and parents, incentives for schools to engage in inter-agency work, effective and supported co-ordination at national and local level, and national level support were all identified as key facilitating factors for inter-agency work. At the policy level, Sproule et al. (1999) suggest that the transfer of learning between the local and national levels is essential to successful inter-agency work.

Benefits are Mixed: Much of the available evaluation literature is primarily focused on the benefits that accrue to schools, other organisations and their staff. These benefits include a better understanding of the needs of children and young people, a better awareness of the wider social



context in which they are working, improved relationships with parents and higher expectations of pupils. With regard to students, evaluations of inter-agency initiatives report a range of outcomes including improved academic performance in some instances but also a relative decline in literacy and numeracy standards. Effective co-ordination and integration across agencies was found to have been difficult (Cullen, 2000) or rarely achieved (Eivers, 2001).

Obstacles to Inter-agency Working: Lack of experience of working on an inter-agency basis, staff shortages, gaps in services, poor communication within and between government departments, and between government departments and local services were all cited as obstacles to inter-agency working in the field of education. These obstacles were noted even where inter-agency work was the focus of the initiative, such as in the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme.

We can note an over-riding concern that transcends both spheres of activity looked at here. This is the difficulty of transferring learning from the multiplicity of initiatives that are implemented at the local level to the national context. At this point, despite the extent of experience on the ground, the issues for policy identified by Sproule et al. (1999) remain current. These were: the need for stronger links to be developed between local strategic approaches and national decision making in relation to policy and budgets that impact on local approaches; the need for national initiatives to build on the experience and effort of local responses through for example, mainstreaming best practice at national level; and, the need for greater integration between educational initiatives promoted by DES and those promoted by local community organisations, in order to ensure cohesion and co-ordination of activities

2.5 Inter-agency Work in Youth Justice

Chapter 6 in the main report examines the literature on inter-agency work in youth justice. The legislative framework for youth justice work is the Children Act, 2001. Key aspects of this Act are the adoption of a twin-track approach of welfare and youth justice in meeting the needs of children who are in need of special care or protection and children who have committed offences. The Act places an emphasis on early intervention, diversion, restorative justice and community sanctions while allowing for detention as a last resort.

Attention in Chapter 6 of the main report focuses on the inter-agency work undertaken by a number of particular aspects of these services: the Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs), restorative cautions, restorative conferencing and family or group conferencing. Although inter-agency work in the area of young people in detention is underway, no research on this was available.

The rationale for inter-agency working in youth justice stems primarily from a recognition of the multitude of problems and needs faced by young people in trouble with the law. The majority of children who come before the Children's Court share a large number of characteristics, including poverty, poor educational experiences and a higher than average risk of future offending. This knowledge means that their needs are easily identifiable and provides a basis for inter-agency work.



The need and desire for inter-agency working is evident in a number of recent policy documents and strategies at national level. These include the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008). Noteworthy here is that this strategy calls for the involvement of not only a range of justice agencies but also for inter-agency working between such agencies and education, health, welfare and community service providers. Despite considerable attention at policy level, there remains almost no written material on definitions or understandings of inter-agency work in the area of youth justice.

The following are key issues that arise from the available literature:

Levels of Inter-agency Working: An early evaluation of the GYDPs showed that networking, support and inward referrals to the Projects were the most common forms of inter-agency working. However, the evaluators were not convinced that these forms of inter-agency working would ultimately lead to the co-ordination of services between youth justice and other agencies (Bowden and Higgins, 2000).

Frustrations at Local Level: Bowden and Higgins (2000) also identified considerable frustration among the GYDPs on a number of issues. The most significant include that their inter-agency work is effectively restricted to local level with no mechanisms for the transfer of learning to national level, and the lack of mandate for local community representatives on the management committees of the Projects.

Involvement of Agencies and Professionals: The Children Act, 2001 allows for the involvement of a range of agencies in family conferences, thereby recognising their potential for inter-agency work. In some cases restorative conferences may also include professionals from other agencies whose involvement is perceived to be of benefit to the young person. In practice, restorative conferences rarely include any professionals beyond Gardaí and the juvenile liaison officers (JLOs). While providing a potential ground for inter-agency work, research suggests that external professionals should only be involved where there is a clear rationale for this. Research further suggests that families may not wish outside agencies to be involved as they want to maintain their privacy (O'Dwyer, 2001).

Family or group conferences also provide opportunities for inter-agency working, but recent research reports that the majority appear not to include any professionals outside the justice agencies. The desire of families to make these conferences as tight as possible in order to maintain their privacy is again raised here (Burke, 2006). An alternative view, however, is that non-justice agencies, such as schools and education bodies, training agencies, sporting organisations and family support services can have a significant, if as yet largely untapped, role to play in youth justice cases. Such agencies do not carry the stigma attached to crime or crime prevention and therefore may be more acceptable to families.



Value of Training: Based on an evaluation of the Copping On training programme, inter-agency training can be seen as an enabling factor in securing inter-agency work. However, such training needs to clearly define what it means by inter-agency, or in this case multi-agency, working and develop a more strategic approach to promoting and strengthening such approaches (Duffy, 2005).

Obstacles to Inter-agency Working: A number of obstacles to inter-agency working are addressed in the available literature. These include at least some of those referred to in earlier chapters such as the lack of time to work on an inter-agency basis, heavy workloads, poor communication, poor role and responsibility definition and personality clashes. Obstacles specific to youth justice include the lack of detailed direction in the relevant legislation governing cautions and conferences, the absence of a forum that allows learning to be shared and transferred upwards to national level, and the weak, primarily consultative or advisory, position of community representatives in the GYPDs. Lack of co-ordination among other youth services and the absence of centralised data also act as barriers to inter-agency work

The relative lack of attention paid to inter-agency working in the available literature on youth justice is notable. For example, the last national evaluation of the GYPDs was undertaken in 1998–2000 when only 14 projects were in existence. There are now 100 Projects but no further national level evaluation or research is available. As a result, there is a significant gap in our knowledge of inter-agency working in the youth justice arena. This may stem from a long tradition of allowing and requiring a small number of agencies, particularly those in the justice field, to attend to children in trouble with the law or before the courts. Recent changes in the field, and in particular the establishment of the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), and the recognised need for inter-agency working in national policy documents such as the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008–2010* means that there is considerable potential for the development of inter-agency work.

3 Conclusions

3.1 Overview

A key issue to emerge from the literature across all sectors is that inter-agency approaches are heavily contextualised, that is, they take their form, focus and mechanisms from the policy making and service delivery frameworks they are located within and from the substantive issue they seek to address. Consequently, it is difficult and unwise to try to identify 'ideal type models' of inter-agency approaches that can be dropped into different settings and contexts. For the same reason, care must be taken in claiming 'best practice' in inter-agency working.



However, we need to balance this by noting the consensus in the literature in relation to a number of issues, particularly the factors that facilitate and inhibit inter-agency working and issues around setting objectives and measuring the achievement of these. This consensus suggests that there are some elements of inter-agency working that transcend geographic and policy boundaries. In relation to the ongoing development of inter-agency work in the children's sector in Ireland, therefore, it will be necessary to establish approaches appropriate to specific contexts *and* it will be possible to learn from previous initiatives. Reinventing the inter-agency wheel can be avoided. With this in mind, this report will highlight the issues arising from the review of inter-agency work in the children's sector in Ireland and will identify steps that can be taken by organisations operating in the sector to support and develop effective inter-agency working.

3.2 The Importance of Context

a. Inter-agency approaches are heavily influenced by the policy and service contexts in which they operate as well as the specific issues they address.

The Irish and international literature reviewed highlights that inter-agency approaches are heavily contextualised. They take their form, focus and mechanisms from the policy making and service delivery frameworks they are located within and from the substantive issue they seek to address. For example, the case conference approach to inter-agency work in child protection is influenced by social work and medical practice, by the often complex relationship between policy in relation to education, children, families and health, as well as by family and criminal law and justice. The relevance and inter-play of these practices, policies and law in relation to other areas such as education or youth justice will differ substantially. Consequently, it is difficult and unwise to try to identify 'ideal type models' of inter-agency approaches that can be dropped into different settings and contexts. For the same reason, care must be taken in claiming 'best practice' in inter-agency working.

b. However, common elements of Inter-agency approaches can be identified in the literature.

The literature also points to a number of elements of inter-agency working that transcend geographical or policy contexts and on which there is agreement or consensus. Most notably these include the factors that facilitate inter-agency working (such as effective leadership, commitment, adequate resources, good communication, a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and appropriate stakeholder involvement) and those that inhibit it (including poor leadership, lack of commitment, poor role definition, lack of understanding of responsibilities, obstructive professional and agency culture and lack of inter-agency training opportunities). There is also consensus on issues relating to setting objectives and measuring the achievement of these. Thus, while the specifics of the inter-agency initiative must determine the process, mechanisms and so on, it is also possible and necessary to be guided by available knowledge and experience.

In relation to the ongoing development of inter-agency work in the children's sector in Ireland, therefore, it will be necessary to establish approaches appropriate to specific contexts *and* it will be possible to learn from previous initiatives.



3.3 The Basis for Inter-agency Working – Theories and Rationale

- a. At present, the theoretical underpinnings of inter-agency work remain weak and require considerable development in Ireland. The lifecycle approach to policy and service development provides a context for the development of such theory.**

Strong theoretical underpinnings can validate and guide inter-agency approaches. For example, Montgomery and Rossi's (1994) work in education, as cited by Cullen (1997), highlights the value of a conceptual or theoretical approach to the development and delivery of services for children. However, such an approach is not widely evident in the children's sector in Ireland.

The emerging emphasis on a lifecycle approach in policy making, advocated by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), provides both a context and an imperative for the development of a more theoretical approach to inter-agency work. It focuses on the way in which the various aspects of the lives of children are integrated and interact, and further, on how integrated policies and services can effectively support children and address many of the difficulties faced by vulnerable children in particular. Such an approach holds that a better understanding of the factors contributing to the well-being and otherwise of children in all aspects of their lives is crucial in underpinning quality services, including integrated services. Knowing the extent and nature of children's experience of disadvantage and difficult situations is important, but the lifecycle approach highlights the need for research focused on examining the underlying factors that contribute to such experiences.

- b. The rationale underlying inter-agency working needs to be challenged and evidence-based.**

Related to the lack of theoretical basis is the vagueness regarding the rationale for inter-agency working. Much current thinking and practice is based on the belief that intractable and complex problems require inter-agency responses and that inter-agency working leads to collaborative advantages. However, this appears to draw more on the rhetoric of inter-agency approaches than on any hard evidence of their effectiveness. Inter-agency working is seen as self-evidently a good thing, without a full understanding of how it improves upon the existing situation or what targets it is to achieve. This is not to say that inter-agency approaches are not successful or valuable, but rather that we are lacking sufficient studies to prove the case either way.

At this point, the decision to adopt inter-agency approaches should ideally be based on their demonstrated effectiveness rather than the assumption that inter-agency approaches are always the most appropriate response to the needs of children. Instead, and drawing on a more conceptual understanding of the needs of children, strategies should clearly identify when and in what ways inter-agency approaches can contribute to meeting children's needs and achieving strategy objectives, and when other approaches might be more effective.

- c. Good inter-agency initiatives require good agencies and good services.**

It is particularly important in the context of services for children to ensure that inter-agency approaches are not seen as a way of compensating for poor quality services, for the lack of services



or for under-performing agencies. There is consensus within the literature that good inter-agency working requires both good agencies that are willing, capable and have a clear mandate to work on an inter-agency basis, as well as comprehensive services that can be effectively and efficiently delivered on an inter-agency basis.

3.4 Defining Inter-agency Approaches and Objectives

a. Definitions of inter-agency work are diverse, reflecting different approaches and different contexts. There is a need for context specific definitions and the use of continuum models.

Clearer rationales and stronger theoretical underpinnings should result in a clearer definition of what is meant by inter-agency working, or more appropriately perhaps, what range of activities is covered by the concept of inter-agency working. In this report we note the slippage in terminology in describing inter-agency approaches. To a large extent, this reflects the fact that inter-agency approaches are context driven and therefore it is difficult to provide generic models or definitions. It seems from the literature – and from growing awareness and practice in Ireland – that defining different types of inter-agency approaches is more useful than attempting to define inter-agency work *per se*. The work of Himmelman (1992) has been particularly influential and his continuum of inter-agency approaches has ongoing relevance for the diverse body of policy and practice in the children's sector in Ireland and for guiding the development of more sophisticated and integrated forms.

b. There is a need to distinguish between inter-agency working at the levels of planning and decision making on the one hand, and service delivery on the other hand require different and clear objectives. This helps to develop clearer objectives, targets and mechanisms of inter-agency working.

A clear understanding of the dichotomy between decision making and service delivery is crucial if the commitment to inter-agency working contained in numerous policy documents is to become a reality through integrated services on the ground. It is particularly important in the context of a lifecycle approach to policy development and the implications of this for children and their families.

The mechanisms, objectives and targets of integration at the level of decision making are fundamentally different from those of integrated service delivery. This is to such an extent that we need a separate terminology to accommodate these two spheres and a separate understanding of what is required to support them. As things currently stand, the lack of a clearer delineation of these two can lead to an excess of activity at the level of the board (or similar management or oversight structure) and little or no activity at the level of services. Using a continuum framework such as Himmelman's, allows objectives at the level of planning and decision making to be clearly differentiated from integrated service delivery.

c. Different service delivery contexts require different language, practices and tools.

Part of the difficulty in developing definitions and setting clear objectives is that the practice of integrated service delivery is poorly understood as well as being highly context specific. For example, integrated services in the context of *responding* to child protection issues is very different to integrated



services in *preventing* early school leaving. Not only are there different sets of actors involved in these contexts, but the issues and structures with which they are concerned also differ considerably. Much more work needs to be done to develop a precise language, set of practices and tools to resources these practices around integrated service delivery in specific contexts

3.5 Structures, Mechanisms and Actors

a. Different types of inter-agency approaches require different structures and mechanisms of co-ordination.

Different types of inter-agency approaches require different structures and mechanisms of co-ordination. For example, where the objective is to engage in planning or decision making a forum or similar structure upon which the key agencies are represented is required. On the other hand, integrated service delivery requires to be reinforced and underpinned by a formal structure such as a forum or network but is delivered through different mechanisms such as shared protocols, key workers and case conferences.

Where the objective is to engage in planning or decision making, there is a consensus in the literature that a forum or similar structure upon which the key agencies are represented is required. A considerable amount of learning has been generated in relation to these fora or other partnership arrangements. For example, the analysis produced by Pobal (2008) and discussed in Chapter 3 identifies best practice, or what it calls the optimum model of partnership. In brief, this model is characterised by high levels of participation and complementary working arrangements.

Integrated service delivery, for its part, requires to be reinforced and underpinned by a formal structure such as a forum or network but is delivered through different mechanisms. Three such mechanisms predominate in the Irish context: shared protocols, key workers and case conferences.

The former two are not yet in extensive use although interest in both is growing and the key worker approach has been advocated by the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF). To date, no written body of learning in regard to these mechanisms has emerged.

Evaluations from the UK suggest that mechanisms such as key workers can be effective in improving the delivery of services, but that key workers cannot compensate for ineffective agencies and that they require to be reinforced by local structures. Case conferencing, in contrast, is in common use in Ireland in child protection and welfare situations and is echoed also in youth justice. Research into case conferences here highlights the myriad of challenges that beset these and provides insights into just how difficult service integration is in practice, from the perspective of those delivering the service. Little is known about the benefits of this approach to the young people involved.



b. When undertaking inter-agency co-operation there is a need to ensure that all key agencies or departments are fully involved in the formal structure, while also being mindful of the need to keep this structure relatively small and flexible.

Among the key learning from the literature from the children's sector is the need to ensure that all key agencies or departments are fully involved in the formal structure, while also being mindful of the need to keep this structure relatively small and flexible. In the area of education, the limited capacity to integrate DES initiatives and other initiatives targeted at young people has been cited as a barrier to success at local level. The need for representation on inter-agency mechanisms, however, must take into account the large number of such interventions that now exist at local level, particularly in urban areas.

In the roll out of services to children, it will be necessary to avoid 'participation burn-out' on the part of key agencies. A more overarching integrated approach at local level (such as is proposed and in development within the new Children Services Committees) may help to overcome some of these issues.

However, the learning from the Social Inclusion Measures (SIMs) looked at in Chapter 3 highlights the difficulties even at this level. The 2003 evaluation of the SIMs noted limited progress in co-ordination at local level, lack of commitment at national level and little impact on service delivery. Indecon (2008) also found that as the County/City Development Boards (CDBs) operate primarily in influencing other organisations, both statutory and voluntary, their potential influence is significantly dependent on the perceived priority which is attached to their functions. Clearly, in terms of the development of further work in the children's sector, it will be important to absorb the learning that has been generated by the CDBs and SIMs.

c. The community sector has an important role to play in inter-agency processes in the children's sector in Ireland, especially in relation to ensuring community buy-in and acceptance of initiatives, but in order to support the community sector's involvement there is a need to address difficulties such as a lack of resources and a lack of parity of esteem.

Most inter-agency approaches also involve the community sector as formal partners in the process, and evaluations have rated the contribution of the sector quite highly. In particular, the involvement of the community in ensuring community buy-in and acceptance of initiatives has been highlighted. The Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000) also advocates the need for good working relationships with the community and voluntary organisations at local level. However, the difficulties which this sector can experience are also much referred to in the literature. These difficulties include lack of resources and lack of parity of esteem.

d. While formal structures are necessary to underpin effective integrated service delivery, these can also impede it.

Finally, we should note that while formal structures are necessary to underpin effective integrated service delivery, these can also impede it. The key issue here is the quality of participation and the difficulties caused by non-cooperative partners. These can include partners who are lukewarm to participation in inter-agency work as well as those who actively obstruct integration. Mechanisms to



deal with this type of situation are recommended in the literature, but there is little mention of exactly what these might be apart from some references to providing incentives to ensure compliance. Clearly, this type of issue needs to be anticipated in establishing new structures within the children's sector. Possible ways to address this might include setting clear targets for all participating agencies, developing agreed implementation frameworks and undertaking ongoing assessment and review. If mechanisms such as these are put in place, national commitment to, and oversight of them would be essential.

3.6 Tools and Resources

- a. While the literature is inconclusive on the particular contribution of specific tools to inter-agency working, it is clear that tools should be relevant and specific to the particular level of inter-agency work being undertaken as well as settings, agencies and professionals involved.**

Amongst the tools that are frequently referenced in the literature are those that support technical excellence and consistency across initiatives. These include central support units, the development of strategic frameworks at national level to guide planning and activity at local level, the development of planning guidelines and related material such as self-audit templates and so on.

In general, the evaluations reviewed have cited the absence of tools as hindering inter-agency working rather than demonstrating the actual contribution these make to achieving and enhancing such work. One area that appears conclusive, however, is that different levels of inter-agency working require different tools. Thus, the types of tools that can resource staff involved in service delivery will be quite different from those that resource national co-ordination units or planning bodies. In addition, the range of settings, agencies, professionals and work processes involved in inter-agency work in the children's sector makes it almost impossible to develop generic tools of this type across the sector. However, one thing to stress is the importance of developing guidelines and tools to support target setting and data collection (see below).

- b. More generic tools to support training for inter-agency working and the transfer of learning could be developed.**

There are two areas where a more generic approach to developing tools for inter-agency work in the children's sector may be possible. These are:

1. The provision of training for inter-agency work. In this regard, it is important to take a whole systems approach, that is, agencies need to be trained as inter-agency agencies and to support their staff who are involved in direct inter-agency working. This is a key area for consideration in terms of implementing services to children in the future.
2. The development of mechanisms to transfer the learning from successful interventions. The lack of opportunity to learn from other examples is frequently referred to in evaluations. There is considerable potential to address this through, for example, a structured programme of research to guide strategic networking within similar areas. An example would be identifying the elements of good practice in a specific setting (such as a school/community setting), exploring



how it could be replicated in similar settings and developing the mechanisms to implement it in other settings.

3.7 Strategic Planning, Setting Targets and Monitoring Impact

- a. Two key issues can be gleaned from the literature in relation to issues of planning and target setting. These are (a) there is huge variability across initiatives in regard to these, and (b) there is a growing awareness that these are essential in facilitating effective inter-agency working.**

The area of planning and target setting is one where inter-agency work in the children's sector can draw on previous experience. However, three key issues need to be addressed if effective planning and target setting are to become possible.

- Good baseline data that can facilitate planning and objective setting. Inter-agency initiatives in the children's sector will benefit from the availability of accurate and up-to-date statistics and data on the situation of children and young people at local level. This information could be shared by all organisations working within the sector at local level and tailored to their specific concerns. Good baseline data will facilitate strategic planning and will also facilitate setting targets and time frames.
- The setting of specific rather than vague or overly general targets and time frames within which these should be achieved. A significant failing at the moment – although it pertains more in some areas than others – is the failure to set clear targets and reasonable timeframes within which these can be achieved. In this regard, the importance of a common understanding of what is to be achieved, the roles and responsibilities of the agencies and individual staff members involved and the resources and supports available to achieve inter-agency work becomes evident. An area based approach to set overarching targets across interventions in the children's sector at local level (guided by the Children's Services Committees (CSCs)) could provide a useful approach to this. This could be guided by but would need to supersede, the goals set down in the Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the indicators of child well-being.
- Appropriate mechanisms to collect the relevant data to underpin ongoing monitoring. The failure to collect the type of data that would indicate if these targets were being reached or not contributes to the lack of evidence on the effectiveness and appropriateness of inter-agency working in various settings.



b. Strategic planning, target setting and monitoring should contribute to the sustainability of appropriate and effective inter-agency work.

A final issue here is that of sustainability. There is a need to be careful about the ongoing development of inter-agency mechanisms which simply add to the number of initiatives at local level and that risk consigning inter-agency work to pilot projects. Sustainability requires that organisations that are participating in inter-agency work become adept at being inter-agency organisations and that they learn from inter-agency experiences to reconfigure their existing services. These aspects of inter-agency working and learning should be included within strategic planning, targeting setting and monitoring process and procedures.

3.8 Research and Evaluation

a. The literature reveals a number of areas in which further research and evaluation are required if inter-agency work is to develop in an informed and effective manner.

A number of issues have emerged from the literature in relation to research and evaluation. As already indicated above, these include lack of baseline data, lack of monitoring data and the lack of comparative data. A further very significant issue is the failure to include the voice of the child in evaluations of services that are primarily aimed at improving their well-being. Related to this point is the extent to which the participating agencies have been shown to be the primary beneficiaries of inter-agency approaches, with the children whom these approaches are intended to serve being secondary or even tertiary beneficiaries.

The development of a more comprehensive and systematic approach to evaluating children's services and children's policy is required as well as mechanisms to involve the participation of children within this. The central question to be asked is to what extent inter-agency working in children's services and policies improves the processes and outcomes experienced by the children concerned, over and above those secured by single agency approaches. Evaluation on this basis will serve to improve our understanding of inter-agency working and strengthen the rationale for and effectiveness of inter-agency approaches.

4 Recommendations

In light of this analysis and that contained in preceding chapters the following key recommendations are suggested in assisting the CAAB, and other relevant organisations, of initiatives that can be taken to implement inter-agency working, and to provide a basis for positive action in this area. It is important to stress here that while inter-agency work has been subject to much criticism in practice, this is not a basis for arguing against inter-agency work: rather it should be interpreted as evidence of the need for greater understanding of, and planning for, inter-agency work to enable it to achieve effective outcomes.



Recommendation 1

It is recommended that when planning, undertaking or reviewing inter-agency co-operation approaches and initiatives, agencies in the children's sector take into account the conclusions presented in this report (see Section 3) to inform their work.

Recommendation 2

A more robust approach, definition and understanding of inter-agency working should be developed in order to facilitate effective approaches. The main objective of this recommendation is to develop a sectoral consensus and understanding of inter-agency approaches.

The following steps are suggested:

- a.** A conceptual/theoretical approach to inter-agency working to inform the rationale and the basis for adopting inter-agency interventions across a range of areas should be developed.
- b.** A more critical approach to assessing the relevance of inter-agency working in concrete situations is necessary, to avoid the assumption that inter-agency approaches are always the most appropriate response.
- c.** There is a need to clarify the language and terminology used to clearly differentiate between integrated planning and integrated service delivery. Lack of precision on this issue can frustrate the development of integrated services.
- d.** Conduct and/or commission research to aid understanding of integrated service delivery in different contexts, including the distillation of lessons for specific settings and those that can be applied to inter-agency approaches more broadly. This should include research into the impact of developments in the past 10 years or so, including the Children Act, 2001, the National Children's Strategy, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the provisions of *Towards 2016*, on putting in place national and local structures to facilitate inter-agency working.



Recommendation 3

Measures should be taken to support the development of effective structures of co-operation and to support the members of these structures.

The importance of appropriate structures at various levels – from national to local – is highlighted in the literature. Consideration should be given to the following:

- a. Develop protocols to help ensure the participation of key agencies in local structures. This should incorporate guidelines on active and constructive forms of participation, how agencies might support front-line staff in inter-agency working, the development of information sharing protocols and other mechanisms of co-operation.
- b. Take actions to help ensure an appropriate level of meaningful involvement of the community and voluntary sector. This might include the development of guidelines for helping to ensure parity of esteem for community sector representatives as well as feedback mechanisms to the wider community. Regard for the fact that community organisations have fewer resources than statutory agencies is also necessary.
- c. Provide guidance and assistance on ways to work with inter-agency structures to identify and respond to problems with non-cooperative or obstructing agencies. While this is an issue that needs to be addressed within the context of any specific inter-agency initiative, it is important to anticipate any such difficulties and agree mechanisms for overcoming them.



Recommendation 4

Appropriate Irish resources should be provided to support inter-agency co-operation.

Providing resources, tools and incentives for inter-agency working is recognised as important but remains somewhat underdeveloped within the literature. In developing Irish resources it would be important to draw and build on relevant international resources and tools, for example resources on the *Every Child Matters* website (www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters), tools developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (www.cwdcouncil.org.uk) and other relevant international resources and tools. In addressing this within the Irish children's sector, the following are important:

- a. Develop training for inter-agency working in the children's sector. This training should address key issues such as clarifying roles and responsibilities, defining inter-agency working in the specific context and building agency-to-agency rather than, or as well as, individual-to-individual relationships. Training should also take a whole organisation approach, that is, all relevant personnel within the organisation should be trained and not just those seen to have a primary role within the inter-agency process.
- b. Develop a toolbox for inter-agency working at all levels, to include technical expertise, training and sharing of good practice. Resources to facilitate target setting, data collection and identifying impact indicators are particularly important.
- c. Support the sharing of learning and dissemination of good practice. This could be facilitated by publications on inter-agency working in the children's sector but would need to be accompanied by pragmatic measures to bed down learning in various contexts.



Recommendation 5

Actions should be taken to support the effective planning, strategy development and review of inter-agency working and initiatives in the children's sector.

Currently, there is a lot of unevenness across inter-agency initiatives with regard to how strategically they are planned, implemented and reviewed. Work in this area should include the following:

- a.** Help to ensure that inter-agency initiatives have good knowledge and data on the local context is essential. Ways to provide relevant data to inter-agency initiatives, to assist them in developing integrated impact indicators, and to develop data gathering mechanisms should be explored.
- b.** Help to ensure that all levels of inter-agency work are involved in strategic planning, target setting and monitoring and that this extends to absorbing the learning within organisations.
- c.** Promote a more systematic approach to evaluation with systemic participation by children and young people. Evaluations of integrated service delivery mechanisms involving a client perspective are particularly warranted.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Inter-agency co-operation between government departments, State agencies and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) has, in recent years, come to be seen as somewhat of a gold-standard in the development of public policy and services. It has, as a concept, goal or practice featured in many of the most significant policy documents, both nationally and internationally. Some of the most commonly cited benefits of inter-agency co-operation include collaborative advantage at agency level, the capacity to develop more cohesive policy and practice and improved value for money.

The drive towards inter-agency co-operation has also been evident in the children's sector, with recent policy documents stressing the importance of this approach. The National Children's Strategy, *Our Children, Their Lives* (Government of Ireland, 2000) refers to such co-operation as a key part of the 'engine for change' necessary to meet the goals and objectives of the strategy. The strategy states:

'An ambitious and cross-cutting plan of action has been set down which will only be achieved with the fullest collaboration and co-operation between Government departments, the statutory and voluntary agencies and the research community in working with and supporting families and children.'

Our Children, Their Lives provides an outline of the structures and relationships through which such co-ordination is to be achieved. At the national level these include the establishment of the National Children's Advisory Council, which is comprised of representatives of the statutory and non statutory sectors. Some of the plans and structures outlined in the strategy, such as the establishment of the National Children's Office, have now been subsumed by the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (OMCYA). The OMCYA has now assumed responsibility for the delivery of the National Children's Strategy and the co-ordination of policies directed at children in various government departments. At the local level, the National Children's Strategy points to the need for good working relationships with community and voluntary organisations and identifies the potentially key role to be played by the County and City Development Boards (CDBs).

The role of the CDBs in the children's arena was further developed in The National Agreement, *Towards 2016* (Government of Ireland, 2006). In this agreement the social partners committed to work together to improve children's lives on a number of fronts, including access to appropriate services, access to play, sport and recreational activities, improved literacy and numeracy, and improved participation for children in decision making. *Towards 2016* also provides for the establishment of local Children's Services Committees (CSCs), which are to be embedded in the CDBs and chaired by the Health Services Executive (HSE). One of the key purposes of these committees is to drive and achieve co-ordinated and integrated services.

The rationale for integrated services for children is perhaps most clearly stated in the *Agenda for Children's Services: A Policy Handbook* (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007).



'There is now widespread recognition that just as children live their lives 'in the round', so too must the services be holistic in their orientation and fit together in an integrated fashion. This whole child/whole system* approach ensures that the effectiveness of any particular service benefits from being reinforced and complemented by other services working together, for and with children. Each agency has a responsibility to articulate and act on its own goals in regard to the shared outcomes and be clear as to how it can demonstrate that this is being done.'

The *Agenda for Children's Services* acknowledges that shared ways of working will have to be supported for inter-agency work to thrive. A key part of developing such shared practice is a common language that will ensure that terms have a shared meaning among all relevant parties. In a move to promote such a shared language the *Agenda for Children's Services* defines inter-agency and cross-sectoral working as follows:

'Proactive co-ordination of services between agencies that have their own specific focus (e.g. health, social care, education or social welfare) and that are located within different service sectors, i.e. the statutory, voluntary, community, not-for-profit and commercial sectors.'

It is to such inter-agency working arrangements that this literature review directs its attention.

1.2 Scope of the Current Study

For the purposes of the current literature review the Children Acts Advisory Board (CAAB) has used Bardach's (1998) definition of inter-agency working. Thus 'inter-agency co-operation' is defined as '*any joint action by two or more agencies that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately*'. While the study draws on literature relating to a range of public services, its primary focus is on inter-agency working in children's services in Ireland delivered by public sector bodies, community and voluntary organisations and privately owned organisations. Further, the CAAB has specified the nature of literature to be reviewed as being research-based and of an analytical rather than purely descriptive form. The current review has therefore focused on such research-based analytical materials as are available from a range of sources. These include government commissioned research, academic journals, research commissioned and/or undertaken by other State bodies, research consultants and institutes, academic centres and not-for-profit organisations. However, where such material is unavailable and in order to include particularly relevant examples of inter-agency working, some descriptive material is referred to here. To be considered relevant for inclusion, the research must have been completed between 1990 and 2008 and be available in English. The bulk of the literature reviewed here falls within this time frame. However, a small number of particularly influential texts which pre-date this timeframe have been included.



1.3 Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of this literature review is to produce a summary analysis of research literature on inter-agency co-operation in public services, with a particular focus on inter-agency co-operation in children's services. Specific objectives of the review are:

1. To identify completed research in relation to inter-agency co-operation in the public sector and in particular inter-agency co-operation in children's services.
2. To identify, summarise and analyse key findings, conclusions and recommendations in the research by key themes. These include:
 - a. How is inter-agency co-operation defined? And how are the terms related to other similar terms (e.g. are they used interchangeably or are there important differences) such as inter-agency working, multi-agency, multi-disciplinary/interdisciplinary, joint working/working together and co-ordinated services?
 - b. How are different forms of inter-agency co-operation defined?
 - c. What is the policy context for inter-agency co-operation in children's services in Ireland? What is the policy context for inter-agency co-operation in the public sector in Ireland more generally?
 - d. What is the principal rationale for using inter-agency co-operation? Rationales include: to address problems with multiple and interrelated causes; to generate economies of scale; and to reduce policy fragmentation.
 - e. What are the potential and proven benefits of inter-agency co-operation for children, their families, workers and organisations?
 - f. What are the different types of tools or structures available to support formal inter-agency co-operation? What are the advantages and disadvantages of different types of supports or tools, i.e. when are they suitable for use and when are they not suitable?
 - g. Where does the literature identify good practice in inter-agency working?
 - h. What are the barriers to inter-agency co-operation? How have certain barriers been overcome (e.g. information sharing)?
 - i. What incentives have been used to encourage agencies to start to co-operate or work together? For example, providing financial/resource incentives for co-operation; creating shared professional values/a sense of working towards the same end; providing a legal mandate, using the law to instruct agencies to co-operate; increasing the prestige and profile of agencies that co-operate; highlighting how co-operation can help organisations reduce uncertainty.
 - j. What factors facilitate good inter-agency co-operation? Examples of factors include clear and understood shared goals/aims; involving all relevant professionals; including children/parents/grandparents in inter-agency working; clear roles and responsibilities of organisations; strong managerial commitment and expertise/sufficient leadership etc.
 - k. What are the gaps in relation to knowledge of inter-agency co-operation and what are areas for future research?



- I. What are the other key themes and issues raised in the literature relevant to the CAAB?
3. To identify key areas for consideration in order to enhance inter-agency co-operation, based on the findings from the literature reviewed and an understanding of the CAAB's objectives (as per Strategy 2008 to 2010).

1.4 Methodology

In addition to drawing on publications already identified by the CAAB, the researchers also undertook a number of internet searches on key terms in order to identify additional materials. Keywords and terms utilised in these searches included inter-agency co-operation, inter-agency working, inter-agency methods, both on their own and in combination with the terms child protection, family welfare, child welfare, education and youth justice. A number of searches were also conducted using similar keywords and terms, but substituting multi-agency for inter-agency and organisation for agency. Reflecting the Irish focus of the study many of these searches were confined to Irish search engines such as www.google.ie (employing the general search facility as well as the Books and Scholar search facilities) and www.yahoo.ie, and key Irish websites such as www.omcya.ie. However, searches for Irish materials published in international journals were also undertaken using databases such as Sagepub and Jstor, and key websites such as www.everychildmatters.gov.uk were also searched. While these searches identified considerable material on inter-agency working, little of this related to the Republic of Ireland and to the key areas of child protection, education and youth justice.

Researchers in the children's field, service delivery organisations, government departments, relevant State agencies and NGOs were contacted with a view to identifying and accessing relevant literature. Ongoing contact with staff in the CAAB and members of the project steering committee also helped to guide the review.

In line with the overall objective of the research, an analytical approach to the review of literature on inter-agency working generally, with the principal focus being on children's public services in Ireland, was adopted. While a number of synthesis reports reviewed here are of an international nature, the primary focus was on Irish literature. The overall analytical framework was distilled from the specific objectives of the research as outlined above.

The literature review focused on:

- literature reviews (international and Irish) of inter-agency co-operation;
- reviews of relevant Irish public policy initiatives with inter-agency co-operation;
- Individual literature reports on inter-agency co-operation in Irish children's services.



1.5 Some Issues Arising

Inter-agency working is now included in many national level policies and has almost become a prerequisite in many publicly funded services. Despite this, extensive searches by both the CAAB and the researchers yielded what can only be considered to be limited research and evaluation literature that focuses specifically on the contribution of inter-agency working to the achievement of better service development and delivery. It should also be noted that a considerable amount of the evaluation evidence points to difficulties and obstacles to inter-agency working (particularly at the level of integrating services), which do not appear to have receded over time. In addition, the failure to include the service users' perspective leaves a significant gap in our understanding of the impact of these approaches. Consequently we must draw attention to a current lack of knowledge regarding the overall effectiveness of inter-agency approaches.

A small number of questions posed in the terms of reference proved difficult to answer on the basis of the available research-based literature. Firstly, there is very limited literature available on the issue of incentives to overcome barriers to inter-agency working. Secondly, there is limited material that explicitly addresses the strengths, weaknesses, or appropriateness of the various structures of inter-agency working. Thus it is difficult to establish the benefits of one structure over and above others. Thirdly, tools for inter-agency working are identified but not all have been systematically evaluated in terms of their contribution to inter-agency working or its outcomes. Finally, the available literature did not lend itself to the identification of examples of good practice. The vast majority of the literature did not directly address this issue. Furthermore, where examples of good practice were identified in the literature these were very context bound and based primarily on case studies of what worked in specific circumstances. However, our analysis of the literature available to us, allows us to identify key learning from wide range of initiatives and to present this in terms of its relevance to children's services in Ireland.

Before presenting this key learning three points must be noted. The first of these is that this document reviews available literature on inter-agency working – not contemporary inter-agency practice. The authors are aware that there are developments underway in a number of policy areas, including the development of new regional educational structures and measures to transfer learning from local youth justice initiatives to the national level. These should impact positively on collaborative practice in these areas. However, as there is no analytical literature available on these, they have not been included here. The second point relates to the critique of inter-agency work and in particular the negative assessments that are referenced throughout this document. This should not be misconstrued as criticism of inter-agency work *per se*, but rather as evidence of the need for a robust, clearly articulated approach to inter-agency work that is informed by past experiences.

Third, it is worth noting again the focus of the study and identifying not just what this included but also what is excluded under its remit. The focus of the review, as directed by the CAAB, was on children's services and particularly children's services in Ireland. Furthermore, the review was to consider only research literature of an analytical as opposed to a descriptive nature. This could include academic articles (peer reviewed journals or other journals), commissioned research undertaken by consultants and researchers, and systematic research undertaken by government departments, agencies or



independent public bodies. With the focus of the study thus defined it does not, therefore, consider inter-agency practice in children's services in individual countries, of which there are potentially many documented examples and case studies of both good and poor practice. It does not attempt to evaluate individual resources, structures or tools that are available both in Ireland and elsewhere to support inter-agency working, nor to evaluate or review the practice of individual organisations as described in promotional, practice, resource or other materials.

The study focuses instead on presenting what is known about inter-agency working at the macro level as detailed in a number of literature reviews covering practice across various countries and sectors. It then narrows its focus to examine the research literature on the emergence of inter-agency working in Ireland generally before focusing on the three areas that fall within the remit of the CAAB: child protection and welfare; education; and youth justice.

1.6 Report Structure

The next chapter of this report identifies and analyses a number of synthesis reports on inter-agency working. Although starting from different points of view and covering a variety of public services these syntheses point to a number of common elements in the available research. These elements broadly coincide with the specific objectives of the review detailed above and provide the overall framework and structure for the remaining chapters. The material in the subsequent chapters is presented within this framework. We must note, however, that the different types of material reviewed and the nature of the substantive issues discussed gives a specific tone to each of the chapters.

Chapter 3 presents an analysis of the emergence of inter-agency working as a priority in Irish policy and practice in the field of anti-poverty and social inclusion. It also provides an overview of key lessons from inter-agency working in other public services in Ireland that are not specifically focused on children, but have relevance for the development of integrated children's services. The following three chapters address areas of children's policy and services of most relevance to the CAAB. These are child protection and welfare (Chapter 4), education (Chapter 5) and youth justice (Chapter 6). Chapter 7 brings the preceding analysis together and highlights some of the issues that need to be addressed in progressing inter-agency working in children's services in Ireland.



2 AN OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE REVIEWS ON INTER-AGENCY WORKING

2.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of previous literature reviews on inter-agency working in the international context. It focuses on identifying the main headings under which the majority of the literature easily sits, and on drawing out a number of recurring themes from this. The literature reviews assessed here vary substantially in their focus and their detail. For example, Ronayne (2007) focuses only on those examples of inter-agency working that have a formal structure (task force, network etc.) and cites only examples from Ireland, but places these in the context of international literature. Sloper (2004) reviews inter-agency working in the children's sector against a broader backdrop of reviews, while Cameron and Lart (2003) focus on health initiatives. Hudson *et al.* (1999) try to develop a theory of inter-agency working. Warmington *et al.* (2004) focus their discussion on inter-agency working as the driver of initiatives to combat social exclusion, in line with UK Labour thinking since the late 1990s, a focus that is common in the Irish literature too.

Notwithstanding differences in scope and focus, a number of areas can be identified that provide a framework for considering the divergent approaches to inter-agency working. These areas are:

- definitions;
- motivation/rationale for inter-agency working;
- objectives;
- structures;
- processes;
- strategies/models;
- tools;
- benefits/outcomes (for clients, agencies, professionals);
- actors;
- success/enabling factors;
- inhibiting factors;
- alternatives to inter-agency working.

The main points raised by different authors under these headings are looked at in this chapter. It should be noted at the outset, however, that there is a degree of overlap between the elements contained under these headings. This reflects both a genuine overlap in some instances (as for example in case conferences where structures and processes converge) as well as a lack of consistency and clarity among authors in terms of their definition of inter-agency work and the components of such an approach to service delivery.



2.2 The Theory of Inter-agency Working

Relatively few studies reviewed here address the theory that might underpin and support inter-agency work. Such theories would help to define the concepts that are used in more practical research, inform discussions of inter-agency work and also help to organise and classify materials. More importantly perhaps they would provide a framework for understanding and resourcing the potential effectiveness of inter-agency working. However, a few notable exceptions exist.

Hudson *et al.* (1999) try to elaborate a theoretical framework but take a very normative approach (in the sense that they prescribe how things should be) and use organisational theory to try to understand the behaviours of organisations, that is, the way in which organisations as opposed to the individuals within them operate and respond to internal and external stimuli. Self-interest, autonomy and status loom large here, together with the threat of 'loss of glory' and the nature of the policy environment. They distinguish between policy communities (which are highly integrated within the policy making process, have stable and restricted membership and have a strong sense of shared objectives) and issue networks (these are looser, less stable in membership and with weaker points of entry to the policy domain). Interestingly, they use conflict theory to suggest that conflict can be a useful part of collaboration rather than an indicator of dysfunction.

Warmington *et al.* (2004) draw on activity theory, which is set in direct opposition to traditional professional role theory. Professional role theory posits that the actions and behaviour of a professional are shaped by internal (the individual professional themselves) and external expectations of how they should behave in their professional role, societal norms and social rewards or sanctions. This is a predominantly consensus-based and somewhat rigid system. In contrast, a key aspect of activity theory is 'knotworking', where professionals come together to address a particular issue or case over a relatively short period of time, but the 'knot' rapidly changes to bring together other professionals as the issue at hand changes. Activity theory also recognises that collaborative working need not be based on consensus among the actors involved. Rather it identifies conflict across practitioners and agencies as a source of expansive learning for those involved. Warmington *et al.* (2004), citing Ackerman (1999) argue that the generation of new meanings via dialogue is more important to learning in and for collaboration than idealised notions of consensus as a 'prerequisite' for collaboration and provide a dynamic model of collaboration as opposed to the more settled notion of shared goals, values etc.

Cheever *et al.* (2005) provide an outline of Bardach's (1998) theory of collaboration that centres on 'craftmanship' as opposed to the traditional framework of networking theory. This theory views the construction of a successful collaboration in the same way as one views the construction of a building: in as much as a building requires good plans, high quality materials, and skilled craftsmen, so too does successful collaboration. Collaboration can therefore be viewed as a function of the skill of craftsmen interacting with the quality of available materials, as well as the ability of the craftsmen to create protection mechanisms against actual or potential destructive environmental forces such as personnel turnover and the erosion of political alliances. This must be underpinned by an operating system based on communication among the partners in the first instance. It must also support flexibility, motivate lower-level staff, increase mutual intelligence and trust cross community roles and



boundaries, while maintaining accountability and exploiting financial exchanges that induce high quality performance (Bardach, 1998).

An alternative to normative organisational theory is provided by critical theory or political economy. The only paper reviewed that makes reference to these types of critiques is Kelleher and Kelleher (2005). In their review of inter-agency work in Ireland they cite several writers who suggest that locally based partnerships have an ideological role in maintaining political legitimacy in the face of processes of accumulation that promote inequality. They also cite Sable (1996) and Powell and Geoghegan (2004) who argue that local partnerships seek to involve the marginalised in the management of their own marginalisation rather than in a genuine effort to overcome it.

Finally, in an examination of integrated strategies to address educational disadvantage among children, Cullen (1997) argues that integrated community services have their theoretical roots in developmental ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and social and personal networking theories and research (Garbarino, 1982). The ecological approach stresses the need to develop a supportive social network, involving families, friends, neighbours and both formal and informal careers in order to improve children's capacities to grow and develop. Applying this to inter-agency work in education Cullen presents Montgomery and Rossi's (1994) conceptual model. Montgomery and Rossi argue that academic progress or lack of progress needs to be understood in the context of (i) the quality of resources available to children (such as abilities, family support and educational opportunities) and (ii) students' perceptions of the value of investing these resources in academic achievement. This model assumes that in circumstances where children are generally doing well, home, school and community are well integrated for the purposes of education at least. The absence of integration, conversely, contributes to poor educational outcomes.

This highlights the benefits of a theoretical framework within which to locate inter-agency interventions: within Montgomery and Rossi's model an integrated approach therefore is not simply a 'good idea' in relation to general education provision, rather it is a way of tackling problems inherent in the relationship between the home, school and community in circumstances where educational disadvantages persist.

2.3 Definitions of Inter-agency Working

In considering the definitions provided in the literature reviews, the first substantial point that must be noted is a lack of consistency in the use of terms among reviewers and those they cite. The terms 'co-operation', 'collaboration', 'co-ordination', 'partnership' and 'inter-agency working' are used interchangeably and without rigorous attempts to define either what these terms mean or the differences between them. For example, Gray (1989) provides a definition of 'inter-agency collaboration', Bardach (1998) provides a definition of 'inter-agency co-operation' while Nelson and Zadek (2000) define 'social partnerships' while the OECD (1996, cited in Eivers 2001) defines 'service integration'.



Figure 2.1: Definitions of Various Forms of Inter-agency Working

Concept / Model	Definition	Source
Inter-organisational Collaboration	A process through which different parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited view of what is possible.	Gray (1989)
Service Integration	Service integration (SI) refers primarily to ways of organising the delivery of services to people at the local level. SI is not a new programme to be superimposed over pre-existing programmes: rather it is a process aimed at developing an integrated framework within which ongoing programmes can be rationalised and enriched to do a better job of making services available within existing commitments and resources.	OECD (1996) cited in Eivers (2001)
Inter-agency Co-operation	Any joint action by two or more agencies that is intended to increase public value by their working together rather than separately.	Bardach (1998)
Social Partnerships	People and organisations from some combination of public, business and civil constituencies who engage in voluntary, mutually beneficial, innovative relationships to address common societal aims through combining their resources and competencies.	Nelson and Zadek (2000) cited in Kjaer (2003)

Reflecting the lack of definitional clarity, Hudson *et al.* (1999) cite Aiken (1975) who describes inter-agency working as a term which is '*overworked, underachieved and seldom defined*'. At a political level he also quotes Weiss's suggestion that

'...the definitional ambiguity which makes co-ordination a handy political device has led to a chasm between rhetoric and operationalisation: co-ordination is discussed in the political arena as though everyone knows precisely what it means, when in fact it means many inconsistent things and occasionally means nothing at all'. (Weiss, 1981)

The apparent lack of clarity on what exactly inter-agency working is may not appear to be significant at first. However, when taken in conjunction with other apparent obstacles and difficulties this lack of clarity takes on considerable significance. On the positive side, this lack of rigorous conceptualisation and rigidity in definitions may reflect a number of issues including a desire to be flexible and accommodating of different perspectives and inter-agency working arrangements. On the negative side, however, it may lead to confusion among practitioners and managers of what exactly it is they are trying to achieve and what processes, tools and strategies may be most effective. This lack of



rigorous conceptualisation and definition is also reflected in the relatively weak and scarce literature on issues such as the rationale for inter-agency working, its purpose and objectives (as discussed later). This in turn can contribute to the creation or extension of many of the obstacles to inter-agency working such as the lack of clarity in relation to processes and strategies.

A number of the authors whose work is reviewed here (Tomlinson, 2003; Atkinson *et al.*, 2002; Atkinson *et al.*, 2005) suggest that models and examples of good practice exist in inter-agency working and that the immediate context within which they occur is important in describing and understanding them. The relationship between the context and the appropriate model should not inhibit the further conceptualisation, refinement and definition of what inter-agency working is. It does, however, suggest that a number of types of inter-agency working need to be considered. This can provide a framework within which various inter-agency working arrangements can be located and the various processes and strategies they employ can be elucidated.

In this context, more useful than these single-strand definitions, is the attention that has been paid to different types and levels of inter-agency work. Warmington *et al.* (2004) provide the following analysis of different types of inter-agency work:

- *Inter-agency working*: where more than one agency works together in a planned and formal way, rather than simply through informal networking (although the latter may support and develop the former). This can be at strategic or operational level.
- *Multi-agency working*: where more than one agency works with a client but not necessarily jointly. Multi-agency working may be prompted by joint planning or simply be a form of replication, resulting from a lack of proper inter-agency co-ordination. As with inter-agency operation, it may be concurrent or sequential. In actuality, the terms 'inter-agency' and 'multi-agency' (in its planned sense) are often used interchangeably.
- *Joined-up working, policy or thinking* refers to deliberately conceptualised and co-ordinated planning, which takes account of multiple policies and varying agency practices. This has become a totem in current UK social policy.



Himmelman's (1992) early definition of levels of inter-agency approaches also remains influential. He distinguished between accumulative *levels* of inter-agency working as follows:

- networking (information exchange);
- co-ordination (information exchange plus altering activities);
- co-operation (the above two combined with sharing resources); and
- collaboration (all the above plus the active enhancing of other agencies for mutual benefit).

Mutual benefit here refers to the accruing of benefit to each of the agencies involved. A summary of definitional terms related to multi-agency activity is provided in Atkinson *et al.* (2007).

2.4 Motivation and Rationale for Inter-agency Working

There are three clear examples of commonality on the topic of motivation for inter-agency work within the literature. First is the rationale that inter-agency working helps to provide answers to complex problems that cannot be addressed by one agency alone, which is cited by Serrano (2003) and Ronayne (2007). The second is the desire for economies of scale which is cited by Serrano (2003) and Tomlinson (2003). Third, Ronayne (2007) and Hudson *et al.* (1999) cite collaborative advantage as one of the principal reasons for inter-agency work, although they differ in the primary advantage to be attained. Ronayne (2007) considers the primary collaborative advantage to be securing new ways to address complex problems, while Hudson *et al.* (1999) embed collaborative advantage in a theory of organisational behaviour which includes self-interest. Other motivations are also cited, including the desire to reduce policy fragmentation (Blank, 1997). Kjaer (2003) notes the economic and political developments, as well as changes in legislation and the availability of funds as among the key motivating factors leading to the establishment of local partnerships

A key issue to emerge from the literature is that most of the reviewers address the question of rationale from the organisational perspective, with less attention paid to the perspective of the end users, although there are some notable exceptions. Atkinson *et al.* (2002) address the issue of the impact of multi-agency initiatives on the target groups they serve. However, this is based on the service provider's impression of impact on the target groups as opposed to the views of service users themselves. Tomlinson (2002) following Borland *et al.*, (1998) argues that progress in work with young people is dependent on inter-agency collaboration while Fletcher-Campbell (2001) suggests that as clients are frequently so vulnerable their needs cannot be met by any single agency. In his case studies Serrano (2003) states that there was a high level of client participation in one instance (Plan Jefas de Hogar (Argentina)) and the recognised need for it in another (Programa de desarrollo sustentable de Darién (Panamá)). Tomlinson (2003) also notes the potential benefits to end users as a rationale for inter-agency working.



The only review that involves the actual views of clients, including children, is Sloper (2004) in her review of facilitators of, and barriers to inter-agency working in children's services. The focus of this review was services for children with particular needs such as children in care, disaffected and excluded pupils, children with mental health issues, disabilities or chronic illnesses. In this, the views of both the families and the children were taken into account. On this basis Sloper writes:

'The demands placed on families by having to deal with many different professionals and agencies have been well documented in such studies as have the difficulties in obtaining information about the roles of different services, the problems of conflicting advice and the likelihood that the children's and families needs will fall into gaps between different agencies provisions.'

In a similar vein, Warmington *et al.* (2004) propose a participatory model of 'joined up' working that involves collaboration between clients and professionals. From further chapters it will be seen that the absence of the voice of the clients and users of services, and specifically children is a common theme across a number of areas.

It is notable that few of the authors whose work is reviewed here question or challenge the basic premise of inter-agency work, that is, that it is a good and perhaps essential way of working, particularly when dealing with complex problems and issues such as those presented by social exclusion and vulnerable groups. Three exceptions can be cited here. First, Serrano (2003) challenges the idea that inter-agency co-ordination is a good and necessary idea in and of itself and states that it is important not to over sell or exaggerate the benefits of such working arrangements. Second, Warmington *et al.* (2004) challenge the concept of inter-agency working being a virtuous and, in particular, non-conflictual approach to services. Third, Cameron and Lart (2003) identify the lack of challenge to the idea of inter-agency work in the literature. This lack of a critical voice has led to a kind of circularity in the literature, with little concern for the effectiveness of inter-agency work, and has undoubtedly contributed to the limited development of knowledge on what factors help or hinder such working arrangements.

In line with this, Cameron and Lart (2003) identify a two fold challenge for professionals and policy makers: to ensure that future joint working initiatives address the issues already known to promote and inhibit their success, and encourage agencies to shift the focus of their attention to evaluating the impact of new ways of working on the lives of clients and service users. The issue of evaluation is also raised by Sloper (2004) who highlights the need for methodologically sound evaluations of local multi-agency services. Specifically, Sloper calls for these evaluations to focus on the outcomes they achieve for service users, and in terms of costs and measures of effectiveness. He argues that, while process evaluations have produced consistent findings on conditions which promote or act as barriers to multi-agency working, further investigation is required into the ways in which these process variables relate to outcomes.



2.5 Objectives and Purpose of Inter-agency Working

Little specific attention has been devoted to the objectives and purpose (i.e., what it aims to achieve) of inter-agency work in the literature reviewed. This reflects the nature of the materials being reviewed and the relatively high level of abstraction contained therein, as well as a dominant focus on motivation rather than objectives. Two key issues can be identified however. The first is that there is an emphasis in the literature on inter-agency working as a problem-solving mechanism, with little attention being paid to its potential or role in preventative work. The exception to this is Atkinson *et al.* (2005) where prevention is identified as a key impact of multi-agency working. The second and related point is the lack of focus on improved service delivery in the literature. Sloper (2004) notes that service delivery is the least frequently cited objective of inter-agency work in the UK. This finding is not surprising in light of the focus on the organisational perspectives of inter-agency working as opposed to clients' perspectives already noted above.

2.6 Structures and Formal Co-ordinating Mechanisms

In general, co-ordinating mechanisms are not detailed in the literature reviewed. However, Seranno (2003) amongst others has identified formal and informal structures. Formal co-ordination mechanisms include organisational structures and job definitions as well as managerial instruments such as plans, contracts, budgets etc. Serrano (2003) cites examples of formal co-ordination formats and strategies as follows:

- The official liaison – a person whose formal role is to co-ordinate the actions of two or more organisations.
- The inter-organisation group – one of the most common ways of inter-agency working including inter-agency task forces, cabinet councils etc.
- The co-ordinating unit – a unit that is set up with the purpose of co-ordinating decisions and actions. This unit has greater autonomy and more formal structure than the above inter-organisation groups and will usually have its own office, budgets and personnel. The focus of the unit is primarily on planning, managerial and administrative activities as opposed to the implementation of tasks.

Notwithstanding the general lack of attention paid to structures or mechanisms to co-ordinate inter-agency work, two possible options can be distilled from the literature. The first is the idea of a minimum co-ordinating mechanism that allows for consultation and information exchange rather than decision making (Chisholm, 1989). Chisholm also argues that it is better to use the minimum mechanisms necessary to achieve a satisfactory level of co-ordination. The second idea is that put forward by Warmington *et al.* (2005). Using the concept of co-configuration, informed by activity theory, they recommend a move away from compact teams of professional networks to an approach that focuses on what families need and how professionals with varying professional backgrounds and values and no common location meet, potentially briefly, in a variety of configurations that can meet these needs.

Citing Engeström *et al.* (1999), Warmington *et al.* refer to 'distributed expertise' with team working replaced by 'knotworking'. Knotworking happens where rapidly changing, often improvised



collaborations exist between loosely connected professionals with the view of meeting a child's or family's needs. This more dynamic and fluid approach is in contrast to more traditional thinking about inter-agency structures as being static and long term.

A related theme to emerge from the literature here is that of inter-dependence. Hudson *et al.* (1999) state that agencies must be aware of their inter-dependence as in the absence of this awareness collaborative work makes no sense. Following Alter and Hage (1993) they identify two types of inter-agency co-operation: symbiotic co-operation among organisations that have similarities but operate in different sectors and whose relationships can be intense and stable; and, competitive co-operation where organisations of the same kind are producing the same product or services and where relationships tend to be fragile and insecure.

In contrast to the international literature, as will become clear in later chapters, Irish material is very focused on the structures of inter-agency co-operation. Indeed there have been criticisms of the emphasis on inter-agency structures in Ireland to the detriment of inter-agency processes (Ronayne, 2007). This will be returned to in Chapter 3 below.

2.7 Processes

There is some confusion in the literature between process, components of inter-agency work and models. For example, Ronayne (2007) following Himmelman (1994) includes networking, co-ordinating, co-operating and collaborating as elements of the process, but these could also be considered as models of inter-agency working, or as suggested earlier, definitions. Hudson *et al.* (1999) describe the process of building the collaboration rather than implementing inter-agency actions in terms of stages or tasks. These include establishing the contextual factors (expectations and constraints), recognition of the need to collaborate, identification of a legitimate basis for collaboration and nurturing fragile relationships. These could also be considered to be components of inter-agency work rather than stages.

Cheevers *et al.* (2005) provide a summary of Gray's (1998) three phases of collaborative working. These are summarised in Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.2: Phases of Collaborative Working

Phase One: Individuals (and their respective agencies) engage in a problem setting process. A common definition of the problem or issue to be addressed is agreed, and there is a commitment made to collaborative working to address this. This phase also involves the identification and legitimating of the stakeholders, and identification of resources.

Phase Two: In this phase the direction for the collaborative group is set. This includes establishing ground rules for the collaboration, agenda setting, engagement in some joint activity such as information searches, the exploration of options and agreeing the final programme of work or 'deal' for the collaboration.

Phase Three: Phase Three sees the implementation of the agreed set of activities. Tasks in this phase include dealing with the various constituencies involved, building external support, structuring the long-term relationship, and monitoring implementation and compliance.

Cheever *et al.* (2005) also outline Winer and Ray's (1994) four stages of the collaborative process which is individual led. These are summarised in Figure 2.3.

Figure 2.3: Four Stages of the Collaborative Process

Stage 1: Individuals or groups of individuals, referred to as policy entrepreneurs, from different agencies work together to begin to develop a shared vision or possible solution to an issue that could involve inter-agency collaboration.

Stage 2: In this stage the emphasis shifts from an individual-to-individual process to one which is of individual-to-organisation. This is where individuals try to bring their colleagues into the work and begin to identify roles, resolve conflicts, and organise the proposed collaborative work.

Stage 3: The third stage involves organisation-to-organisation collaboration, the establishment of joint systems, evaluation of results, and undertaking renewal activities.

Stage 4: In the fourth and final stage, collaboration-to-community, attempts are made to maintain continuity of effort. Public relations are used to create visibility for the collaboration and its work, system changes achieved and embraced. Reflecting this, the original collaboration may come to an end, presumably having achieved its goal, and new individuals and organisations may become active and involved to address new or changing needs.

A third process is proposed by Warmington *et al.* (2004) based on object orientation and boundary crossing. Object orientation requires identifying what professionals are working on and what they perceive as the ends to be achieved. Working in an object oriented way allows professionals working in loose and changing configurations to experience 'expansive learning' where they get to rethink their goals, activities and relationships with each other. Professionals thereby encounter an enriched learning environment that allows for the formation of new activities, broader understanding and changes in practice.

Boundary crossing refers to the horizontal sharing of knowledge among diverse professionals and organisations from different sectors and cultures such as education, mental health and youth justice. It is set in contrast to the more traditional vertical learning that comes with acquiring competence over time and a gradual progress upwards as professionals gain specialised knowledge and experience. Boundary crossing, on the other hand, allows and promotes learning opportunities and the development of expertise through horizontal working relationships that arise as a result of collaborative inter-agency working. Therefore, by bringing diverse professionals together to engage in shared activities, professional learning is expanded as they negotiate working practices that cross traditional professional boundaries. In the light of some of the material contained in later chapters of this report, this process appears to be somewhat optimistic about the motivations and willingness of a number of professional groups to be involved in inter-agency work.

2.8 Models and Typologies of Inter-agency Working

The models described in the literature are predominantly focused on new collaborative organisations, co-location of agency staff, steering groups and case conferences. Atkinson *et al.* (2002) provide a typology of multi-agency working which is primarily based on the purpose of the multi-agency work. The five models identified are:

- decision making groups;
- consultations and training events;
- centre-based delivery;
- co-ordinated delivery, i.e. through the appointment of a co-ordinator, gathering a range of expertise on one site in order to deliver a more co-ordinated and comprehensive service; and
- operational-team delivery.

These models are then located in a strategic/operational divide. Only decision making groups are located in the strategic sphere, with all others residing in the operational one. The co-ordinated delivery model straddles both spheres via a co-ordinator, but its activities are also based in the operational domain.

Atkinson *et al.* (2002) view these models as a continuum from decision making bodies where professionals from different agencies maintain their distinct role, to operational teams where professionals work closely and therefore the merging of roles is more likely. Operational teams were found to be the least common model of inter-agency working. This is in line with findings by Sloper



(2004) that of the seven types of joint working she identifies, only one, case or care management within multi-agency teams, aims to ensure that the service is co-ordinated at the point of delivery. She also notes that case or care management is the least common form of inter-agency working in children's services and states that

'...the majority of models were focused more on the organisation of professionals and whilst they should contribute to greater communication and understanding between professionals in different agencies, they will not necessarily ensure that families receive a co-ordinated service'.

Many models are suggested in the literature reviews. For example, Atkinson *et al.* (2005) distil the typology outlined above from their analysis of literature, but also draw attention to the four models that were identified by a UK Audit Commission in 1998. These are (i) formation of a separate legal entity, (ii) formation of a virtual organization where a separate organisation is formed, but without generating a new legal identity, (iii) co-locating staff from partner organisations, and (iv) steering groups.

Dyson *et al.* (1998) developed the following typology of inter-agency relationships:

- Mutual co-operation, in which agencies recognise each other's statutory responsibilities and have systems for responding to information requests. Co-operation occurs in areas where it does not infringe on specialist roles, and generally runs smoothly as agencies' responsibilities are clearly defined. The need for co-operation is acknowledged, yet individual practitioners can still work in what they see as the best interest of their clients and departments remain distinct.
- Shared responsibility, in which agencies '*recognize the concept of need as multi-faceted and therefore requiring a multi-agency response*'. Activities are frequently locally based joint services, with considerable operational autonomy, although there is a risk that this leads to policy based on responses to front line activity, rather than as a result of careful analysis of evidence.
- Natural lead, in which it is recognised that different agencies will take a lead role at different stages of a client's life. For example, in the case of children with special needs, health takes the lead before school age, at which point education takes the lead, with social services taking pole position after the young people leave school. Responsibility is unambiguous and information tends to be held centrally by the lead agency, but non lead agencies may be unwilling to help fund projects not felt to be their priority and the transition process can be difficult.
- Community services, in which individual need is seen in the broader context of community need. Services are therefore devolved and centralised management structures dismantled, with the potential for extending provision through commercial partnership. Participation by service users can be high, but there is a risk of fragmentation of overall provision, or that communities receive unequal provision.



Sloper (2004) citing Watson *et al.* (2000) classifies joint working based on the way in which professionals work together at an operational level:

- Multi-disciplinary working among individuals within a single agency.
- Interdisciplinary working where individuals from different agencies separately assess the needs of child and family and meet together to discuss findings and set goals.
- Trans-disciplinary working where members of different agencies work together jointly sharing aims, information, tasks and responsibilities. This is the most holistic approach centred on the need of the child and family and involving a primary provider whose post is funded on a multi-agency basis. This is a key worker type approach that Sloper (2004) advocates.

Robinson *et al.* (2008) provide a summary of different models in relation to the extent of integration. They consider models in terms of: the extent of engagement; the extent of communication; the extent of joint planning; and the extent of process integration. Figure 2.4 presents a summary of the points made by Robinson *et al.* (2008) in relation to these.

Figure 2.4: Models in Relation to the Extent of Integration

Models Based on the State of Engagement
Shinners' (2001) three-level typology: co-operation, co-ordination, integration
Different levels of organisation participation (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2005): defensive participation, opportunistic participation, active participation.
Model Based on the State of Communication
Hudson's (1998) model of collaborative involvement: communication, co-ordination, co-location, commissioning.
Gregson <i>et al.</i> 's (1992) taxonomy of collaboration on joint working: no direct communication, formal and brief communication, regular communication and consultation, high level of joint working, multi-disciplinary working.
Models Based on the State of Joint Planning
Miller and McNicholl's (2003) three degrees of integration: signposting and co-ordination, managed processes, integrated organisations.
Turnstill <i>et al.</i> (2007) collective approach to service provision: commissioned/collaborative services, collaborative services, complementary services, integrated services



Models Based on the State of Sustainability

Ladder of partnership, Gaster *et al.* (1999): Information exchange: planning action; implementing projects and service plans, co-ordination and co-operation in practice, collaboration and full partnership

Townsley *et al.* (2004) Three Level Typology: autonomous working, co-ordinated working, integrated working, typology of development in community partnerships,

Broadhead and Armistead (2007): loose confederation of partners, conjoined partnership, integrated partnership, holistic partnership.

Models Based on the State of Process Integration

Model for interdisciplinary collaboration (Brunner, 1991): interdependence, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, reflection on process

Woods *et al.* seven dimensions of classifications of partnerships: degree of static vision, degree of group/area identity, creation of an infrastructure, significant professional collaborative ACTIVITY, penetration below senior management level, strategic innovation, normalisation of collaboration as part of the schools' culture.

Source: Robinson *et al.* (2008)

While there is considerable literature available on each of these models, and authors and reviewers often cite their own preference for one or more models, it is notable that there appears to be no evaluation of the models or typologies as inter-agency entities and their varying impact on service implementation or outcomes for service users.

Few of the studies reviewed here relate specifically to services for children. Two notable exceptions to this are Sloper (2004) and Cullen (1997). In the context of a literature review with a primary focus on inter-agency activity in children's services, the identification of a common concern in these two reviews is not insignificant. Of particular note in these studies is the role assigned to one particular 'key worker' or what may be more commonly referred to as a case management approach. Sloper (2004) highlights the need for key worker type approaches, which while recognised in policy for over 20 years, is not reflected in children's services in the UK, many of which remain fragmented. Additionally, Sloper notes that case or care management approaches are the least used in children's services, but are the only ones that might ensure the delivery of a co-ordinated service to children and families. Likewise, Cullen (1997) refers to case management as a key strategy for integrating and co-ordinating services to children and families and recommends the strengthening of case management practices. However, a review of research into key working in the UK argued that successful key working itself requires effective inter-agency structures (Greco *et al.*, 2005). This is an issue that will be returned to in the following chapters.



2.9 Tools and Strategies for Co-ordination at the Service Delivery Level

Various tools are available to help support inter-agency working at both strategic and operational levels. For example, Ronayne (2007) refers to the multitude of guides and handbooks available on inter-agency working including some from Ireland, the UK and USA. He cites *The Partnership Toolkit* (Haverty, 2007) in Ireland, in the UK, *Partnership for Success: A Guide to Partnership Working for Learning Partnerships* (Campbell and Percy-Smith, 2000), and *Working Across Boundaries* (Linden, 2002) in the US, and the European Commission's *The Principle of Partnership in the New ESF Programmes* (EC, 2006) as examples of such tools. Ronayne suggests these guides place an emphasis on two issues: the role of organisational factors in effective inter-organisational working and the role of individual factors associated with personnel. Serrano (2003) suggests that tools or techniques can be identified at the different levels of inter-agency work. These are summarised in Figure 2.5. A recent contribution to this material is the Framework for Integrated Planning for outcomes for children and planning (CAWT, 2008), which focuses on outcomes, indicators, integrated planning and commissioning and participation.

Citing Alexander (1995) Serrano also makes the key point that there are no *a priori* best co-ordination structures or tools for a specific situation and that various structures have had different levels of success. This raises an issue that recurs throughout much of the literature, that is, the importance of the specific context in which inter-agency working takes place. At a different level, Sloper (2004) refers to the setting out of standards in the Children's National Service Framework as a way of bringing services together.

Figure 2.5: Co-ordination Approaches and Tools

Level of Inter-agency Work	Tools and Techniques
Communication and Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inter-agency task forces ■ Inter-ministerial liaisons ■ Cabinet councils ■ Use common geographical boundaries
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plan review ■ Joint planning ■ Uniform planning periods ■ Common definitions and quantifiable outcomes
Operational Co-ordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Joint funding of programmes ■ Joint purchase of services ■ Co-operative (non-financial) agreement e.g. division of labour
Service Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One –stop shopping/collocation ■ Case management ■ Using clients as purchasing agents ■ Shared information services ■ Universal eligibility and referral mechanisms ■ Shared credit mechanisms ■ Shared staff
Source: Serrano (2003) citing own adaptation from Jennings (1993, 1994) and Kagan and Pritchard (1993)	



Cullen (1997) citing Bruner (1991) argues that tools and resources must be made available at all levels of the organisations involved. He suggests the following strategies to resource the various levels of collaboration from planning to service delivery:

- *Level 1: Inter-agency collaboration - Administration.* Administrators at State or local levels manage agencies to facilitate inter-agency and intra-agency collaboration through protocols, inter-agency agreements, staff organisation, staff incentives and job evaluation systems.
- *Level 2: Inter-agency collaboration - Service.* Workers at the service delivery level in various agencies are given incentives and support for joint efforts with staff in other agencies.
- *Level 3: Intra-agency collaboration -* workers at the front line service delivery level are given discretion in serving clients, provided with support for decision making and involved in agency planning.
- *Level 4: Worker – Family collaboration –* front line worker and family members determine needs, set goals and work toward greater family autonomy and functioning.

In addition, Cullen (1997) argues that an integrative strategy for education must be driven by and actively involve both senior and front line staff, as well as involving families and communities not simply as receptors of services but as resources in the planning and development of new services.

At a conceptual level Warmington *et al.* (2004) citing Hoyles and Noss (undated) recommend the use of 'boundary objects' as a valuable conceptual tool for understanding inter-agency learning, communication and transfer. Boundary objects provide a key means for analysing and understanding boundary crossing practices. Boundary objects may be physical objects, pieces of information, conversations, goals or rules. These become boundary objects when they are worked upon simultaneously by diverse sets of actors. Warmington *et al.* provide the example of a child's care plan. This may be negotiated by a nexus comprising teachers, social workers, health workers and educational psychologists. Because the care plan sits at the intersection between these professional practices or cultures it can be used differently by the corresponding communities, providing a means to think and talk about an idea in multi-voiced fashion. An important aspect of this situation is that each profession or community need not completely adopt the perspective of the other. Boundary objects therefore provide a mechanism for meanings to be shared and constructed across professional boundaries (and across boundaries between professionals and clients) and provide key moments of meaning-creation, renewing learning through collaboration.

2.10 Actors

As noted above, there is considerable overlap between some of the headings used to present information in the literature. One term that has various meanings is that of actors, which is used to include sectors, organisations, systems and individual professionals involved in inter-agency working. However, the literature reviewed for this chapter has tended to consider 'actors' from the perspective of classifying forms of inter-agency working rather than consideration of actors at an operational or service delivery level. For example, Serrano (2003) sees actors, or more correctly sectors, as a useful means of classifying co-ordinating formats. He distinguishes between the following:



- inter-governmental or vertical co-ordination, that is, joint action of agencies belonging to different government levels;
- inter-sectoral or horizontal co-ordination, which involves the joint action of agencies from different sectors;
- public-private co-ordination partnerships between public, non-profit and for profit organisations.

Similarly, Ronayne (2007) classifies actors according to their geographical, intra-sectoral or cross-sectoral location. He also notes the imbalance in resources between the statutory and voluntary sectors and cites Gazley and Brudney's argument (2007) that this can be a source of motivation for cross-sectoral work where the statutory sector gets expertise and the voluntary sector gets funding. However, there are several problems with this approach including the lack of parity of esteem and power between the statutory and non statutory sectors. This issue is returned to in a number of the following chapters.

2.11 The Benefits and Outcomes of Inter-agency Working

The analysis of the benefits of inter-agency working principally identifies the beneficiaries as the agencies or organisations involved, the individual staff involved and the clients or users of the services. In addition Tomlinson (2003) and Serrano (2003) also state that, where economies of scale have been achieved, benefits may accrue to the exchequer.

Atkinson (2002) identifies a range of impacts or outcomes of inter-agency working for the organisations and individuals involved. These are clustered into the categories shown in Figure 2.6.



Figure 2.6: Organisational and Individual Impacts of Inter-agency Working

	Organisations	Individuals
Understanding	<i>Understanding within agencies</i> , e.g. the development of a broad perspective or focus and improved understanding and knowledge of other agencies	<i>Understanding among staff</i> , e.g. raised awareness of how other agencies worked and raised awareness of the issues.
Interactions	<i>Interactions between agencies</i> , e.g. improved relationships and shared responsibility	<i>Interactions with other professionals</i> , e.g. meeting different professionals and enhanced or new working relationships
Gains and Losses	<i>Single-agency gains or losses</i> , e.g. raised profile/status, achieved targets and increased workload or pressure	<i>Individual gains or losses</i> , e.g. rewarding, satisfying or enjoyable, and increased work or pressure
Practices	<i>Agency practices</i> , e.g. access to other services or expertise and early identification and intervention	<i>Professional practice</i> , e.g. experience or learning how to engage in multi-agency working.
Extension	<i>Extension to other areas of work</i> , e.g. highlighted the value of joint working and increased joint working in other areas	N/A
Source: Atkinson (2002)		

Multi-agency interventions in Atkinson's (2002) study were also generally felt to have had a positive impact on other multi-agency work in which the organisations were involved. The lessons learned in multi-agency working were also reported to have been useful in other areas of work. Where initiatives were considered to have been examples of good practice they provided motivation for others to become involved. A general improvement in inter-agency relationships was reported by a number of initiatives. Although largely positive in nature, and therefore to be read as benefits as well as impacts, it is noteworthy that some of these impacts were viewed as negative. This included the loss of profile of individual organisations, and benefits being seen to accrue to one agency or one type of professional at the cost of others.



As with the impact of multi-agency work on agencies, both positive and negative impacts were reported for the individual personnel involved (Atkinson, 2002). In particular, many of those who stated that they found such work to be rewarding also reported increased pressure at work, with some evidence of differential impacts of multi-agency working based on the original position, role or service provided by both individual staff and agencies.

Consistent with findings presented elsewhere in this chapter, there is little discussion in the literature of the benefits that accrue to clients and service users. Sloper (2004) is again an exception to this. Citing Cameron *et al.* (2000), Sloper (2004) states that there is little good evidence on the effectiveness of multi-agency working in relation to the effects on services users. The few evaluations that have been carried out were methodologically poor and frequently there were no outcome data other than the subjective views of professionals. However, Sloper goes on to cite Liabo *et al.*'s (2001) review of key worker systems for disabled children that concludes that while large scale, robust studies are lacking, taken together existing studies are consistent on the impact on clients. When compared with families who do not have a key worker, families who have such workers report improved quality of life, better relationships with services, better and quicker access to services and reduced levels of stress. Sloper also cites Borrill *et al.* (2002) and their review of team working. This study concluded that there is some evidence of positive outcomes. For example, primary health care teams reduce hospitalisation and costs, improve service provision – including increasing access to healthcare, improving detection and treatment and follow up – and enhance staff satisfaction and motivation.

Sloper's (2004) findings on the potential benefits of inter-agency working, specifically to children and families, is upheld by McInnes (2007) who provides a number of examples of 'success' in this area. Examples cited include Townsley *et al.*'s (2003) finding that parents of children with disabilities reported that a multi-agency service provided them with an effective, focused support service that helped them manage their child's complex needs, and Halsey *et al.*'s (2004) evaluation of multi-agency behaviour and education support teams that found a significant reduction in exclusions and behaviour problems.

While it is acknowledged that much of the literature reviewed here is at a high level of abstraction, it could not go unnoticed that the perceptions and experience of one groups of stakeholders are conspicuous by their almost total absence. This group is users of the inter-agency services. Sloper (2004) provides relief in this respect as the only author whose focus is on service users. However, as noted in several places in this chapter it is the perspective of organisations that prevails along with the views of individual or groups of professionals. This has particular implications when considering inter-agency working in children's services, which are the focus of Sloper's (2004) review.

Kjaer (2003) notes that while most local social partnerships can point to positive outcomes for participants in their *projects*, two issues remain. These are of relevance to developing inter-agency approaches to children's services in Ireland. Firstly, in looking at the outcomes for individual participants little attention is paid to their sustainability. For example, a number of participants may be



helped in employment or self employment, but research has shown that for many these are short-lived outcomes. Secondly, evaluations tell us little about the outcomes of the *partnership* as a particular structure or method of working as opposed to the outcomes of its projects.

Figure 2.7 provides a summary of reported impacts of multi-agency working as presented in a recent publication by Atkinson *et al.* (2007).

Figure 2.7: Summary of the Impacts of Multi-agency Working

Impacts on Professionals	
Personal Well-Being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Professionals found multi-agency working to be rewarding, stimulating and enjoyable ■ Increased job satisfaction ■ Opportunities for creativity and autonomy ■ Increased professional confidence
Professional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased knowledge and understanding of the roles of other agencies ■ Increased knowledge and understanding of cross-disciplinary issues ■ Changed professional understanding and practice ■ Expansion of roles and the development of new ones
Professional Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased accountability ■ Confusion over roles and professional identities ■ Questioning of individual roles ■ Uncertainty over professional status
Working Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved communication between agencies/services ■ Improved interaction amongst professionals ■ Increased accessibility of other agencies ■ Improved accessibility to information from other agencies ■ Greater opportunities for information sharing and problem solving ■ Increased workload on individual professionals <p>Potential for duplication</p>
Impacts on Service Users	
Improved Services for Service Users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Easier/quicker access to services ■ Referral to appropriate agencies/services ■ Increased focus on prevention/early intervention and reduced need to access specialist services ■ Reduced stigma attached to accessing services
Improved Lives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enabled children and young people to remain in their local community, i.e. live at home/attend the local school ■ Improved support for children and young people ■ Improved educational attainment



Impacts on Agencies/Services	
Various	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increased demand placed on services/agencies ■ Reduced demand made on services/agencies ■ More positive inter-agency relationships ■ Improved communication between agencies ■ Improved data sharing ■ Efficiency savings
Source: Atkinson <i>et al.</i> (2007)	

2.12 Success and Enabling Factors of Inter-agency Working

A wide range of success and enabling factors are identified in the literature and there is considerable overlap of such factors among authors. Common enabling factors include effective leadership (Serrano, 2003; Sloper, 2003; Atkinson *et al.*, 2005), and clear and common aims, objectives or purpose (Atkinson *et al.*, 2005; Ronayne, 2007; Cameron and Lart, 2003). Serrano (2003) identifies eight enabling factors including effective leadership, flexibility and discretion and the participation of clients. Tomlinson (2003) includes a commitment from all parties involved at strategic and operational level, joint training and effective communication among enabling factors. Ronayne (2007) draws on a range of other research to provide a matrix of enabling factors including environmental factors, membership characteristics, purpose, process/structure, communication and resources. Cameron and Lart (2003) provide a comprehensive list of 12 enabling factors ranging from having clear aims and objectives to having a favourable political climate.

Atkinson *et al.* (2005) provide a slightly different perspective on enabling factors by rank ordering them according to the frequency with which professionals cited them. From their study the following are the seven most significant enabling factors:

- commitment and willingness to be involved, involving a 'bottom up' and 'top down' approach;
- understanding of roles and responsibilities, including individual and agency clarity regarding responsibilities and expectations;
- common aims and objectives, including a needs-led approach to service delivery;
- communication and information sharing;
- leadership or drive, including strategic drive to overcome obstacles and strategic vision to bring people together;
- involvement of relevant personnel, particularly at senior level;
- sharing and access to funding and resources through pooled budgets, joint funding or alternative and additional resources.

Sloper (2004) separates enabling factors into those that assist with planning of inter-agency work, including the commitment of senior and front line staff and clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and enabling factors in the implementation and management of services, such as the recruitment of staff with the appropriate knowledge and approach and joint training. What is perhaps more interesting about Sloper, however, is that she appears to be the only author who highlights the relevance of agencies having a prior history of working together to build on and learn from.



Cullen (1997) in a review of evaluations of inter-agency projects in the EU and the US separates enabling factors into three categories:

- the incorporation of principles, (such as that services should be comprehensive and accessible to all in a variety of settings);
- effective delivery including the needs for services to be broadly inclusive of all interests and the need for service reform efforts to be focused on the areas of greatest need; and
- sustainability factors such as the need for parental involvement in creating and sustaining service reform and the need to balance partners that can achieve effectiveness and those who can secure funding.

Moving from the theoretical craftsmanship framework, Cheever *et al.* (2005) provide Bardach's (1998) somewhat more pragmatic approach to achieving successful collaboration. Bardach suggests that successfully completing small, distinct tasks in the early stages of collaborative working greatly enhances the longer term potential of success. In a pragmatic vein, Bardach (1998) suggests that early successful action greatly enhances the possibilities for future collaborative efforts and contributes to the momentum for additional joint efforts.

Cheever *et al.* (2005) provide a summary of common enabling factors identified in a range of literature. These include adequate resources (Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff 2001), and effective leadership that can cross a number of boundaries and is characterised by, among other things, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, self-assurance and that is capable of articulating the collaborative vision (Radin 1996). Stakeholders must be identified and decisions made on how and when they should be included in the collaborative exercise. In particular, potentially obstructive stakeholders need to be identified and strategies for minimising their impact developed (Bardach, 1998). A collaborative structure that fosters effective formal and informal communication must be established (Mattessich *et al.*, 2001; Winer and Ray, 1994). Trust must be built and sustained and, at a minimum, participants in the collaboration must know what other participants will do in specified circumstances. An external mediator may also be useful in bringing stakeholders together (Mattessich *et al.*, 2001).

2.13 Inhibiting Factors and Obstacles to Inter-agency Working

Most of the literature reviews identify barriers and obstacles to inter-agency working. Atkinson *et al.* (2005), however, identify eight obstacles and rank them according to the frequency with which they were mentioned by research participants (139 staff from 30 multi-agency initiatives). Many of the obstacles identified by other authors fall under these eight.

- *Fiscal resources* with the main concerns being (i) conflicts within or between agencies; (ii) a general lack of funding; and (iii) concerns about sustainability. Funding is also cited as a barrier by Tomlinson (2003), Atkinson *et al.* (2002), Ronayne (2007), Sloper (2004) and Hudson *et al.* (1999).
- *Roles and responsibilities* with the main areas of concern being understanding the roles of others, conflicts over areas of responsibility, and the need to move beyond existing roles. Sloper (2004)



and Hudson *et al.* (1999) also refer to different perceptions of roles as an obstacle. While Anning *et al.* (2006) citing Hudson (2002) and others, refer to professional identity as a barrier.

- *Competing priorities* both at the level of individuals and agencies. This is referred to in a number of ways by other authors. For example, Serrano (2003) citing Weiss (1987) refers to the individual agency's protection of their independence and autonomy, and both Weiss (1987) and Tomlinson (2003) refer to the significance of different organisational goals, aims and objectives as one of the barriers facing inter-agency working.
- *Non-fiscal resources* including having the 'right' staff, sufficient allocation of time, the provision of staff and the physical space in which to work together effectively. This is also cited by Ronayne (2007), while Sloper (2004) lists frequent staff turnover and lack of qualified staff as obstacles.
- *Poor communication*, both horizontal and vertical, within and between agencies is cited as a major challenge to successful multi-agency working. Further, Atkinson *et al.* (2005) state that successful multi-agency working at local level may be undermined by poor communication between government departments. Notably, this is one obstacle that does not appear in many of the other reviews but is referred to Sloper (2004).
- *Professional and agency cultures* where multi-agency working disrupted, or intruded on, existing agency cultures (values and protocols). Specific policy and procedural differences and different data management systems also had implications. This is a barrier that is raised by many other reviewers. Again, Weiss (1987) refers to difficulty of synchronising the routines and procedures of different organisations. Sloper (2004) refers to the barrier that different professional ideologies and agency cultures presents. A summary of the different models of understanding used by professionals ('medical model', 'needs based model' and 'social model') is presented in Anning *et al.* (2006). While Hudson *et al.* (1999) cite differences in procedures, non-coterminous boundaries, differences in ideologies and values, and professional and organisational self-interest among the barriers to inter-agency work.
- *Management*, particularly at the strategic level, is essential and one of the challenges is to engage like-minded individuals at strategic level. 'Creative entrepreneurs', who sought new ways of working in order to meet shared goals and who worked within, beneath and across existing management structures in order to achieve change are essential. While not referred to in these terms Sloper (2004) cites a lack of leadership and lack of commitment and support at senior level as barriers.
- *Training opportunities* need to be provided to allow those who require training to meet the demands of any new or extended role due to multi-agency working, as well as training to enhance their knowledge and understanding of other agencies and the way they operated. Linked to this, opportunities for professional development delivered at individual's own agency should not be foregone. The need for training and the potential loss of training opportunities was also identified as an obstacle by Tomlinson (2003).

Ronayne (2007) citing Himmelman (1992) presents the following succinct typology of obstacles that effectively captures the many barriers contained in the literature.

- **Trust:** organisations must make themselves vulnerable to the actions of another organisation. Without trust, there is no possibility of risk taking. Without risk there is no collaboration.



- Turf: barriers here arise when organisations perceive other organisations to be competitors for resources, when the cost of collaboration is perceived as greater than the benefits, or when an organisation perceives that another organisation is trying to take over its function.
- Resources: barriers here relate to time, finance, and human resources.

Cameron and Lart (2003) provide us with an important reminder that many of these obstacles are long standing by citing Booth (1981) and Wistow (1982) who identified differences in professional cultures, organisational structures and forms of accountability as barriers to inter-agency working. Issues such as fragmentation, inflexibility, budgetary uncertainty and incongruent planning cycles have been identified as barriers to inter-agency work over a decade ago (Lewis and Glennerster, 1996; Hudson, 1987).

Sloper (2004) draws attention to the possibility of removing barriers to inter-agency working. However, citing Lyne *et al.* (2001) Sloper concludes that there is little empirical evidence on the effectiveness of methods to overcome such barriers. What conclusions that can be drawn about strategies to remove obstacles are tentative at best.

Bardach (2005) cited in Cheever *et al.* (2005) identifies a number of factors that limit or obstruct the achievement of successful collaboration. These include protectionist strategies that may arise from a fear of job losses, political imperatives or individual careerist strategies. Bureaucratic purposes, such as turf, autonomy, accountability and ethnocentrism may also act as obstacles to inter-agency collaboration.

Cheever *et al.* (2005) remind us of an essential inhibiting cultural factor, which although they state this applies to those raised in the US, can also be applied further afield. This is the widespread promotion of competition in many areas of life. As Cheever *et al.* (2005) put it, we bowl to win or we bowl alone. Further to this, they cite Bardach (1998) in proposing that in such a culture '*collaboration is an unnatural action among nonconsenting adults*'.

A recent literature review by Atkinson *et al.* (2007) identifies four key factors that influence multi-agency working: working relationships; multi-agency processes; resources for multi-agency work, and management and governance. Key points in relation to each of these that facilitate and challenge multi-agency working are summarised in Figure 2.8.



Figure 2.8: Factors that Facilitate and Challenge Multi-agency Working

Working Relationships	
Role Demarcation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clarity over roles of agencies ■ Clear role boundaries ■ Acknowledging professional differences ■ Status issues/hierarchies addressed ■ Understanding of each other's responsibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Status issues/power struggles ■ Professional hierarchies ■ Lack of equal representation ■ Blurring of professional boundaries ■ Role ambiguity ■ Redistribution of specialist skills
Commitment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Willingness to work together ■ Commitment from all staff ■ Strategic commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of commitment ■ Inappropriate levels of representation ■ Competing priorities
Trust and Mutual Respect	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Positive regard for workers from different agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of trust between individual and agencies
Understanding other Agencies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Awareness of what other agencies can contribute ■ Appreciation of different agency contexts ■ Understanding the range of perspectives involved ■ Development of a partnership culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stereotypical thinking ■ Ignorance of other services ■ Failure to recognise the contribution of others ■ Different professional models and beliefs ■ Conflicting professional and agency cultures
Multi-agency Processes	
Communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Transparent structures for communication ■ Maintaining constant communication ■ Adequate IT systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of clear channels of communication ■ Poor interagency communication
Clarity of Purpose	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing clear and realistic aims ■ Aims understood and agreed by all agencies ■ Developing a shared vision based on jointly held values ■ Appropriate targets ■ Clear justification for partnership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of clarity about the rationale for multi-agency work ■ Divergences in objectives
Planning and Consultation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Inclusive planning systems ■ Consulting service users ■ Conducting a needs analysis ■ Extensive consultation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of consultation with key stakeholders
Organisational Aspects	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Effective systems, protocols and procedures ■ Establishing formal protocols ■ Clearly defined structure or model ■ Continual reassessment of processes and procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Failure to address temporal aspects of partnerships ■ Competing policies and procedures ■ Complex and time consuming negotiations ■ Organisational restructuring ■ Different targets and incentives
Information Exchange	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Establishing clear protocols for information exchange ■ Accurate and up to date shared data between agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Confidentiality issues ■ Different rules and protocols around information sharing ■ Legal, ethical and practical obstacles



Resources for Multi-agency Work	
Funding	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adequate funding with shared access ■ Financial certainty ■ Equity between partners ■ Explicit agreements about the pooling or sharing of resources ■ Sufficient administrative support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Conflicts over funding within and between agencies ■ Inadequate funding ■ Time-limited funding ■ Management of a variety of funding streams ■ Lack of joint budgets
Staffing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Recruitment and retention of staff ■ Effectiveness of particular personalities ■ Adequate staff ■ Co-location of staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Staff turnover and recruitment difficulties ■ Lack of qualified staff ■ Salary differentials ■ Variations in conditions of service
Time	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dedicated time for start-up ■ An incremental approach to joint working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of time to devote to joint working ■ Time involved in developing and sustaining relationships
Management and Governance	
Leadership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Leadership and drive at a strategic level ■ Vision and tenacity ■ Clear managerial presence and support ■ Allies and champions at strategic and operational levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of leadership ■ No clear vision ■ Lack of managerial support
Governance and Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clear framework of responsibilities and accountabilities ■ An environment that gets the most out of the individuals ■ Governance infrastructure to facilitate decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of clarity around responsibilities and accountabilities
Performance Management	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Performance management system ■ Monitoring and evaluation ■ Demonstrating progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of monitoring and evaluation
Source: Atkinson et al. (2007)	

2.14 Alternatives to Inter-agency Working

There is little mention of alternatives to inter-agency in the literature reviewed here, which appears to support the finding that inter-agency work is widely accepted as being valuable in and of itself. However, Serrano (2003) challenges this position and argues that inter-agency working is not good *per se*, and that co-ordination should only be required if it produces better organisational performance or lower costs than can be had without it. Reflecting the earlier point made above relating to the relative invisibility of service users and beneficiaries in the available literature, it is notable here that Serrano does not include the better delivery of services to clients or other client-based rationales for co-ordination. Serrano drew attention, however, to the following potential alternative means of achieving multi-sectoral goals:

- *Sequencing* of interventions is the alternative to a simultaneous/integrated approach. Programme



designers should think deeply whether it is essential to address issues simultaneously and within the same project or whether *sequencing* of interventions to deal with various constraints is possible without ignoring crucial linkages or scarifying critical goals.

- *Reorganising* means creating or merging organisational units (ministries, departments, secretaries, etc.) and/or changing the assignment of functional responsibilities to those units. Even though reorganising is a tool that *under* certain conditions can help reduce unnecessary duplication and make government more efficient, opinion about its effectiveness is *mixed*.
- *Competition* creating incentives for agencies to compete for leadership or resources is another approach. This can be used when there is a certain degree of redundancy or overlap between different agencies. Rather than *try to* reduce redundancy, or to force co-operation, an alternative is to promote competition for either leadership in programme *implementation* or in access to programme resources.

2.15 Key Chapter Findings

The material reviewed in this chapter draws together a wide range of reviews at the international level and highlights a number of issues which are replicated in the Irish context. Of particular note is the lack of consensus regarding definitions within the literature – this draws attention to the extent to which the nature of inter-agency working is determined by its context. In this regard, the concept of a continuum or hierarchy of models appears to be more useful in guiding practice. There is also some evidence that a strong theoretical basis to inter-agency work is important. The material points to a number of key issues which can inform the ongoing understanding of and development of inter-agency working.

The literature allows us to identify the following key issues:

- There appears to be a broad consensus in the literature that inter-agency working is good in and of itself. The principal rationales are cited as achieving solutions to complex problems, attaining collaborative advantage, economies of scale and policy cohesion. With a small number of exceptions, there is little critical consideration of whether these rationales hold firm, particularly in the context of limited evaluations which unambiguously identify their impact.
- The literature points to a range of potential tools, structures and strategies that can be used in inter-agency working. What are less obvious from the literature, however, are the relative merits and weaknesses of particular tools, structures or strategies in responding to specific circumstances, groups or issues. It appears clear that more work is required to establish the circumstances or contexts in which one structure, tool or strategy should be the preferred, most appropriate and most cost-effective one or when it should in fact be avoided.
- There is an extensive literature on the enabling factors in inter-agency working and many of these are common across a number of studies. These include effective leadership, commitment, adequate resources, good communication and a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. They also include flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, appropriate stakeholder involvement and the recognition of obstructive actors. Inhibiting factors tend to be the reverse of



these enabling factors and include poor leadership, lack of commitment, poor role definition, lack of understanding of responsibilities, obstructive professional and agency culture and lack of inter-agency training opportunities.

Finally, we can note the extent to which the benefits of inter-agency working are considered to accrue to organisations and individual professionals. Organisations and individual staff benefit from an increased understanding of each other's roles, improved relationships and interactions, raised profiles and improved job satisfaction, although the inverse of these is also reported. The limited attention paid to service users within evaluations is marked as is their limited involvement in planning. In the context of the National Children's Strategy, this issue has particular relevance.



3 THE EMERGENCE OF INTER-AGENCY APPROACHES IN IRELAND

3.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on inter-agency approaches in Ireland particularly in relation to combating socio-economic disadvantage. This has particular significance for the main focus of this document for two reasons. Firstly, the evolution of inter-agency approaches in the children's sector, in so far as it has occurred, was heavily influenced by the concepts, models and practices that emerged within the broader social inclusion context. Secondly, many of the issues identified by the relatively extensive literature on these broader examples are evidenced also in the less plentiful documentation that exists on inter-agency practice in the children's sector. A review of the broader literature therefore can help elucidate the issues for inter-agency work in relation to children's services. This chapter presents the material under the same headings as used in Chapter 2 with some modifications to accommodate the available literature.

The emergence of the contemporary phase of inter-agency work in Ireland can be traced back to the late 1980s and the economic and employment crisis of that period (Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Rourke, 2007). The scale of the crisis at that time led to a search for new models of welfare and new actors (including those from the community and voluntary sector) in the welfare mix. In this context, inter-agency work emerged with a very specific focus on combating unemployment (especially long-term unemployment) and poverty and this in turn was reflected in the targeting of specific groups identified as being most vulnerable, such as early school leavers, the low-skilled and people with disabilities (Chanin, 1992).

These early interventions also incorporated an area-based or district approach: that is, they were situated in specific localities which were experiencing high levels of socio-economic disadvantage and they drew on local actors including the community sector. The concept of partnership, drawing heavily on discourses of social partnership at the national level, was also embedded within these approaches (Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Sabel, 1996). Since then, inter-agency approaches have been extensively replicated at the local level, particularly in relation to social inclusion measures. Many of the initiatives to promote integration involved the establishment of new organisations or structures at local level (rather than simply developing working relationships between agencies, for example). The result is a proliferation of organisations within certain areas, leading to what has been called a 'crowded institutional landscape'.

Key milestones in the evolution of integrated approaches in relation to socio-economic disadvantage referenced in the literature are outlined in Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1: Key Milestones in the Development of Inter-agency Approaches

<p>1985 COMTEC</p>	<p>COMTEC was established in 1985 to co-ordinate the delivery of services to those aged under 25. The objective of the COMTEC programme was to facilitate the emergence and development of (a) co-ordination between agencies at a local level; (b) local participation in the planning of service provision and (c) formulation and implementation of a local plan. Eight COMTEC AREAS were established, each with a similar structure: a director, a planning unit and a consultative council. The planning units were composed of local representatives of the main agencies providing educational, training and manpower services for young people. Their main task was to formulate and monitor the implementation of a two-year plan for its designated area. The consultative council comprised a wide range of statutory, private and voluntary representatives (Joyce and Daly 1987).</p>
<p>1989 Community Development Fund</p>	<p>The Community Development Fund (CDF), the forerunner to the Community Development Programme (CDP), provided funding to community resource centres to enable them to act as focal points for community development activities within their own areas. The emphasis of the funded projects was on 'involving local communities in developing approaches to tackling the problems they face and on creating successful partnerships between the voluntary and statutory agencies in the area' (Dept. of Social Welfare, 1990). Initially, 14 community resource centres throughout the country were funded; under the CDP this has risen to 181.</p>
<p>1990s EU Poverty Programmes</p>	<p>The early EU programmes and particularly the Poverty Programmes and LEADER were instrumental in forging inter-agency approaches at the local level in a number of disadvantaged areas and in rural areas respectively. They also served to establish partnership mechanisms and in formalising the role of the community and voluntary sector within these. The contribution of the EU programmes to inter-agency approaches has been discussed by Rourke (2007), Walsh <i>et al.</i> (1998) and Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) amongst others.</p>
<p>1991 Area Based Partnership Companies</p>	<p>The establishment of the Area Based Partnership Companies (ABPCs) under the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) in 1991 was (and to a great extent continues to be) the most significant example to date of State commitment to inter-agency work (Sabel, 1996; Craig, 1994). The first 12 ABPCs had a sole focus on long-term unemployment. When the programme was expanded in 1995 it assumed a broader focus to include local development issues including support for community development and services to young people. Currently, there are 39 ABPCs throughout the country, each of which is structured as a limited company under Irish law with a board of directors upon which are represented the statutory, community and private sectors. The operational units are staffed by a director and project staff.</p>
<p>1996 City and County Development Boards</p>	<p>The introduction of City and County Development Boards (CDBs) in 1996 was part of the strategy to integrate local government and local development. The CDBs have representation from local government, local development (including the ABPCs), State agencies and the social partners. Their function is to ensure integrated development at county or city level and they oversee the drafting and implementation of the city or county plans. These are wide-ranging documents including environmental,</p>



	economic and commercial aspects as well as social inclusion measures. Each CDB also has a Director of Community and Enterprise who acts as a link to the community and voluntary sector. Subsequently, the Social Inclusion Measures Working Groups were set up under the auspices of the CDBs to co-ordinate the implementation of the social inclusion measures of the National Development Plan.
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Throughout the 1990s, a 'partnership' or 'integrated' approach became embedded within the policy response to social problems and was reproduced extensively (see Figure 3.2). The result was the development of a wide range of area-based and partnership initiatives to respond to local need across a range of policy areas, including drugs misuse, educational disadvantage, estate management, money management etc. (see Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Duggan and Loftus, 2005). Two of these initiatives are of particular relevance here. These are the RAPID programme, which was introduced in areas of high disadvantage with a view to better integrating social inclusion programmes; and the Local Drug Task Forces (LDTFs), again established in areas of particular need (mostly in Dublin city and suburbs, with one located in Bray). Their remit is to provide better integration of drug services in their localities and to augment these with new services as appropriate. The relevant learning from these two initiatives is looked at later in this chapter.

3.2 Current Policy Framework

Interest in the concept and practice of partnership, integrated and inter-agency approaches (and local approaches) has continued and is evidenced by the ongoing commitment to these at the highest policy levels. Of particular relevance here is the NESC's (2005) ground-breaking report entitled *The Developmental Welfare State*. This proposed a model for the development of social policy and a framework for the development and delivery of quality public services in the future. The model comprises three core elements: public services; income supports; and activist measures/social innovation. Of these, services are seen as by far the most important. The report argues that quality delivery of services requires quality services, stating that high standards must be achieved in public services both in relation to their nature and adequacy as well as their mode of delivery.

The concept of *tailored universalism* is central to the Developmental Welfare State (DWS) model – services that are universally accessible, but tailored to the needs and circumstances of each individual. A range of actors can be involved in providing services, but all must operate under the principle of accountable autonomy. This allowed providers the autonomy to adjust provision to better respond to the needs of the local community, while remaining publicly accountable for both expenditure and outcomes achieved. In this framework of social protection, these high quality services must be capable of tailoring provision to the needs of every individual, so that everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit from the services available. Integrated services, delivered through teams of professionals, non-professionals and users' representatives are fundamental to this approach.

In 1995, the NESF had called for greater integrated planning at national level and integrated delivery at local level in order to ensure the quality delivery of social services. Its more recent report (2006)



argues that '*Inter-agency co-operation and co-ordination at the local level are essential to ensure that more coherent services/supports are made available*' (NESF, 2006). The NESF recommends:

'Where services require inter-agency co-operation, a lead agency in each sector should take responsibility for the overall co-ordination of services including the production of clear and comprehensive information on the entitlement and rights of users of the service. Other agencies in that sector should be obliged to co-operate with the lead agency. Government Departments should as a matter of urgency, begin to identify areas where initiatives of this kind are required against the background of the lifecycle framework outlined in *Towards 2016*. Consultation with user groups should be part of this process.' (NESF, 2006)

Currently most government departments, including those responsible for children's services espouse a commitment to integrated working. However, as the following chapters will show, the extent to which they have progressed this commitment varies somewhat.

Initially, the emergence and consolidation of inter-agency and partnership approaches during the 1990s resulted in considerable research interest. This included international attention, particularly in relation to the ABPCs, which were considered to be particularly innovative in that they included the formal involvement of employers. Both the OECD (Sabel, 1996) and the European Foundation for Living and Working Conditions (Walsh *et al.*, 1998) looked to the Irish models for possible lessons that could be replicated elsewhere. Considerable Irish attention also focused on these approaches, including Craig (1994, 1998) and Haase (1996). Notwithstanding the fact that the discourse of integrated approaches remains strong, it appears that research interest has waned as these approaches have become the norm within public policy. As a result, there is little recent literature on this topic. In particular there is limited data on what has been achieved by these approaches, and more specifically, to what extent their impact can be attributed to the inter-agency dimension, a feature shared with the international literature. In the discussion below we focus on the main issues covered by the literature that have relevance for inter-agency approaches in the children's sector. We use the same headings identified in Chapter 2 but must note again the degree of overlap across these.



3.3 Definitions

The variety of definitions of inter-agency approaches noted in the previous chapter is evident in the Irish literature too. Moreover, it is further compounded by the extent to which the concept and practice of 'partnership' has become conflated with that of inter-agency approaches. As Powell and Geoghegan (2004) have pointed out, the term partnership has come to have three distinct meanings. Firstly, the term is used at the macro level as shorthand for social partnership, the term used to describe the corporatist approach to social and economic planning that has dominated development discourse in Ireland since the late 1980s. Secondly, the term is used in a more specific way to describe the formal structures and mechanisms of the ABPCs as discussed above. Thirdly, the term is used to describe the more general partnership approaches that involve the coming together of various agencies and stakeholders to plan and manage specific projects. This form of multi-agency partnership is common at local level, and usually comprises a lead delivery agency along with the co-option of other stakeholder organisations. There can frequently be cross-over between the ABPCs and the more project specific partnerships with the ABPCs involved in these either as the lead agency or as a co-opted agency.

A further issue in relation to definition is that, within the literature, definitions tend to be based on actual practice. This reflects the importance of context identified in the previous chapter. For example, Walsh *et al.* (1998), defined local partnership as:

'A formal organisational framework for policy making and implementation, which mobilises a coalition of interests and the commitment of a range of partners, around a common agenda and multi-dimensional action programme, to combat social exclusion and promote social inclusion.' (Walsh *et al.*, 1998)

This definition places strong emphasis on the formal structure of partnership *per se* as the locus of integration rather than the process through which services are integrated at the point of delivery. Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) also focus on the formal partnership dimension but use the term partnership to describe the relationships (rather than the structures) that exist between agencies involved in integration initiatives. In contrast, Eivers (2001) amongst others, references the OECD (1996) definition of integrated services at the point of delivery. As already outlined in Chapter 1 above, for the OECD:

'Service integration refers primarily to ways of organising the delivery of services to people at the local level. SI is not a new programme to be superimposed over pre-existing programmes: rather it is a process aimed at developing an integrated framework within which ongoing programmes can be rationalised and enriched to do a better job of making services available within existing commitments and resources.' (Eivers, 2001)



It is important that definitions clearly differentiate between integration efforts at the planning or consultative level and integration efforts at the point of service delivery. Moreover, ideally these two levels or spheres should be linked. A relevant example here is the RAPID programme which explicitly focuses on service integration. Following the NESF 'continuum of collaboration' (itself based on Himmelman, 1994), a study of service integration in RAPID (ADM, 2005) identifies three different perspectives on collaboration. These are as follows:

- Service perspective. This happens where there is collaboration on strategy and planning of services at local level, at client group level or at the level of individual clients.
- Client perspective. This is where service users are involved in the collaborative process at strategic, locality or client group level.
- Community perspective. This focuses on the needs of users, potential users, their carers and the needs of the wider communities.

ADM (2005) argues that this continuum allows a progressive, developmental approach to service integration to be undertaken. It also allows for a clear identification of the supports necessary to enable initiatives to move up the continuum to more sophisticated levels of service integration. However, often a considerable gap exists between the successful achievement of partnership at the planning and consultation level and the successful achievement of integrated services. Failure to acknowledge the distance between these two, or any lack of specificity with regard to exactly what is covered by the term inter-agency working, is a significant barrier to developing a clearer understanding of how these approaches operate and how effective they are.

3.4 Rationale for Inter-agency Working

The early literature identifies a twin rationale underlying the establishment of inter-agency approaches. The first of these relates to the perceived relevance of localised or 'district' approaches to tackling social exclusion. This was heavily influenced by the NESF which called for area based programmes to address the '*concentrated incidence of unemployment, low incomes and deprivation in certain communities and regions*' (NESF, 1990). The second rationale, noted by Chanin (1992) amongst others, was that district or area based approaches could mobilise new actors at the local level. By developing integration across relevant providers, responses to socio-economic disadvantage could be enhanced without exerting excessive pressure on the exchequer. Among these new actors was the community sector which was, as Zappone (1998) points out, increasingly being recognised as having a contribution to make to responding to socio-economic disadvantage at local level. The involvement of the sector has been a feature of inter-agency approaches since then (Rourke, 2008). Subsequent to the emergence of the early experiments with inter-agency working, a third rationale emerged. This is the concern at national level to improve the management of government (as evidenced by the initiative, Delivering Better Government) and to improve the delivery of quality public services (NESF, 2006; Butler, 2007). Consequently more recent examples of inter-agency approaches have articulated the rationale more specifically in terms of meeting complex needs through the mobilisation of multiple actors (ADM, 2005).



The early literature also provides some analyses of integrated approaches that extend far beyond the desire for co-ordination or integration by drawing on concepts of political economy. Walsh *et al.* (1999) for example, consider the ABPCs to represent a new form of participative democracy at the local level, through the involvement of the community as represented by the community sector. A more critical analysis of the rationale behind the introduction of the ABPCs is that they represented an attempt by the State to maintain mass loyalty at a time of economic crisis (Tovey, 1999). According to this and similar arguments, the primary motivation for facilitating community participation was to ensure the compliance of otherwise potential critics (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004). The ideological role of the ABPCs was not widely taken up within the literature. However, the potential risk of incorporation of the community and voluntary sector was taken seriously by many of the protagonists (Crowley, 1998; Kirby 2002; Larragy, 2006). The ongoing difficulties community organisations have in participating in local inter-agency work remains a feature of the literature (Zappone, 1998; Airey, 2006; WRC, 2008).

3.5 Remit and Objectives

The remits of inter-agency approaches vary quite a bit but have in common a focus on developing integrated responses to socio-economic disadvantage and complex social problems. In many instances, the initial remit of the structures which were established to support inter-agency work (such as the ABPCs, the LDTFs etc.) was to act as agents of integration across existing service providers. However, the literature notes this remit has proven difficult to discharge, for two reasons. Firstly, as Ronayne and Creedon (2003) note, there was a degree of reluctance on the part of agencies to submit to being co-ordinated at the local level, which frequently resulted in no more than minimalist or ad hoc modifications to their existing practices (Ronayne and Creedon, 2003). A second difficulty identified by Ruddle *et al.* (2000), Duggan and Loftus (2005) and Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) was the gaps in existing service provision which made a comprehensive response to social need impossible. In the context of these two problems, the organisations that were established to co-ordinate and integrate the services of pre-existing agencies, have become service providers themselves, thus increasing the number of organisations at local level and increasing the experience of fragmented service delivery¹.

In general, the objectives of inter-agency and integrated approaches are set in broad terms at national level by the relevant funding/parent department and usually are directly linked to the objectives and mission of the relevant department. At local level, the specific objectives are determined by the structures/organisations/mechanisms which are charged with promoting integration. Local-level objectives are usually identified in strategic plans and submitted for approval to the parent department or an agency of the department. For example, the CDBs operating to guidelines provided by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, develop their strategic plans and submit them for approval and funding. ABPCs likewise develop multi-annual plans and submit them to Pobal, the agency charged with supporting and monitoring the LDSIP and other programmes. Broadly

¹ The Cohesion Process, underway since 2006 and now almost fully in place, sought to rationalise the number of agencies delivering the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme at local level and also to increase coverage of the Programme to all areas.



similar mechanisms are in place for most other inter-agency initiatives. Figure 3.2 identifies some of the principal inter-agency initiatives together with the remit, objectives and parent department.

Figure 3.2: Overview of Inter-agency Social Inclusion Initiatives

Intervention	Date of Establishment	Remit / Objectives	Initiating Government Dept	Target Groups
*Community Development Programme	1990	Capacity building, combating exclusion	Department of Family and Social Affairs	Disadvantaged communities
*Area Based Partnership Companies (PESP)	1991 onwards	Respond to disadvantage at the local level	Department of Tourism and Sport	Unemployed people, young people at risk, disadvantaged communities
Money Advice Bureaus	1992	Budgetary advice to low income households	Department of Social and Family Affairs	Low income households/ welfare dependent households
County Enterprise Boards	1993	Promote micro-enterprise	Department of Enterprise and Employment	Potential entrepreneurs
Local Employment Service	1995	Promote employment re-integration at local level	Department of Enterprise and Employment	Unemployed with specific categories prioritised
Integrated Services Project	1997	Improved and co-ordinated services at local level	Initiated by Tourism, Sport and Recreation, seeks to involve most departments	Disadvantaged urban communities
Educational Disadvantage Programmes	Various	Integrated approach to overcoming educational disadvantage at the local level	Department of Education and Science, Combat Poverty Agency	Disadvantaged children, Disadvantaged schools
*Local Drug Task Forces	1997	Community based response to drug problems	Department of Health and Children	Communities with drug problems
Local Anti Poverty Strategies	2001	Roll out of NAPS at local level	Department of Social and Family Affairs	Poverty at community level
County Development Boards/ Community Fora	2001	Integrated development at county level	Department of Environment and Local Government	Local authority
RAPID/CLAR	2000	Promote integrated approach in specific areas	Department of Community Rural, Gaeltacht & Islands	Disadvantaged urban and rural areas

* These Initiatives subsequently moved to the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.



3.6 Structures in Inter-agency Working

In the context of inter-agency work in the area of social inclusion and local development, Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) have argued that formal structures of co-operation between the participating agencies are necessary and this reflects the ongoing support for structures in the Irish context, which is in contrast to some of the international commentators noted in the previous chapter.

The structures of inter-agency work vary across different initiatives, but there are some common features. One such feature, pioneered by the ABPCs (and replicated in other initiatives such as the LDTFs) is for a two-tiered structure to be developed at local level (see Walsh *et al.*, Pobal, 2004). The first tier is comprised of the consultation or planning mechanism, which may be formally structured as a Board, a committee, a steering group, task force etc. This level invariably comprises representatives of the community sector and those statutory agencies most relevant to the specific remit (see section on actors below). In some cases the local business community and local representatives are also represented. The second tier is the operational unit or the co-ordinating unit, usually comprised of the manager and the staff who are responsible for developing and delivering the action plan. In many instances, a mid-tier comprised of sub-committees, or consultative groups, also exist. Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) note that these have value in broadening out the basis of participation but do not necessarily have an executive role.

In effect, the partnership or integrated dimension of a number of inter-agency initiatives exists at the consultative or planning level: at the implementation level, the operational units frequently deliver services unilaterally. The extent, therefore, to which these 'partnership' models can claim to be inter-agency or integrated, really depends on two factors. One is the extent to which the organisations represented on their boards contribute to the design and delivery of actions – through funding projects, modifying their own programmes to better integrate them, delivering programmes in collaboration with other agencies represented at board level and so on.

To date, the literature indicates that the experience in this regard has been very mixed. At one extreme, as Eivers (2001) has argued, the formal partnership structure has been observed to impede the inter-agency approach: for example when representatives of agencies have blocked the development of inter-agency interventions (Eivers, 2001). More generally, there is widespread comment within the literature that representation on a local board does not necessarily provide an effective basis for inter-organisational co-operation amongst the organisations represented. Ronayne and Creedon (2003), for example, state that:

'...local management tend to be members of a wide range of local committees as well as working groups and committees that are not locally based. However there is general agreement that their membership of these committees while providing a point of contact with personnel from other organisations is not seen as a platform for developing more effective inter-organisational working'. (Ronayne and Creedon, 2003)



The second factor that will determine the extent to which local integrated structures actually promote inter-agency working, is the extent to which the operational units of these structures engage in inter-agency work with other organisations in the locality, for example through participating in the type of project oriented partnerships discussed above. Overall, this aspect of integration appears to be more developed than the contribution of boards to the design and delivery of actions. Craig (1994) for example, noted the capacity of the ABPCs to act as catalysts at the local level. In a similar vein, Pobal (2008) notes the involvement of the ABPCs in providing ongoing support, both staffing and financial to the work of the inter-agency partnerships as well as participating in inter-agency partnerships as both lead and co-opted agency. On the other hand, an evaluation of RAPID (Fitzpatrick Associates, 2006) and review of the CDBs (Indecon, 2006) reveal a lack of linkage between initiatives at the local level. Indecon (2006) in particular noted a lack of linkage between the structures of the CDBs and local development agencies such as ABPCs.

3.7 Process and Models

Given the wide range of integrated initiatives in place and the range of issues they seek to engage with, it is difficult to distil a generic model from the literature. However, within the literature, the main emphasis tends to be on models of partnership rather than models of service delivery. In 2008, Pobal published a report which was based on research into practice at local level and informed by Himmelman's (1994) classification noted earlier. The report identified three models of partnership operating within the framework of the LDSIP which, it suggests, provide a clear insight into the ingredients or characteristics necessary for effective partnership work. Among these models was what it termed a Co-operative Model which was concerned with working co-operatively with others rather than developing in-depth collaborative and shared approaches to tackling social exclusion. Some of the characteristics of this model include a moderate level of trust between partners, medium level participation of stakeholders and a limited communication strategy. Also included was the Conciliatory Model which was at the lower end of the scale in terms of impact, ownership and sustainability. The characteristics of this model include a lack of strategic planning, low levels of participation and trust between stakeholders, poor linkages between agencies and stakeholders, weak decision making mechanisms and poor leadership. This model also operates where partners are not interested in challenging the status quo and a comfortable level of operating is accepted by the majority of the partnerships.

The report also identified a third model that contains the optimum characteristics for effective partnership processes. Termed the Progressive Model, its characteristics include very high rates of participation from stakeholders, shared strategies and commitments to resource the process. The Progressive Model also places high emphasis on developing pro-active communication strategies and decision making is open and transparent. Imbalances of power between partners are recognised and strategies are put in place to deal with such imbalances. Partners are open to various methods of working and collaborate comfortably on the development and implementation of strategies. Skilled staff are available to support the partnership process. Figure 3.3 summarises the characteristics of the Progressive Model.



Figure 3.3: Overview of Progressive Model of Partnership

Strategies	Clear medium and long-term strategies developed through consultation. Shared goals, activities inter-related with other programmes and agencies operating locally.
Organisational Culture	Open and mostly informal environment. Good level of trust. Shared understanding of partnership approach and objectives. High level of energy, active participation with some creative tension. Positive work environment.
Resources	Shared/Negotiated. Budget lines and non-financial contributions identified. Funding co-ordinated and administered effectively.
Relationships	Engagement at various levels – with communities, workers/manager and board/sub board level. Relationships open, supportive and include various types, networks platforms, inter-agency collaborations.
Participation	Very high, diverse, active and real. Participation is energetic, challenging. Lead role changes with ease, several players take responsibility for actions.
Decision Making	Decisions well thought out and transparent. Shared ownership of decision making and full involvement of communities.
Information and Communication	Freely available, accessible language, inclusive, pro-active communication strategy. Uses a combination of media (e.g., newsletter, discussion document, minutes). Sustains contact.
Capacities	Skilled chairs, managers and workers, strong teamwork, good understanding of strategic planning, social inclusion partnership approaches. Focus on good community capacity/participation. Encourages open flexible approaches to work. Partnership arrangements well structured with clear procedures.
Leadership Style	Mostly facilitative, focused and balanced. Well prepared and organised. Supportive of others a level of risk taking, challenging, empowering. Lead roles shared among staff.
Power	Imbalances of power acknowledged and strategies in place to address this. Specific supports and strategies in place to enhance community participation and decision-making.
Local Culture	History of community development and collaborative styles of working. Openness towards working in partnership.
Outputs and Outcomes	Clearly defined and measurable, clearly targeted and focused. Impact and process monitored, evaluated and corrective action taken. Clear benefit to communities, target group. Impacts on policy and approaches of other agencies.
Source: Pobal, 2008	

It is not possible to determine the extent to which the characteristics of these models can be discerned more generally amongst integrated initiatives. However, the fact that a single initiative can



contain such variation in the character and effectiveness of the co-ordinating structures within it, is likely to be replicated more generally. It also highlights the challenge of ensuring consistency of approach and capacity within initiatives.

3.8 Tools to Support Inter-agency Working

The literature takes a broad view of what constitutes 'tools' or resources to support inter-agency working. Among the most frequently discussed and highly evaluated tools are the following:

- The establishment of national level structures to provide momentum and secure recognition of initiatives (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003).
- The use of strategy documents to provide a framework for integrated working and for drawing up plans at local level (NDP/ESF Evaluation, 2003).
- Technical support units to provide consistency of technical expertise across projects within an initiative (Cullen 1997; Kelleher and Kelleher, 2005).
- The availability and transfer of good data between local inter-agency mechanisms and government departments (Indecon, 2008; Ruddle *et al.*, 2000; Value for Money Review of Probation Projects, 2008).
- The development of shared tools and guidelines across co-operating agencies as well as training in inter-agency work. These include shared protocols for data collection and referral.

Figure 3.4 provides some examples of tools to support inter-agency working.

Figure 3.4: Examples of Tools to Support Inter-agency Working

<p>The Probation Service is developing guidelines for the planning, delivery and reporting of actions for those organisations which it funds and with which it works in partnership. The Probation Service is also networking the organisations in order to reinforce their practice and harness synergies across them.</p>
<p>The Combat Poverty Agency (CPA) has produced Good Practice Guidelines for Networking and Inter-agency Working.</p>
<p>The Homeless Agency established a Common Needs Assessment approach across all relevant agencies to facilitate care planning in a more integrated way.</p>
<p>The Blanchardstown EQUAL Partnership developed a common referral protocol for use with drug users.</p>
<p>The use of Technical Support to assist organisations to develop good practice in inter-agency working is widely used in programmes such as the LDSIP, CDP, RAPID etc.</p>

One thing to note here is the lack of tools or resources in relation to monitoring and evaluation. While there are some developments in this area, the lack of relevant data on outcomes and impacts – and the lack of guidelines on this issue – hampers the assessment of the effectiveness of inter-agency working. This is discussed further later.

3.9 Assessing the Benefits of Inter-agency Approaches

In trying to assess the impact and effectiveness of spatially focused approaches, we must acknowledge two difficulties. First, not all of the interventions that are in place have been evaluated. Secondly, many evaluations focus on the process of achieving 'partnership' *per se* and on the process of delivering actions, rather than on the outcomes achieved. Consequently they do not provide the type of unambiguous data that could ascertain the effectiveness of integrated approaches or the extent to which the inter-agency dimension contributed to this effectiveness. In addition, the extent to which the organisations involved in the various integrated initiatives articulate specific objectives, establish impact indicators and gather appropriate data varies quite considerably and is frequently identified as a key difficulty in developing effective assessments (Value for Money Report of Probation Service Projects, 2008; Ruddle *et al.*, 2000; Goodbody, 2006; Indecon, 2008). For example, Ruddle *et al.* (2000) evaluated the community projects implemented by the LDTFs and found that one fifth of projects collected no information on impact indicators, while the majority of those that did, relied on participation and retention rates as indicators of success. The need for more appropriate impact indicators and data frequently figures in the recommendations of evaluators and some initiatives are addressing this issue.

Duggan (1999), writing in the context of integrated approaches in the social inclusion arena, has noted that examples of good practice in inter-agency working, '*fall short of an overall confirmation that these interventions are effective in reducing the incidence or the risk of poverty in any given area*'. Similarly, Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) note the lack of resources and statistics to undertake scientific investigation, for example through the use of control groups.

Cullen (1997) puts the point more strongly:

'There is a critical absence of literature and research exploring theories of social change arising from the experience of partnerships and other community initiatives. There is an underlying assumption that area-based partnerships are essentially dealing with structural issues, such as the formation of strong independent community institutions that can engage, interact with and possibly change social economic and political structures. In reality there is no real debate about whether this is the case and in general there is question mark about the models of evaluation that are capable of elucidating and giving meaningful expression to partnership processes.'

Noting these reservations, some benefits of integrated approaches have been identified. The increased communication among agencies providing services at local level and between these agencies and the community they serve has been identified by PA Consulting (1998), Harvey (1994), and Martin (2000). The improvement of trust and good working relationships between agencies, the strengthening of local networks and a decrease in feelings of isolation on the part of service providers



have also been identified (PA Consulting, (1998) and Martin (2000). Haase *et al.* (1996) identified the development of models for widening participation in the change process through the facilitation of local involvement and active participation of citizens in formulating strategies, channelling resources and implementing policies to deal with issues of local concern (Haase, McKeown and Rourke 1996). In addition, the capacity of local partnerships to develop synergies in terms of attracting in external resources, through more effective delivery of services, through generating new investment opportunities (under-exploited) and through consensus building and negotiation was identified by Walsh *et al.* (1998). PA Consulting (1998) also noted the greater efficiency in getting new projects off the ground and greater responsiveness by agencies to local needs thus improving the level and quality of services.

The extent to which most of the above benefits accrue at the level of the 'partnership' rather than at the point of service delivery (or more to the point, to the service recipient) is notable and highlights once again how the achievement of partnership at the planning level has become distanced from the concept of service delivery. An assessment of service delivery in 30 case studies within the RAPID programme found that eight of these were multi-agency projects rather than service integration initiatives (ADM, 2005). Of the remaining 22, only four had progressed beyond the second stage of collaboration as defined by Himmelman (1994). In their evaluation of RAPID, Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) noted that progress in relation to integrated service delivery was uneven, with little progress made in some areas. It concluded that concerted national policy would be required to advance this objective. The lack of services was also seen to impede the development of more cohesive approaches to service delivery.

Similarly, an evaluation of the Social Inclusion Measure (SIM) Working Groups found that they were successful in providing a networking forum where social inclusion stakeholders can meet, discuss issues and share information, thereby increasing awareness of social inclusion issues and helping to break down traditional organisational barriers. However, it argued that there is no clear sense that the SIM process has yet made a difference to service delivery and on this basis concluded that the contribution of the co-ordination process to more effective delivery of social inclusion measures has been minimal (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003). A subsequent review of the CDB Strategic Reviews conducted by Indecon (2008) found little progress on this issue. It noted that many of the participants in the CDB process felt that there was extensive exchange of information and some altering of activities, but limited sharing of resources or enhancing the capacity of agencies (Indecon, 2008).

Fitzpatrick (2006) noted the benefits of RAPID as including the facilitation of a significant number of local development projects, the establishment of structures that have enhanced awareness of needs, the leveraging of additional funding for the RAPID areas, and the development of innovative practice, particularly with regard to community participation and engagement. The evaluation also noted the increased investment in areas that have suffered years of neglect and the ability to influence both local and national policy. However, the lack of any clear Department of Education and Science (DES) mechanism to provide funding for educational initiatives was seen as a critical issue for the potential impact of the programme.



The specific achievements of the LDSIP over the period 2000–2005 have been quantified by Pobal (2006). During this period, 143,200 adults (55% women) were supported under the Services for the Unemployed measure, and 54% of clients received education or training. Under the Community Development Measure, nearly 5,600 community organisations were supported. A further 1,300 small scale environmental/infrastructure projects were supported under the Community Development Measure. Under the Community-Based Youth Initiatives measure, 257,000 young people were supported as well as 46,000 adults. These data highlight the effectiveness of the LDSIP in reaching the target groups and delivering actions, but they are silent on the actual outcomes for participants. The single outcome statistic is that 20% of those who were supported under the Services for the Unemployment Measure progressed into employment and 12% progressed into self employment. The contribution of the various agencies involved in the integrated approach to these progression rates is not elaborated.

3.10 Inhibiting Factors

A number of themes dominate the literature here and they concur to a great extent with the issues raised in the international literature. The lack of high level commitment is frequently identified as inhibiting factor. An evaluation of the SIM Working Groups and the CDBs (NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, 2003) identified the significant level of difficulty in developing real co-operation '*even when there are national guidelines and oversight and political commitment*'. The evaluation notes:

'While the CDBs and SIM Groups have made efforts to implement key elements of the Task Force guidelines including the setting up of websites, adoption of work programmes and completion of social inclusion measures, the extent of progress and the quality of output has been variable. The process proved difficult and time-consuming and was characterised by a lack of co-operation from government departments and agencies.'

Constraints at the level of the co-ordinating mechanism have also been noted. For example, the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit (2003) argued that the lack of authority underpinning the co-ordination function of the CDBs and the SIM Groups hampered their effectiveness. Neither of these bodies can oblige any of the key stakeholders to participate meaningfully in the process and in addition there is an absence of incentives within the system to encourage and reward organisations which pursue issues around co-ordination and eliminate duplication.

Organisational factors also figure. Ruddle *et al.* (2000) and Indecon (2008) note that different ideologies, principles, structures, budgetary time frames, and territorial remits can delimit the capacity for more integration. A related issue identified by Indecon (2008) and Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) is the fact that pursuing integration is frequently additional to the workload of statutory employees and there is a lack of incentive to such employees to assist in integrated service delivery.

Difficulties in community sector involvement in partnership have been noted. Walsh *et al.*, (1998) note that rhetoric attached to the involvement of poor communities and groups in local Partnership Companies ABPCs masks a great diversity in terms of local practice. In some cases, they agree,



community participation rarely extends beyond token consultation due to the limited capacity of community groups to participate effectively (Walsh *et al.*, 1998). In a similar vein, Kelleher and Kelleher (2005) note that the preponderance of statutory representation can have a distorting effect on the conduct of meeting and they argue that the relative strengths of community partners as against statutory and private sector partners needs careful balancing. Ruddle *et al.* (2000) identified tensions between the statutory and community sector agencies represented on the management committees of projects delivered by LDTFs as a factor inhibiting better integration at the point of service delivery.

Lack of linkage between the local level and the policy making framework has also been identified as impeding the development of effective responses (Walsh *et al.*, 1998; Craig, 1992; 1994; Indecon, 2006). An exacerbating factor here is the perceived reluctance of the policy context to absorb learning from outside its own framework: either from other national contexts or from other sectors. This leads to inertia within the system, which coupled with the lack of a national strategy, militates against leadership with respect to change and policy development (Duggan, 2007). Butler (2006) has suggested the existence of tensions between locally based inter-agency structures and the State.

In general, there is a broad consensus within the literature, that while the partnership mechanism *per se* may be effective in sharing information, facilitating consultation etc., the extent to which integration feeds back into the represented agencies appears very limited (Ronayne and Creedon, 2003; Rourke 2007). Rourke (2007) notes that reports have referred to the fact that inter-agency co-operation is not prioritised within many statutory agencies and voluntary organisations and is not factored into the strategic plans of these organisations. Since it is not prioritised, it is often not resourced or supported and it is granted far less importance than the direct services being provided by the agencies. Rourke cites the fact that collaboration does not occur outside of formal meetings of partnerships etc. and that frequently co-operation is dependent on the goodwill and personalities of individual workers, with co-operative arrangements not strong or robust enough to withstand changes of personnel. In similar vein, Ronayne and Creedon (2003) argue:

'Organisational effectiveness is measured in terms of the extent to which each organisation meets its own targets and little active consideration is given to assessing the manner in which each organisation may be impacting on the effectiveness of the others.'

More fundamental problems were identified by the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit (2003) when they noted that the social inclusion co-ordination process has faced considerable constraints, some of which are inherent to the organisation of the public administration in Ireland, such as the vertical nature of departmental organisational cultures and the lack of flexibility to adjust spending programmes to local circumstances.

We can also note here that despite the proliferation of integrated approaches and inter-agency approaches, significant problems arising from the fragmentation of service delivery remain. For example, the problems arising from the fragmentation of services has been identified in relation to the unemployed (NESF, 2005), older people (NESF, 2006) and drug users and their families (Duggan, 2005). In the latter case, however, people living in LDTF areas were shown to have fared better,



reflecting in part the role of key workers in these areas (see later sections). Similarly a review of the work of the Homeless Agency identified significant developments in service provision in the homeless sector (PwC, 2003). These findings suggest that issue based structures at local level are a necessary but insufficient factor in promoting integrated service delivery.

3.11 Overcoming Inhibiting Factors

A number of assessments and policy documents suggest ways in which the limitations of mechanisms of consultation (such as partnerships) in actually improving the quality of service delivery might be overcome. One such suggestion response is to impose obligations on participating agencies to more effectively collaborate and co-ordinate their services. For example, NESF (2007) argues that there should be a formal obligation on agencies delivering public services to coordinate and to collaborate and to recognise the importance of inter-agency work within organisations. This should be encouraged by its being incorporated into their business planning process.

A second response to this has been the establishment in some areas of service delivery of a key worker or broker model, which operates on a case management approach (Eustace and Clarke, 2000). This approach is in operation in the LDTF areas and has been reinforced by the Report of the Working Group on Rehabilitation (2006). It is also evident in the work of the Homeless Agency. A case work approach has been endorsed by the NESF (2006) which argued that within this model, brokers have a significant role to play in ensuring the integration of services at the point of delivery and in ensuring that integration is specific to the needs of the individual service user.

'The broker is the key worker in the process who becomes the single point of contact for the service users, not only in providing information on the types of services that are available, but also in mediating and advocacy on their behalf, both within their own organisation and other relevant bodies.' (NESF, 2006)

The difficulties that the absence of services presents to this approach need to be noted. It is also important to note that in their review of research into key working services in the UK, Greco *et al.* (2005) found that these were most effective when they were accompanied and supported by effective inter-agency structures. Thus, a key worker approach complements but does not substitute for inter-agency mechanisms. A similar point is made by Stokes (2000) who has noted that inter-agency collaboration won't compensate for intra-agency inadequacies.

The need for technical excellence and support in developing action plans and identifying local-level objectives has also been identified (Joyce and Daly, 1989; Cullen, 1997; Kelleher and Kelleher, 2005; Probation Service Review, 2008). The need to resource technical excellence was stressed by Walsh *et al.* (1998), who argued that provision of resources including information by a central co-ordination unit is essential. Specifically, in terms of developing models of good practice, providing baseline information and transferring learning across localities, centralised back-up is important (Walsh *et al.*, 1998). The value of technical support in facilitating policy development has also been noted by Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) and Indecon (2008).



3.12 Lessons from Specific Initiatives in the Public Sector

3.12.1 Overview

Finally, in this chapter we look at relevant learning from four inter-agency initiatives in the public sector with a view to establishing the elements of best practice. The initiatives are the CDBs/SIMs, local partnership arrangements incorporating ABPCs and Community Partnerships, RAPID and the LDTFs. These initiatives have been selected because they represent different models of inter-agency work with different remits, structures and processes. They thus provide insights into elements of good practice at different levels from national strategies to community level issues. Recent evaluations of the CDBs/SIMs highlight the need to embed initiatives within appropriate national and local structures and to ensure linkage between policy objectives and policy processes at national and local levels. An analysis of local inter-agency models involving ABPCs highlights best practice in relation to the partnership process. Evaluations of RAPID identified the issues that need to be addressed to ensure integrated service delivery. A broad based assessment of projects delivered by the LDTFs highlights good practice in ensuring community buy-in. We should note that in the case of all four initiatives the learning they generate is derived as much from their weaknesses as from their strengths. The discussion here incorporates the recommendations of the various reviewers to strengthen the impact of the various initiatives.

3.12.2 The CDBs and SIM Working Groups: National Level Supports and Linkages

The CDBs were set up in 2000 and operate under the aegis of the local authorities. The role of the CDBs is to carry out the co-ordination function in relation to public and local development services across cities and counties. The CDBs have been referred to as the key co-ordinating mechanism at local level and commitments to strengthen and develop them were made in the partnership agreement, *Towards 2016* and also reinforced in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2007–2013 and in the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. The CDBs also have responsibility for the CSCs established under *Towards 2016*. Four pilot CSCs have been established. As these are at the early stages of their development there is as yet no research or evaluation available on them.

The SIM Working Groups were established under the CDBs for the purpose of co-ordinating, at a local level, the delivery of the social inclusion measures contained in the NDP and feeding into the social inclusion aspects of the county and city strategies. The promotion of social inclusion was one of the four key objectives of the NDP which included 38 social inclusion measures across four operational programmes. Given the multi-faceted nature of social exclusion, it was considered essential that appropriate structures be established at local level to co-ordinate the overall planning and delivery of the measures and ensure an integrated, holistic approach to programme delivery.

In 2003, the SIM Working Groups were evaluated by the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit to assess their effectiveness and impact and the constraints on both. Subsequently in 2008, Indecon undertook a review of the CDBs. The 2003 evaluation noted limited progress in co-ordination at local level, lack of commitment at national level and little impact on service delivery. Indecon (2008) also found that to



date, the focus of the CDBs had been on information exchange although it also noted the value of the CDBs in bringing together stakeholders, providing fora for communities, and creating opportunities for collaborative projects. The review noted that as the CDBs operate primarily in influencing other organisations, both statutory and voluntary, their potential influence is significantly dependent on the perceived priority which is attached to their functions.

The two reports also identified – including through their recommendations – the following factors which have or could strengthen the impact of both structures. The key learning, which as noted above relates largely to the strategic inter-connectedness between structures, processes and objectives, at national and local levels, is detailed in Figure 3.5.



Figure 3.5: Key Learning from CDBs/SIMs: National Level Support and Linkages

Government Commitment

The need for measures to highlight on an ongoing basis the government's commitment to local integrated service delivery was identified. This included the need for the Taoiseach and relevant Ministers to provide guidance to departments, local authorities and statutory agencies on what is expected from local integration initiatives and on the required co-operation of their constituent organisations.

Departmental Strategies

Government departments should embed support for local co-ordination objectives into their multi-annual strategy statements and yearly business plans. In addition, agenda setting at national level (via the NDP) should streamline objectives, ensure greater coherence between and increase the effectiveness of the targeting and planning process at local level.

Mandating the Local Agencies

There is a need for national policy makers to ensure appropriate integration is fostered at local level between the various initiatives. Government departments should provide a clear explicit mandate to local departmental or agency structures participating in the local co-ordination process.

National Co-ordination Group

A national co-ordination group can add value to inter-agency initiatives by giving impetus to the work of the integration initiatives at local level, by informing the Cabinet on key emerging issues and by addressing any obstacles which arise.

Data Requirements

Good data on the local situation is essential to underpinning strategic planning and in providing a basis for monitoring and evaluation. Much more data should be made available at city and county level to inform the work of the CDBs. In addition, tie-in to national strategies should be strengthened through formal monitoring and reporting on progress to both the NDP and the National Anti-Poverty Strategy (NAPS).

Reinforcing Good Practice

Mechanisms to reinforce good practice at local level are required. These should focus on the exchange of best practice amongst CDBs and between CDBs and statutory agencies and on integrated training including joint workshops and joint training programmes between CDBs and statutory agencies. The possibility of secondment arrangements between CDB Community and Enterprise Directorates and central government departments, statutory agencies and private and voluntary sectors was also suggested.



3.12.3 Local Partnerships Projects: Building Effective Partnership Arrangements

The ABPCs, as noted earlier, are formal structures, constituted as companies under Irish law and comprising a board structure with representation from the statutory, business and community sectors. They are supported by Pobal and each ABPC delivers its actions through an operational unit. ABPCs are also frequently involved in less formal partnership arrangements with other agencies at local level as are Community Partnerships.

In 2008 Pobal published a study of eight ABPCs and Community Partnerships funded under the LDSIP. The study sought to explore local partnership processes and to highlight how partnership approaches and processes contribute to the promotion of equality for disadvantaged social groups. The focus of the study was not on the internal dynamics of a partnership board or sub group but rather on the dynamics associated with the process of adopting a partnership approach to develop and realise a particular project. That is, the focus is not on the formally structured partnerships but on the projects they implement through pursuing a partnership approach with other organisations.

The study highlighted key challenges faced by these partnerships including those of promoting the inclusion of socially excluded groups, maintaining flexibility and responsiveness, working with different personalities, linking local issues to a national agenda and valuing the work involved in participating in and developing partnership arrangements. The optimum characteristics of effective partnership arrangements have been presented earlier in this chapter. The progressive or optimum model was described as having a commitment to collaboration, being energetic, highly participatory and empowering and leading to sustainable outcomes. The participating organisations were found to be open to various methods of working and able to collaborate comfortably on the development of strategies.

In addition, the report identified the key elements required to facilitate effective partnership arrangements at local level. These are detailed in Figure 3.6.



Figure 3.6: Key Learning from Local Partnerships: Building Effective Partnership Arrangements

Pre-development Work

Pre-development work is essential in building effective partnership processes at local level. Engagement with relevant agencies and stakeholders prior to the establishment of more formal partnership processes leads to early identification of possible barriers to effective collaboration and ensures that pro-active measures can be introduced at the outset to enhance the sustainability of the partnership process.

Shared Analysis and Objectives

The development of a shared analysis of issues relating to social exclusion and the subsequent development of shared objectives and programmes of work amongst partners are necessary. These can increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for relevant target groups.

Agreed Implementation Frameworks

Agreed frameworks through which to implement actions are necessary. These enable clarity across the participating agencies regarding approaches and the resources required to implement agreed actions.

Involving and Resourcing the Community Sector

A well developed community sector increases the likelihood of strong target group participation in partnership processes. This has subsequent benefits in terms of the appropriateness and sustainability of actions. There is a need for ongoing investment in building a strong community sector committed to social inclusion.

The Need for Flexibility Over Time

Agencies need to consider their medium to long-term role in local partnership processes from the outset, and understand the changing nature of their role over time as well as the demands such changes place on the organisational resources.

Capturing the Policy Learning

The learning for national and regional policy generated by local partnerships must be captured at implementation level and at programme management level. Adequate mechanisms need to be in place for this.



3.12.4 RAPID: Facilitating Integrated Services

The RAPID programme was launched in early 2001 in order to direct State assistance towards improving quality of life and access to opportunities for communities in 25 designated disadvantaged urban areas throughout Ireland. One year later, a second strand of the programme extended its coverage to a further 20 provincial towns. Responsibility for delivering the programme currently resides with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and a National Monitoring Committee oversees activity at national level. Pobal co-ordinates the implementation of the programme on behalf of the Department. At county/city level, a Monitoring Group operates via the SIM Working Groups to monitor activity within each local authority area. At local level, Area Implementation Teams (AITs) were established to implement the programme in the selected areas. The AITs are comprised of representatives of the local authority, statutory agencies and community and voluntary agencies.

In 2005 a study of service integration in the RAPID area was commissioned by ADM. The following year, an evaluation of RAPID (Fitzpatrick Associates 2006) focused on, among other things, assessing the appropriateness and effectiveness of structures, systems, processes and procedures that the RAPID programme has developed and deployed at both local and national level. Both Fitzpatrick Associates (2006) and ADM (2005) identified the positive impacts of RAPID but also highlighted difficulties in achieving service integration. Among the latter was the uneven and slow progress in actually achieving integrated service delivery, already noted.

Factors contributing to this included difficulties at the level of the participating agencies, such as inflexibility, difficulties in producing organisational change, lack of reporting structures and co-ordination mechanisms within agencies. Also identified was the lack of strategic leadership at local level, an emphasis on co-ordinating networking activities instead of shared management activities and attempts to develop integration focused on new services rather than reconfiguring services (ADM 2005).

Despite these difficulties, learning from the RAPID programme highlights some of the key elements required to ensure that integrated service delivery can occur. These are outlined in Figure 3.7.



Figure 3.7: Key Learning from RAPID: Facilitating Integrated Services

Focus and Strategies

The focus of the initiative must be clearly defined and ideally limited to a number of specific themes. Each theme should be the subject of clear strategies embodying appropriate actions and projects. The central support agency should provide guidance and support on this work and where appropriate the relevant government department should identify funding streams to resource subsequent activity.

Seniority of Personnel

Sufficiently senior personnel must participate in the integration process. They must be adequately supported at central level. They must be required to make full and active contributions to the inter-agency work and must be allocated sufficient time and resources to devote to the implementation of the programme. Strategies are also required to cope with inflexible or unco-operative participating agencies.

Greater Autonomy at Local Level

Local representatives on the planning structure should be given a mandate by their parent organisations to make decisions on local funding and service delivery.

Key Departmental Involvement at Local Level

It is essential to ensure the strategic involvement at local level of departments whose remit is central to the objectives of the initiative. The relevant departments must find ways of engaging with local initiatives and establishing appropriate structures and processes to facilitate the development of integrated services.

Whole Organisation Approach

It is important for participating organisations as a whole to develop an approach to service integration and that clear structures and mechanisms are developed that enable flexibility and changes to service delivery to be put in place. Full organisational support must be provided to individual staff involved in integrated service delivery.

Supporting Integrated Services

More work is required to understand service integration and its strategic focus. In particular there needs to be a greater understanding of the needs and issues underpinning service integration initiatives, clarity on the roles, responsibilities and contributions of the participating stakeholders and a clear focus on the expected results from the work and its sustainability into the future.

Allowing Sufficient Time

It takes time to get service integration initiatives working effectively but it is important that time is allocated otherwise a bad experience can destroy future opportunities for collaboration.

3.12.5 The Local Drug Task Forces: Embedding Inter-agency Work in the Community

The LDTFs operate at local level but under the aegis of the National Drugs Strategy to which they report. The LDTFs have a board structure and an operational unit and as well as seeking to integrate existing services also engage in delivering their own projects, sometimes in conjunction with other organisations. In 2000 Ruddle *et al.* undertook an evaluation of the projects implemented by the LDTFs. The projects delivered by the LDTF are varied both in scope and nature. Some provide a



single specific service – such as providing a minibus or facilities for events. The majority however provide multiple services, including education and prevention interventions involving training, treatment and rehabilitation.

The evaluation was conducted in the early stages of implementation of the projects and thus could not assess the benefits and outcomes to any extent. Instead it focused on the planning and implementation stages and the extent to which the projects were prepared for subsequent evaluations. The review identified difficulties in implementation, the main ones being lack of suitable premises, community hostility and staffing issues. Other frequently mentioned pitfalls included duplication of existing services, problems with statutory bodies (such as non-consultation with the community) and problems with the management committees or boards of directors.

In 2006 Goodbody Economic Consultants undertook an expenditure review of the task forces themselves. The key findings from both reviews are presented in Figure 3.8.



Figure 3.8: Key Learning from LDTFs: Embedding Inter-Agency in the Community

Identifying and Planning for Target groups

Determining the target group, establishing benchmark measures and carrying out needs assessment are essential to developing integrated services. Sufficient attention needs to be paid to planning and to establishing review systems for this.

Responsiveness to Needs

The responsiveness of community based projects to clients' changing needs was highlighted along with the relatively low costs of prevention measures which harness 'captive' audiences in schools, youth clubs and community groups.

Comprehensive Services to Meet Community Needs

The fact that treatment services were being developed in order to provide a range of options to clients within the same premises, together with the increasing focus on provision of childcare and family based supports within treatment projects was positive. The latter enabled all those most affected by drug misuse to benefit from these services. Meeting the complex needs of the community means that some services (such as family support and crisis intervention) frequently occur outside office hours. Committed and appropriate qualified staff are essential in delivering these services.

Formal Involvement of Community and Service Users

A high level of community and voluntary involvement on the management committees of individual projects contributes to impact. Examples of this were community and voluntary representatives, including service users, participating in a range of task forces and associated projects including the Community Policing Forums and the Community Drug Teams. This can also encourage more positive community/State agency interaction and help to break down community resistance to locally based drug treatment services.

Local Networking

Networking is essential in underpinning integrated service delivery. However, clarity with regard to how the projects understand the term networking is important. It is also necessary to move beyond personal contacts in developing networks and these must also be supported by local and national structures.



3.13 Key Chapter Findings

The commitment to inter-agency working within Irish social policy that first emerged in the early 1990s remains strong and has been continually reinforced within national documentation. The commitment is reflected in multiple structures at local level that seek to ensure better planning, better co-ordination and better delivery of integrated services. The following points can be noted:

- Inter-agency working has evolved in somewhat of an ad hoc way, notwithstanding a number of very highly structured strategies. However, there is evidence that a more systematic approach to managing inter-agency work at national level is emerging.
- The evidence suggests that benefits are being delivered both to the participating agencies and to the service users, and frequently too to the wider community. However, research also suggests that significant deficiencies remain in achieving integration, particularly at the level of service delivery and that the fragmentation of services continues to be a major problem for service users.
- Context is important in determining the nature of inter-agency working and there is a need for flexibility and autonomy at local level in establishing the most appropriate processes.
- Common learning across the initiatives looked at in this chapter indicates the need for commitment, strategic planning, resources and appropriate participation at all levels, including government and community levels.

In terms of the ongoing development of inter-agency approaches, a fundamental issue is to balance the generic learning from previous initiatives with the imperatives dictated by the context within which the inter-agency work will take place, and the substantive issues that arise within that. It is also important to ensure that the benefits of inter-agency working are clearly shown to accrue to service users. This is particularly important in order to ensure that inter-agency approaches are not predicated on the demonstrable fact that single-agency interventions are insufficient, rather than on the demonstrable evidence that multi-agency interventions work.



4 INTER-AGENCY WORK IN CHILD PROTECTION, CHILD WELFARE AND FAMILY SUPPORT

4.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews a body of literature that is concerned with the operation of the child protection and welfare system and inter-agency work in this field. While this chapter follows a structure similar to that used in Chapter 1, as in other chapters some of the headings have been amended to allow for the inclusion of the most significant material from the literature in a clear way. For example, structures and processes are included under one heading due to the way in which the case conference serves as both in the child protection system.

4.2 Child Protection, Child Welfare and Family Support Services

The focus of this chapter is primarily on child protection as opposed to child welfare and family supports. This reflects the focus of the available literature, which in itself is indicative of the length of time for which child protection has been the focus of policy and practice, with only a more recent recognition of the role of child and family welfare services.

In the context of inter-agency working it is interesting to note that the HSE, the main provider of both child protection and child welfare services, distinguishes between these. Child protection responds to neglect, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse. It arises when, on foot of an initial assessment, there is a risk of an ongoing and immediate risk to the child. Child welfare on the other hand, arises when, following an initial assessment there is no immediate or ongoing risk to the child, but where the child's emotional, psychological or social needs are not met and there is a subsequent risk of impaired development (HSE, 2007a). Common problems to arise among children and young people in welfare as opposed to protection cases include children with emotional/behavioural problems, abuse of alcohol and/or drugs, involvement in crime, child pregnancy, physical illness or disability and mental health or learning disability problems. Family difficulties frequently reflect these problems among children and include parents who are unable to cope, abuse of drugs or alcohol, parents who are involved in crime, have an illness or disability, but also include domestic violence, marital or relationship breakdown, poor housing and financial problems and disharmony within the home (HSE, 2007b).

While the involvement and support of the family is relevant in the area of child protection, it is within the child welfare services that family support services are most commonly located. The primary services included under child protection are social work services. The services offered under the child welfare and family support heading are more extensive and include Springboard, social work interventions, family support worker services, community child worker, community mother, home help, family centres, pre-schools, community groups or referral to other professionals. The services offered and their take-up vary considerably across the health services areas (HSE, 2007b).



A further distinction that can be made between child protection and child welfare and family support services, and one that has implications for inter-agency working is the degree of involvement of the voluntary and community sector in the delivery of services. McKeown *et al.* (2003) state that 69% of family support services are delivered by community and voluntary organisations with funding from the relevant health authority. Such extensive involvement of voluntary and community organisations does not occur in the field of child protection where the vast majority of agencies involved are statutory.

Two further distinctions are noteworthy here. The first relates to the use of language. Child welfare and family support services refer to need as opposed to child protection which refers to risk. Second, and reflected in the language used, is the point at which services become relevant and active. Child welfare and family support services are primarily prevention and early intervention services, while child protection services usually become active when abuse has actually occurred. This should result in services forming a continuum of supports and interventions, with families and children moving across this as their circumstances change. However, as will be seen below the services are often rigidly divided.

This distinction between child protection and child welfare services has been challenged. McKeown *et al.* (2003) note that a study conducted in the Mid-Western Health Board Region by Ferguson and O'Reilly (2001) concludes by saying that

'...distinguishing 'welfare' and 'protection' systems implies a false separation which endangers the provision of the full range of services needed in each case. The best way forward is to develop integrated services where workers and systems have the skills and knowledge to respond to the mixed protection and welfare needs evident in child care practice'.

4.3 The Rationale for Inter-agency Work

The drive for inter-agency work in relation to child welfare and protection has been evident in policy for many years. For example, Buckley (2000) states that multi-disciplinary work goes back to the late 19th and early 20th century when the focus of child protection work became one of therapeutic and rehabilitative support within families. Further, developments in medical technology, and most specifically the advent of the X-ray, allowed for better diagnosis of injuries and the emergence of the 'battered baby' syndrome in the 1960s and the greater involvement of medical staff. In addition, our increasing understanding of the complex nature of child abuse and the widening definitions of abuse and risk including physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect has resulted in the need for the involvement of a wider range of professionals (Buckley, 2003a). This range of professionals has now come to include public health nurses (PHNs), psychologists and psychiatrists as well as counsellors, teachers, therapeutic services and voluntary agencies working with families and children. The involvement of the Gardaí and the courts is of course necessary for the prosecution of abuse cases. Although not all of these actors or professionals have a specific or front line role in child protection they are seen to play a crucial role in the initial identification and referral of alleged abuse and neglect cases to the relevant authority. The rationale for the involvement of these professionals also lies in



their knowledge of and ongoing contact with the child and the family over a long period of time. (Buckley *et al.*, 1995)

Added to this is the ever strengthening argument that children should be supported by helping their families (McKeown *et al.*, 2003). This has resulted in an increasing awareness of the need for child and family welfare services as opposed to protection. In this arena McKeown *et al.* (2001) provide one of the most concise reasons for inter-agency working. This is that children and families should not be inundated with services from a wide range of agencies, while still ensuring that they receive the services they need and that are most appropriate to their circumstances.

Another rationale for the promotion of inter-agency work in child protection can be seen to arise from what Buckley (1999) describes as 'text book' cases. These are cases where there is serious physical abandonment and clear admissions or disclosures of assault, which would in turn elicit an urgent response from the appropriate services. However, as Buckley goes on to state, such text book cases are rare in reality and most cases are in fact vague in nature, lacking in evidence and involving various levels of risk. Cases most often involve a range of circumstances, such as poverty, substance misuse and disability, and there is a lack of clarity about which issue is of greatest significance. Statutory social workers end up making decisions according to the available circumstantial information. This recognition of the complexity of child abuse and protection cases suggests the need for the involvement of a range of disciplines and agencies to meet the often very complex needs of children and families suffering abusive situations.

The complexity of children's lives and the corresponding need for multi-disciplinary and inter-agency work is also clearly cited by McKeown *et al.* (2003). The authors state that children's needs are rarely confined to one area of their lives, with family, educational, health, social and financial needs all arising at different times and in various combinations. Effective responses to these needs must therefore involve a range of agencies whose services can be combined in various formations to meet the needs of children and families.

This need for inter-agency working that reflects the development of the child and its family is also evident in the Supporting Parents Strategy (2002) which states:

'By keeping the child at the centre, agencies and departments providing myriads of supports and services must work together. A child and his/her family do not experience their lives in neatly divided sections but as a whole with many changing parts. Evidence suggests that the delivery of supports to parents and their children is most effective if a holistic and integrated approach is taken.'

As in Britain, the development of written procedures and policies relating to multi-disciplinary and inter-agency collaboration in the field of child protection in particular, but also in relation to the development of preventative and early intervention child and family welfare services, became a matter of greater legislative and policy urgency in Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s. This was due to a number of high profile cases of ongoing and severe child abuse, encompassing physical, sexual and



emotional abuse and gross neglect. These included the Kilkenny child abuse case, what was known as West of Ireland Farmer case, now known to be the McColgan case and the litany of abuse stories arising with respect to members of the Catholic clergy, most particularly in the Dioceses of Ferns. The reports on each of these cases² identify the failure of communication between a range of professionals and agencies, most specifically within the health boards involved, as one of the key system failures that allowed such cases to go unprosecuted and children to go unprotected for long periods of time.

Policy and official practice guidelines have presumed that inter-agency co-operation is both possible and desirable in the Irish child and welfare protection system (Buckley, 2003a). In 1987 the Department of Health issued its first set of guidelines on child abuse, which included a very clear principle of multi-disciplinary if not inter-agency work by highlighting the need for *'the ready willingness and co-operation'* of a range of practitioners within the health boards (Department of Health 1987, cited in Buckley, 1996). These guidelines set out the rationale for inter-agency working in the context of specifying the role of Directors of Community Care/Medical Officers of Health:

'He (sic) should also, in conjunction with the senior members of his (sic) team, review from time to time procedures in his (sic) area for co-ordinating support services generally in cases where different disciplines and different agencies are providing support on a regular basis for families with young children. This would facilitate the early detection of vulnerable families as well as increase the overall effectiveness of support measures for them. In this way stresses which give rise to situations associated with the incidence of child abuse can be identified early on and steps taken to alleviate them. All staff dealing with the welfare of children have a responsibility in this area and should develop a greater awareness of child abuse and of the circumstance with which they are dealing.' (Department of Health, 1987, quoted in Thorpe, 1997)

Following this came the Child Care Act, 1991, which was to become the principal legislation governing child protection and welfare. This Act provided for the establishment of Children's Advisory Committees (CACs) to be comprised of *'....persons with a special interest or expertise in matters affecting the welfare of children, including representatives of voluntary bodies providing child care and family support services'*. Furthermore, the Act allowed health boards to procure services from such bodies (Government of Ireland, *Child Care Act, 1991*). From the very fact that this Act contains sections of the role of the Gardaí and the health boards, inter-agency collaboration between these two at a minimum was addressed. This relationship was specifically addressed in the guidelines on *Notification of Child Abuse Cases between Health Boards and the Gardaí* (Department of Health, 1995). The 1991 Act also provides the legislative basis for child welfare and family support services by placing an obligation on the health boards to provide such services for children who had not experienced abuse or neglect but who are potentially at risk of such experiences in the future.

² See McGuinness, C. (1993) *Report of the Kilkenny Incest Case Investigation*, Dublin: The Stationery Office; (1995) *'West of Ireland Farmer Case': Report of a Review Group*, North Western Health Board; Murphy, F., Buckley, H. and Joyce, L. (2005) *The Ferns Report*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.



In 1999 the Department of Health issued its *Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Department of Health, 1999). These guidelines were themselves drawn up by an inter-agency group comprising representatives of government departments, the HSE, universities, trade unions and non-governmental bodies. The aim of the guidelines includes the clarification and promotion of mutual understanding among statutory and voluntary organisations about the contribution of different disciplines and professions to the field of child protection and welfare. Further, it states that services must be delivered using a partnership approach and that there is a need for consistency between policies and procedures across health boards and other statutory and voluntary agencies. Objectives of the guidelines include:

- the facilitation of effective child protection work by emphasising the importance of family support services and the need for clarity of responsibility between various professional disciplines;
- maximising the capacity of staff and organisations to protect children effectively by virtue of their relevance and comprehensiveness;
- the consolidation of inter-agency co-operation based on clarity of responsibility, co-ordination of information, and partnership arrangements between disciplines and agencies.

In the guidelines, the rationale for inter-agency working is clearly spelled out as follows:

No one professional has all the skills, knowledge, or resources necessary to comprehensively meet all the requirements of an individual case. It is essential therefore that a co-ordinated response is made by all professionals involved with a child and his or her carer/s.

Horgan (1996) upholds this rationale by arguing that, in relation to child sexual abuse in particular, professional isolationism is not desirable due to the interdependency of agency functions, the fragmentation of responsibility, the complex nature of the problem and the strong emotional impact that work in child sexual abuse cases has on the individual professionals involved. Buckley *et al.* (1997) provide evidence that many of those working in the child protection field clearly recognise the need for collaboration and co-operation and that healthy, if largely informal, networks of professionals exist and operate effectively. Nonetheless, the presumption that inter-agency working is an essential aspect of child protection work has also been challenged. This will be returned to later in this chapter.

The 1999 guidelines devote an entire chapter to family support services and refer to Family Group Conferences, more usually called Family Welfare Conferences (FWCs) in Ireland, as a useful mechanism for drawing up a family support plan. Such conferences were further enshrined in the Children Act, 2001 which makes provision for three separate types of family welfare conferences. Of particular concern in this chapter is the FWC. These conferences are the statutory responsibility of the HSE and can be called as a result of a referral from court, family referral, on a HSE application for a Special Care Order or possibly in a child's best interests. Such conferences are considered to be a form of preventative or early intervention measure that can help resolve a care and protection issue that is before the courts, or prevent a child protection issue from emerging (Brady, 2006). They can



involve a wide range of family members, members of the wider community, health and welfare professionals and any other relevant person or organisation representative.

4.4 Definitions of Inter-agency Working

Despite the promotion of inter-agency work by both policy and legislation, there is relatively little attention paid to what constitutes inter-agency working in the literature on child protection in Ireland. Terms such as 'co-operation' and 'collaboration' are used interchangeably. In addition, there is little distinction drawn between inter-agency and multi-disciplinary approaches. These are distinct terms, however. Multi-disciplinary work is common in the child protection system as the principal organisation charged with child protection duties, that is, the HSE, employs a range of professionals all of whom have a role in child protection. These include social workers, PHNs, psychologists and psychiatrists and doctors. Such professionals come together on a regular basis in child protection case conferences. Beyond this lies inter-agency work which, in child protection work, usually means the health board working with others including the Garda Síochána, general practitioners, teachers, therapeutic counsellors and a range of community and voluntary organisations providing services to children and families.

This lack of clear definitions is evident in the Irish literature. For example, Buckley (2002) in her introduction to inter-agency co-operation refers to 'the ideal child protection system' presented by official guidance as being a *multi professional* network rather than a multi- or inter-agency one. This idealised network is viewed as one in which '*interlocking elements combine to produce a seamless, comprehensive and holistic response to the cases of child maltreatment which comes to its attention*'. Many of the studies referred to in this section will draw attention to just how idealised this official version of the child protection system is.

Buckley (2003a) also provides the only clear distinction between work that is inter-agency and multi-disciplinary, but this distinction is made only in relation to training. In reviewing what is termed an 'inter-agency training' project, Buckley argues that the training is in fact not inter-agency but multi-disciplinary. The author holds that inter-agency training requires targeting participating organisations as whole learning systems with a view to improving co-ordination at practice and policy levels. Multi-disciplinary training concerns the bringing together of individuals to understand a particular problem or experience. In relation to the training under review in Buckley's report, this is clearly the latter rather than the former. Buckley goes on to argue that adopting this multi-disciplinary approach to training can have negative consequences for inter-agency collaboration. This is because multi-disciplinary training tends to focus on information exchange and dissemination rather than inter-agency collaboration. Where inter-agency work improves as a result of such training it tends to be at the level of individuals rather than organisations.

Despite setting one of the objectives of her article to be to define what is meant as *multi-disciplinary collaboration*, Horgan (1996) then goes on to define *co-ordination* in general terms as '*the ability of those involved in the process of child protection to work together efficiently and effectively*'. The article then goes on to use these two terms, as well as 'multi-agency approach' and 'inter-agency



collaboration' with no distinction drawn between these various terms. This highlights the difficulties of definition in this area.

4.5 The Benefits and Enabling Factors of Inter-agency Working

The clearest statements of the benefit and enabling factors of inter-agency working are to be found in official policy documents. The *Children First* guidelines (Department of Health and Children, 1999) identify the following three benefits to such work:

1. It ensures provision of a comprehensive response to all concerns about children. This includes the pooling of resources and skills at all stages of intervention from initial enquiry to assessment and case management, including early identification and prevention.
2. It avoids gaps in the service response especially in cases where information might otherwise remain concealed or unknown.
3. It provides mutual support for professionals in complex cases.'

Buckley (2003a) cites a number of reasons why inter-agency working is desirable:

'The achievement of good inter-agency and inter-professional co-operation promotes the use of a broad range of skills and resources in the investigation, assessment, management and prevention of child abuse. It can avoid duplication or overlap of services and enable a comprehensive response to families, ultimately offering greater protection to children at risk. As an added bonus, the experience of working together with other disciplines can provide practitioners with mutual support in what can be stressful working situations.'

The benefits and value of inter-agency working are predominantly viewed from the perspective of the professionals involved. There is little mention of the specific benefits of this way of working to the child victims of abuse. Buckley (2002b) quoting Long (1995) indirectly raises the question of whether inter-agency working results in children not having to be interviewed repeatedly about traumatic events. More recently, Buckley *et al.* (2007) found that poor communication between agencies was one of the more common problems cited by service users, that is, children and families, of child protection services. Instances of poor communication of basic information between agencies were considered by service users to have led to unnecessary delays in investigations and misunderstandings, as well as having resulted in their having to give the same information again and again to different professionals that should have been more 'linked in' with each other.

The *Children First* guidelines also identify the conditions or enabling factors that support inter-agency working. These are:



- 'dissemination on a regular basis of procedures, guidelines and policies;
- clear contractual arrangements between statutory and voluntary agencies;
- an understanding and acceptance by all professionals working with children of their responsibilities and roles in the promotion of child welfare;
- mutual trust in the sharing of information;
- agreement on common goals with regard to a child's safety and welfare;
- willingness of professionals to accept the contributions made by each other, irrespective of status and position within agencies and organisations;
- awareness of the potential from inter-professional tensions, defensiveness, prejudices, rivalries and polarity of views which may, from time to time, prevent the needs of children from taking precedence.'

A number of these enabling factors were also cited in relation to the Springboard Initiative. Springboard is a child and family welfare initiative of the Department of Health and Children, which began as a pilot programme in 1998. Springboard projects work intensively with children who are at risk of going into care or getting into trouble and their families. Projects were expected '*to work in partnership with other agencies, key groups and individuals in the community and with families to develop programmes of family support services*' (Department of Health, 1998, cited in McKeown *et al.*, 2001). Springboard projects have a remit to improve integration among service providers and were expected to establish formal collaborative structures that involved relevant statutory, community and voluntary agencies. In their national evaluation of Springboard McKeown *et al.* (2001) identify the following six factors that facilitated inter-agency co-operation:

- ensuring that all of the relevant agencies and organisations are involved in the partnership process and are aware of its benefits;
- having regular contact and communication, both formal and informal, through meetings, phone calls, etc. The purpose of these is to share information about each other's services and promote clarity about the respective roles of each in working with families, thereby avoiding duplication, overlap and misunderstandings. Shared training events could also contribute to this objective;
- keeping in mind that the first priority is meeting the needs of vulnerable families;
- cultivating professional attitudes which place a premium on respect, openness, flexibility, clarity, networking, trust, co-operation, constructive challenge, prompt replies, clear boundaries and good communication;
- supporting the management committee in Springboard as a key instrument of inter-agency co-operation;
- ensuring that senior management, especially in the health boards, show leadership and support for inter-agency co-operation.

Reinforcing the very limited involvement of children or indeed families in assessments of inter-agency working, it should be noted that these six factors were identified by a wide range of professionals working in and with Springboard projects.



While the 1999 guidelines recognise that difficulties arise in inter-agency working, these difficulties are somewhat minimised and it is proposed that inter-agency training can address these issues. A number of studies suggest that such training is necessary to support effective inter-agency working. For example, Buckley (2003a) suggests that inter-agency training can provide workers from different professional backgrounds with a mutual understanding of their roles and cultures and professional values. It can also help combat stereotyping of roles, role rigidity and other barriers to inter-agency work. Significantly, at a local level inter-agency training may stimulate a shared learning culture and foster the development of local policies. However, if training is to act as an enabling factor for inter-agency co-operation, then training itself must be appropriately designed and supported. In the same report Buckley argues that the following are essential in successful inter-agency training:

- Inter-agency training should be underpinned by a training strategy, evidence-based needs assessment at local level as well as a clear statement of the limitations of training.
- Where inter-agency work is being co-ordinated by a committee comprised of a number of organisations, this committee should first undergo some training to make sure that they present a united front when trying to convince others to participate.
- A set of shared principles and values should be set down at a senior level at the beginning of the training programme.
- Multidisciplinary learning should be made more effective by the establishment of formal structures to be initiated by senior managers to allow the transfer of learning to practice.
- The *process* of inter-agency training (for example the mutual examination of values or beliefs about child protection, resolution of conflict, and development of actual practice skills) needs to be considered as much as the *content* of training.
- A co-ordinating structure should be put in place if possible, as well as a training advisory committee (itself a model of inter-agency collaboration) with members from all organisations at whom the training is targeted, with sufficient knowledge about child protection and training to make informed decisions.
- The method of training needs to be carefully considered and allow for a balance between '*...giving information, facilitating critical reflection on the information, and enabling the participants to experience the process of inter-agency working through a role play using a case scenario*'.
- Staff morale in each agency must be high if inter-agency training and collaboration is to succeed. Good staff care, opportunities for critical reflection, supervision, support and professional development are pre-requisites to effective inter-agency training.
- Agreed standards that will act as the basis of an evaluation of training should be in place from the outset.

Child protection training on an inter-agency basis was recommended in many of the projects reviewed by Buckley (2002). For example, McNamara (1995) recommends multi-disciplinary training as a means of regularly challenging and examining the nature of inter-agency collaboration and avoiding collusion in bad practice. Pritchard (1998) recommended cross-agency training as a means of improving relationships between various child protection teams. Gannon (1994) went further to develop and pilot a training programme. This was offered to health board staff in the first instance as



Gannon believed that it was important to complete work with these staff before including representatives of other statutory and voluntary groups.

In commenting on this theme Buckley (2002) concluded that inter-agency training is generally regarded as one of the most effective ways of bringing staff from different agencies together, challenging the boundaries that exist between them (Horwath and Morrison, 1999), delivering information, raising awareness about child protection practices and policies, and allowing staff to meet. However, she warns against training being a tool for information exchange only and that it must move on to promote real collaboration. Here she raises key issues that are reinforced in her later work (see Buckley, 2000; 2003a). These are that training must be underpinned by agreed strategies and commitment to the implementation of agreed plans if it is to go beyond being a short-term solution and that senior management in agencies must assume ownership of the responsibility to develop policies and arrangements. Furthermore Buckley (2003a) identifies a small number of crucial enabling factors. These are that inter-agency working must be based on equal power between those sitting at the table with no one person or agency being allowed to dominate, and that conflict must be allowed for as conflict can bring about positive change.

It is also notable that the lack of training on the process of inter-agency working, including training on the roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved was cited by McKeown *et al.* (2001) as one of the key barriers to successful inter-agency working in the Springboard initiative.

4.6 Formal Co-ordinating Structures and Processes

4.6.1 Overview

Few of the studies here refer to formal structures for the co-ordination of inter-agency work. In fact Buckley (2000) identifies the absence of an organisation that can adjudicate on the co-operation or non co-operation of any agency or profession as one of the key weaknesses in the organisational context surrounding the inter-agency debate. This is an area that has received some impetus more recently. The *Review of Compliance with Children First National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2008) acknowledges that the establishment of the original child protection committees envisaged under the guidelines at regional and local level were the exception rather than the rule. The review also states that it '*is considered vital that some effective structure should exist to support child welfare and protection services*' (p.18). The review goes on to recommend that the HSE reviews and revitalises or replaces structures that are no longer effective. Any new structures or bodies established in this way must link with the inter-departmental and inter-agency National Children's Strategy Implementation Group established under the National Agreement, *Towards 2016*, for the effective delivery of children's services.

However, McKeown *et al.* (2003) are somewhat damning in their observations in relation to the then Health Services Board and health boards' history and capacity to provide co-ordinated services based on inter-agency working. They argue that the manner in which services are organized actually promotes division of services rather than integration. Internally, the three core child and family services of the health board – (i) children in care (ii) child protection and (iii) family support – are not



well co-ordinated with each other. Further, access to more specialised services for children and families, such as mental health, and speech and language services, appear even less co-ordinated. This holds true for the co-ordination of services between the health boards and external bodies as well. Structures are considered to be confusing and frustrating, both those of the health boards and outside this. The authors report a lack of organisational alignment and lack of evidence of any overarching vision or principles that could drive the cohesive development of services or foster collective responsibility. Responsibility for this is placed squarely on the shoulders of national bodies, with poor co-ordination and a single disciplinary approach to both the organisation and delivery of services stemming from the top down. There is no mandate for services to work together with the result that they sometimes work in isolation and decide what they will, and will not, offer. Families, in turn, have to adapt to the needs of these services rather than vice versa.

In considering the specific issue of family support and prevention of abuse and neglect, *Towards 2016* also makes provision for local level structures. These are CSCs that will be established under the aegis of the CDB in each county and will be chaired by the HSE. These local committees will focus on the implementation of strategic plans and policy documents already devised in relation to children's services in Ireland. Initially, four CSCs were established on a pilot basis, one each in Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Donegal County Council and Limerick City Council. It is intended that these pilots will lead on the development of a prototype structure and methodology for collaboration of service delivery that can be used across all city/county areas.

4.6.2 The Child Protection Case Conference

Given the relative newness of these pilot CSCs, it remains that the only mechanism of inter-agency working to receive detailed attention in the Irish literature is the child protection case conference, although some attention has been paid to the FWC in more recent research (see below). Buckley *et al.* (1997) refer to the Department of Health's 1987 guidelines statement that case conferences are '*an essential feature of inter-agency co-operation*'. Buckley (2003b) describes the case conference as '*...an inter-disciplinary and inter-agency meeting, attended by a variety of professionals involved in a particular case*'. Further, she argues that the case conference '*...provides an ideal location for examination of interactional processes which are fundamental to the much desired 'co-ordination' of child protection work....*'.

Buckley *et al.* (1997) found very strong support for the case conference among most professionals involved. They were cited as a means of sharing information, facilitating planning, making decisions, clarifying roles and hearing different perspectives. For social workers, they also functioned as a means of sharing responsibility by highlighting the role of other professionals and agencies in child protection.

The observable process of the case conference is straightforward and is set out in Buckley, 2003b. The key worker in the agency requesting the case conference, usually a social worker, reports on a number of areas including the agency's contact with the family, the family's social history, details of the recent events of incidents, admission or denial of guilt by the alleged abuser, previous work



undertaken with the family if any and assessment of immediate needs. Other participants are then asked for their input which will reflect their particular professional role with regard to the family concerned. For example, the PHN's input will include information on the child's general development and the child's physical well-being and behaviour. The input by teachers will generally include an impression of the child's personality, their relationship with peers, the school attendance and educational progress, as well as any observations on the health of the child. Reports by various professionals that are detailed, succinct and comprehensive are seen to contribute to good case conferences and to facilitate decision making.

According to Buckley *et al.* (1997) many of the participants in their study were satisfied with the case conference *process*, stating that they felt the meetings were well chaired, that everyone had an opportunity to speak and that all contributions were welcomed. This is in stark contrast to the views of a minority of professionals involved who believed that there was too much time for 'talking shops' and that personal opinion and hearsay was acceptable as contributions. Social workers, in particular, felt that the plans made at case conferences were often unrealistic and unattainable and placed them in the position of having to find solutions to every problem, whether or not they had the mandate or resources to do so. This contradicts the earlier finding that social workers consider that case conferences allow for sharing of responsibility, as many social workers felt that in the end they were left with all of the responsibility. This contradiction might well indicate the difference between the perceived potential of the case conference and actual practice.

Buckley (2003b) raises these issues and contradictions again and goes further to identify how the case conferences highlight many of the barriers to inter-agency working. In this study the most significant dynamic in case conferences was the inter-professional tensions, which undoubtedly impacted on the process and outcomes of the conference itself. It was even acknowledged that these inter-professional and inter-agency rivalries sometimes went as far as preventing the emergence of a clear picture of the situation of the family and children in question.

Buckley (2003b) goes on to discuss the 'exaggeration of hierarchy' in case conferences. This arises where there is a perceived elevated status of some members of the group, more often than not medical professionals such as general practitioners, psychiatrists and psychologists. This results in the contribution of other 'lower' professionals not being heard or listened to. Buckley gives an example from her research where this exaggerated hierarchy is made quite clear. Here, conflict arose between a psychiatrist and a PHN, where the latter proposed a relatively simple solution to a mother's childcare problems which was refuted by the psychiatrist.

Psychiatrist: 'I think maybe the public health nurse didn't have an understanding of the [family] dynamics, which made others who would have understood the dynamics a bit irritated by her.....I think it was just a lack of understanding, which I don't think she could have been expected to have, to be honest!'

PHN: 'I think I was heard as a voice kind of complaining, I don't know if I was heard...I mean [the chairperson] listened to me, but I don't think it was perceived necessarily as a valuable contribution'.



In this study Buckley also noted that many case conference participants were aware that priority was given to doctors or psychiatrists, even though all contributions were supposed to be considered equally.

4.8.7 Family Welfare Conferences

The primary structure in the child welfare and family support arena to attract much research attention is the FWC. The Children Act, 2001 makes provision for three types of family conference. The first type, which are the remit of the health authorities are dealt with here. The second and third types are those convened by Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) and the Probation and Welfare Service respectively. These will be addressed in Chapter 6 below in the context of the youth justice system.

FWC is the term now commonly used to describe the conference that the HSE has statutory responsibility to convene under Sections 7 and 77 of the Children's Act. Families can be referred by the courts, the health services, other providers of services, or families can request an FWC themselves. The purpose of the conference is to resolve a care and protection issue that is before the courts or to act as a preventative strategy for a child (Brady, 2006). Conferences are organised and facilitated by independent co-ordinators and are held outside HSE premises.

An FWC has four distinct stages: (i) preparation, during which families agree to the necessity of the conference and work with an independent FWC co-ordinator to agree who should attend the conference and their role and purpose; (ii) an information giving session at which professionals share all relevant information and their concerns openly with the family, and the family provide clarifications or further information. This process is facilitated by the co-ordinator; (iii) family private time, during which the family, usually with the help of the co-ordinator, agrees on a plan of action to ensure the safety, welfare and development of the child or children in question and set a date for the review of this plan; (iv) presentation of the plan, where families present their plan to the co-ordinator and the professionals involved. The only grounds for rejection of a plan is where the child in question is put at increased risk, at which point the case becomes one of child protection and enters the appropriate processes.

The extent to which FWCs are multi-agency as opposed to multi-disciplinary is difficult to gauge. O'Brien (2001) and Brady (2006) provide evaluations of local FWCs, one of which took place prior to the enactment of the Children Act, 2001 and one which took place after this. Both O'Brien (2001) and Brady (2006) refer to 'other professionals' as information givers at FWCs. O'Brien (2001) does not provide details regarding these respondents. Brady (2006), in an evaluation of the FWC in the HSE Western Region states that 80% of respondents in the study were employees of the HSE, with the remaining 20% of respondents coming from local community and voluntary organisations, the Legal Aid Board and the Probation and Welfare Service. Just under half (46%) work as social workers, 21% as project workers, while other respondents include PHNs, psychologists, project leaders, childcare leaders, solicitors and probation officers.

In the O'Brien (2001) study only four of the 19 referrals made to the FWC service in the then East Coast Area Health Board came from external agencies. Further, some of the challenges identified as



facing the co-ordinators of the services indicate potential friction between the health boards and the co-ordinators. These are:

- demonstrating to the East Coast Area Health Board staff that they could be trusted to deliver a process aimed at improving effective family decision making;
- demonstrating to the East Coast Area Health Board staff that they are not in competition with the social workers and other professionals, nor is the use of independent co-ordinators based outside the health boards an attempt to privatise FWCs; and
- illustrating that the FWC process can free up social workers to engage in other work. O'Brien (2001)

Also indicative of the degree of inter-agency work in FWCs are Brady's (2006) findings in relation to referrals. If the FWC is to serve as an effective inter-agency early intervention and preventative mechanism, referrals are required from a broad range of both disciplines and agencies which see families and children before protection interventions become necessary. Despite vigorous attempts at information and awareness raising, referrals from schools, PHNs, youth services and community organisations remained low, with the majority of cases being referred by social workers from within the HSE.

Brady (2006) raises a key issue in relation to the inter-agency and indeed multi-disciplinary work in FWCs. This stems to some degree from the relatively weak legal position of FWCs as compared to child protection case conferences. FWCs are not mandated to insist on or enforce any course of action with the families they work with. This is entirely dependent on the commitment, motivation and support available to the individual family. Because of this, many agencies and professionals see FWCs as unsuitable to high threshold cases where there is a risk of serious abuse or harm. A number of social workers stated that they did not see the FWC as appropriate in such high risk cases and also expressed a concern that they would be accused of failure should the FWC process not succeed. Such professional concerns and the absence of clear legislation and guidelines addressing such issues could potentially dilute inter-agency work through the FWC.

One aspect of the FWC that is largely absent in the child protection case conference is the strong role parents and other family members play in determining who attends the conference. O'Brien (2001) states that in many cases choosing the professionals who attend is negotiated with the child and parents, most often the mother. Almost two-thirds (62%) of families believed that the 'right' professionals attend the information giving stage and 79% felt that the professionals present had listened to what they had to say. In a similar vein, the co-ordinators involved in the study in the HSE Western Region study felt that the FWC provides a key mechanism and opportunity for children of appropriate ages to be actively involved in the resolution of issues concerning them (Brady, 2006).



4.7 Strategies for Co-ordination at the Service Delivery Level

The above review of literature on the case conference in child protection and the FWC in child welfare and family support, and the material dealing with actors and barriers to inter-agency working included below, suggest that many of the obstacles to be addressed are either professional or structural. A first reading of the literature could in fact easily lead one to conclude that inter-agency work is so problematic as to occur only rarely. However, Buckley *et al.* (1997) highlight the importance of local networks and strategies in dealing with child protection cases. In a study involving a range of professionals, including social workers, teachers, school counsellors, childcare workers, Gardaí and doctors in the South Eastern Health Board Region, the importance of informal networking and the development at local level of tools and strategies is highlighted. These strategies are as follows:

- the development of personal relationships between workers from different agencies and professions;
- the pooling of skills and resources, which allows for a more comprehensive assessment and treatment of cases;
- the facilitation of the work of other professionals, such as schools, allowing outside workers to interview children or families on the school premises;
- good contact and communication that allowed for regular sharing of information and responses to requests for assistance;
- the provision of mutual support outside formal supervision in their work;
- the development of mutual respect and value for each other's roles.

In relation to child welfare McKeown *et al.* (2001) report a high level of satisfaction among professionals in relation to inter-agency working by Springboard projects. At a local level, a similar level of satisfaction is also identified by O'Sullivan (2007) in the evaluation of the Farranree and Knocknaheeny Springboard project. O'Sullivan reports that this is at least partly related to staff qualities and commitment to inter-agency working, as well as the level of support the project staff provide to other professionals on a day-to-day basis.

While these local and sometimes informal strategies for inter-agency working are valuable to individual workers, their agencies and the children and families they serve, Buckley (2002) citing Hallett and Birchall (1995) sounds a cautionary note in this regard. Informal relationships are essential in promoting collaborative work, but an over reliance on these can bring about problems where there is a rapid turnover of staff. This was particularly relevant in Ireland where the turnover rate among statutory social workers in particular was high. Buckley *et al.* (1997) state that while such personal relationships are important they need to be supported by more formal lines of communication and co-operation. In addition, this raises the question of whether such informal or local level strategies are actually inter-agency as opposed to inter-professional.

McKeown *et al.* (2003) raise a further difficulty with such informal arrangements in a child welfare setting, particularly where these are based on positive relationships between individuals rather than



agencies. They argue that such arrangements lead to inconsistency in services across geographical areas and are inconsistent with the principles of fairness and equity.

In this context it is also noteworthy that a somewhat discretionary application of the *Children First* guidelines was also reported. The review of these guidelines states:

'A key finding of this review of the Children First guidelines is that, in general, difficulties and variations in relation to implementation of the guidelines arise as a result of local variation and infrastructural issues, rather than from fundamental difficulties with the guidelines themselves.'

Given that the *Children First* guidelines set out the basis for inter-agency co-operation and the roles of each organisation concerned, the differential application of these poses questions in relation to the extent and nature of inter-agency working at the point of local service delivery. Further to this, McKeown *et al.* (2003) argue that there is little co-ordination of family support services at the point of delivery.

'There remains relatively little inter-agency co-operation at the point of service delivery in most countries. Once a course of intervention is agreed, a single professional generally holds responsibility for implementing the plan. The introduction of common assessment procedures, training modules and performance targets is increasingly being tried as a solution to these emerging problems.'

4.8 Actors

4.8.1 Overview

As Buckley (2002) points out there is a wide variety of actors whose involvement is seen as vital in child protection. These include social workers in the statutory sector and particularly those employed by the health services, social workers in voluntary organisations, PHNs, general practitioners, teachers, childcare workers, Gardaí, hospital staff and others such as Community Welfare Officers. While many of these professionals or the agencies they represent may not be centrally involved in the direct provision of child protection services, they play a crucial role, most specifically in the identification and referral of potential child protection cases and can provide invaluable information on family members and circumstances (Buckley *et al.*, 1997). This section looks at the literature surrounding the perspective of specific agencies and professions of inter-agency working. It should be noted that not all agencies or professionals receive equal attention in the literature.

4.8.2 Social Workers

The perspective of statutory social workers, particularly those in the employ of the health boards, is well represented in the available literature on Ireland (Buckley *et al.* 1997; Buckley, 2000; 2003b). From this literature there is one very central message: social workers value the input of other agencies and professions but believe that, ultimately, the less pleasant, more traumatic and confrontational aspects and increasing surveillance or policing aspects of child protection work are left to them, with few other professions or agencies happy to be actively involved. Butler (1996) refers to



this social control function as the 'dirty work' of child protection and states that '*...social workers appear to be uniquely burdened with this unenviable task for the health board*'.

Butler goes further to state that this 'dirty work' is in fact even 'dirtier' in Ireland due to the level of esteem and protection afforded to families and their rights under the Irish Constitution. Buckley *et al.* (1997) report on social workers' frustration with the lack of responsibility accepted by other professionals and agencies and that social workers view these as being supportive but only engaged to a very limited extent. Buckley (2003b) also reports that social workers are frequently frustrated by the case conference process as other professionals from outside agencies insist on plans of action that were simply not viable, but for which social workers would ultimately be responsible for delivering, or not delivering as was often the case.

4.8.3 Gardaí and Social Workers

Given the guidelines on the *Notification of Child Abuse Cases between Health Boards and the Gardaí*, this inter-agency relationship has been the focus of some attention in the literature. Buckley (2002) provides an overview of small scale studies undertaken in Ireland between 1992 and 2000 which address a number of issues. For example, Buckley (2002) cites O'Rourke's identification of the following difficulties in inter-agency working between the Gardaí and the health boards:

- an unsatisfactory level of co-operation between medical doctors and An Garda Síochána in the early stages of investigation;
- lack of clarity in relation to the role of social workers;
- frustration with the length of time that referrals took;
- unavailability of health board professionals outside normal working hours;
- disagreement regarding the timing of interviews with children and lack of training in this area.

Similarly Buckley (1992) found the following difficulties to exist:

- difficulty in accessing Garda records where the investigating Garda was not available;
- some stereotyping and negative attitudes within both organisations;
- conflict regarding the necessity to involve An Garda Síochána at the outset of investigations;
- disagreements between Gardaí and health boards about confidentiality and the necessity to share certain types of information.

However, both of these studies found a high level of commitment to working together in both the Gardaí and the health boards.

Following the issuing of the 1995 guidelines, Griffin (1996) noted that the non-synchronous working arrangements, the lack of any routinised exchange of information and the potential for a high degree of mistrust between Gardaí and social workers militated against co-operation. In an evaluation of the 1995 guidelines, Delmar (1997) found these issues to be true even in a well organised health board area where procedures had been put in place for liaison between the Gardaí and the health board.



This was because the guidelines were not adhered to as they did not provide the Gardaí with access to the social workers who were actually working on the case but to their senior team leader. Such personal communication was needed to fill in the gaps left by the notification form. The requirement in the guidelines for both organisations to agree a joint strategy for investigation was adhered to only in a minority of cases. In these cases Delmar (1997) found that the contact between the organisations was minimal. The 'ongoing liaison' stipulated in the guidelines had, in fact, taken place in only one out of the 10 cases studied.

Heller (1997) focused on child protection conferences on the basis that they represented an obvious vehicle for inter-agency co-operation and were a potential source of valuable information for An Garda Síochána. He found that just over one third of the Gardaí involved in the sample cases had attended case conferences during the investigative stage. Heller (1997) also found that just over half of the cases had actually been allocated to social workers after notification had taken place and speculated that this may be linked with the lack of collaborative work. His findings on joint interviewing between Gardaí and social workers were starker, as he found that none at all had taken place.

Hughes (1994) found that neither Gardaí nor social workers felt confident about working together. Hughes recommended that implementation strategies be put in place post-training to allow staff to put their training into practice. Hughes reported a high level of support for the establishment of specialist units in An Garda Síochána as well as the appointment of specialist workers. This is in line with the finding of Delmar (1997) cited above. Hughes made recommendations in relation to the need for regular meetings, more inclusion of Gardaí at case conferences and argued that the establishment of named link persons would greatly enhance co-operation. Lernihán (1998) explored the value of joint seminars for social workers and Gardaí and found that face-to-face contact allowed for strategies for greater collaborative work to be identified and for informal contacts to be established.

Long (1995) examined whether or not a specialised unit would prevent children from being repeatedly interviewed. Having interviewed Gardaí and social workers, Long proposed a structure that conforms to the national guidelines, according to which allocated personnel from the health board and An Garda Síochána would co-ordinate the work from the time of referral to after a child protection conference.

Walsh (2000) examined the potential benefits of the Liaison Management Teams recommended in Children First. Having interviewed a small number of Gardaí and social workers who had previously worked in similar teams, the benefits were identified as better communication between professionals, a more co-ordinated approach to cases, better understanding of each other's roles and a better service for clients. Walsh recommended the introduction of such teams stating that they '*would represent the first real effort to address cases in an orderly manner and may ultimately facilitate the development of effective child protection units in Ireland*'.

In summarising this body of work Buckley (2002) draws attention to a number of positives and negatives. On the positive side the studies have illustrated the level of good will towards co-operation in both the Gardaí and the health boards, a commitment towards making the process of a child abuse investigation more effective and less stressful for victims and their families, and that training and focused inter-agency meetings were found to be successful in building personal relationships. This



latter is offered with the cautionary note that the implementation of strategies and practical suggestions emanating from such training and meetings would be the only means of ensuring their long-term effectiveness.

On the negative side there are enduring difficulties, including the fact that shifts and working hours are non-synchronous, the rapid turnover and difficulty in filling social work posts, the mutual communication problems experienced by staff at the 'operational' end of the work, philosophical differences and the fragile nature of the relationship between the organisations.

4.8.4 Public Health Nurses

Through their work with new borns and their mothers, PHNs are in contact with most families with children at some stage. The attitude to and participation in child protection work of PHNs was the focus of a study by Butler (1996). In this, Butler poses the question of the extent to which PHNs were involved in child protection work, particularly as it developed a greater surveillance and adversarial approach. He views the PHNs as being in a Catch-22 situation: taking on a role of greater surveillance of families may conflict sharply with their more traditional role, while refusing to engage with child protection cases would also challenge their caring ethos.

The answer provided by the PHNs to these questions and challenges are stark: PHNs did not want to be involved in child protection work in any direct way. If they suspected child abuse of any form, they are much more likely to report this to their own superior as opposed to social workers. While they would report an emergency or crisis case directly to a social worker, PHNs would then seek to distance themselves from this referral by asking the social worker not to reveal where the referral came from. PHNs did not want to be involved in court cases, gather evidence of abuse or get court orders. While they accepted that they had to be involved to some degree, most specifically through attendance at case conferences, of which they had a particularly dim view, they would rather have nothing else to do with child protection cases. The reasons put forward for this are clear and are described by Butler as '*...the almost obsessive concern of PHNs to distance themselves from the social control aspect of child protection, so as to protect their caring image in the community*'.

PHNs therefore view their direct involvement in child protection cases as undermining their caring and therapeutic role, resulting in mistrust in the communities concerned and preventing them gaining access to other families. Butler concludes on this basis that the blueprint for inter-agency and multi-disciplinary working envisaged by policy-makers is an illusion, with key workers, in this case the PHNs, wanting no engagement with the so-called 'dirty work' of child protection.

In addition, PHNs were also found to hold negative views of how case conferences were conducted. Butler (1996) found that, with only one exception, the PHNs in his study viewed the case conference as a negative experience, stating that these were poorly chaired, rarely led to decisions and were a waste of their time.



4.8.5 General Practitioners

General practitioners represent another set of actors that have the potential to play a key role in child protection. However, the literature on the involvement of general practitioners and other medical professions presents their involvement in an almost uniformly negative light. Buckley (1999a) interviewed 21 medical/clinical staff including general practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurse/therapists and social workers working in hospitals or clinical settings. On the basis of these interviews Buckley concludes that the level of involvement of medical/clinical professionals in child protection work and case conferences is far lower that might be expected. Those who did participate in such work found it difficult to maintain a clear line between the ethical and procedural expectations of their own professions and the assumption that they could, and would, freely disclose information about their clients or patients at case conferences. This placed them in a very difficult ethical situation. Horgan (1996) quoting Woodmansey (1990) refers to the case conference as '*the most glaring infringement of professional confidentiality*'.

These concerns are reflected in the very low rate of participation by general practitioners in particular at case conferences. General practitioners in fact attended only one fifth of the case conferences they were invited to and frequently left these before they were finished. Buckley (2003b) states that majority of general practitioners were not familiar with the child protection system, having little or no contact with the health boards or knowledge of child protection guidelines.

A number of factors, however, underpin the relative lack of involvement of general practitioners and other professionals in child protection work. In Buckley's study (1999) she draws attention to the lack of trust between general practitioners and the child protection system and quotes one general practitioner as saying that he would 'dread the thought' of reporting his child protection concerns to the child protection system as he had little or no confidence in the health board. Psychiatrists similarly expressed a lack of confidence in the non-medical staff involved in abuse cases. Buckley (1999a; 2003b) draws attention to the conflicting perspectives of medical and non-medical staff, where one is based on medico-social ideologies and professional skills, while the other is based on an increasingly socio-legal understanding and process.

With specific regard to the role of general practitioners as committed members of the child protection 'network', Buckley (1998) concludes that their involvement is overrated in official guidelines. As stated above, general practitioners have a very low attendance rate at case conferences, attending only one in five. While doctors often cite time, both not being able to find the time to attend and the inappropriate times at which case conferences are held, as the principal reason for this, other reasons also exist. These include a lack of trust and respect for the child protection system, and the increasing tendency for parents and therefore doctor's patients to be present at case conferences, which could threaten the balance of the doctor-patient relationship. Buckley concludes that

'...it appears that the expectation underpinning official guidelines and policies of a willing and committed partnership between GPs and the statutory child protection system is somewhat misplaced'.



4.8.6 Teachers

The last key professional group to receive some attention in the Irish literature are teachers. Gilligan (1998) describes teachers as '*...the professionals who have the greatest involvement with the general body of children and therefore those whom other child-focussed professionals must seek to understand and engage*'. Buckley *et al.* (1997) acknowledge the ongoing role teachers play in the monitoring and supporting of children in school. Despite the widespread acceptance by teachers and others that teachers have a key child protection role Kelly reports that of the 692 referrals/inquiries made to the social work services of the North Western Health Board in 1995 only 10 or 1.4% of these emanated from teachers.

Kelly (1997) then poses the question of what teachers actually do when faced with a potential case of child abuse. A small number of strategies emerge: directly calling parents into the school to discuss their concerns; using parent-teacher meetings as a less threatening way to discuss concerns; and providing the child or children in question with direct support such as providing them with lunch or a coat when in school. Teachers reported mixed views on the guidelines issued to them by the DES, with a number of teachers not adhering to them at all, and also raised the difficulty posed by having suspicions of child abuse rather than actual disclosures of child abuse. A number of teachers questioned the expansion of their role into what they see as the social work domain and the lack of attention paid to these issues in their teacher training. This raises the question of whether teacher training should be adapted to include specific training on the role of the teacher in child protection and the practical skills required to fulfil this.

4.8.7 Children and Families

The final group of actors involved in child protection are the suspected child victims and their families. However, this is the group to which least attention has been paid in much of the literature and where it has been considered this is rarely in relation to inter-agency work. More often the literature is concerned with parent and child engagement with individual professionals, most particularly social workers (see Buckley *et al.*, 1997; Buckley, 2003). However, it is notable that Buckley (2003b) refers to parental perspectives as being '*...a frequently ignored dimension of the child protection system*', but clearly recognises the power that parents ultimately have in determining not just the type and quality of services children receive, but whether or not they receive them at all. Buckley *et al.* (1997) found that few of the parents interviewed for their study had been involved in case conferences and that those who had been involved had only been invited to attend the end of the conference. Although those parents who attended the case conferences were glad to have the opportunity to do so, they also found this experience to be painful and humiliating. Buckley (2003b) found that most parents would have welcomed the opportunity to attend the case conference as they would have received more information than they had. In addition, where information had been shared by professionals and in some cases a case conferences had been held without the parents' knowledge, parents were shocked by this apparently covert investigation into their family.

Buckley *et al.* (2008) represents the only attempt to date at ascertaining the users' (that is, parents and children) view of inter-agency working in the child protection system. The authors conclude:



'Service users demonstrated their sensitivity to the perennial problem of inadequate inter-agency and interprofessional collaboration, clearly affirming that collaboration between agencies and professionals resulted in a better service for themselves.'

As identified earlier in this chapter, this report highlights that lack of basic communication between agencies and the inefficient sharing of information were identified as problems and resulted in repeated accounts of circumstances and experiences which led to unnecessary delays.

It is notable that while Buckley *et al.* (2008) gather the perceptions of young people who had direct experience of the child protection services, the issue of how agencies worked or did not work together did not arise. Therefore at this stage the voice of the child has yet to be heard on this subject.

4.8.8 Actors in Family Welfare Conferences

In the field of child welfare and family support services Canavan and O'Brien (2005) report positive relationships between a local Family Support Service and the range of professionals and agencies that it was linked with. This local service had forged links with a range of service providers in both the statutory and voluntary and community sectors. These agencies stated that they had a good relationship with the family support service and a communal sense of working together. This was based on the Family Support Service providing the services and supports it had committed to on a timely basis. The social workers' view of this relationship is particularly notable in the context of the foregoing discussion on their feelings of isolation in child protection cases. Here, social workers stated that the family support service was a significant resource for them, particularly in the context of limited childcare worker/family worker resources within their team. Social workers reported that they were confident of the project's staff's knowledge of the families and children in question and that the project's staff generally enjoyed better relationships with service users when compared to social workers. The Family Support Service therefore contributed to decision making, provided a source of support and acted as a monitor of progress and of risk in families. Similarly, school principals valued the project and were particularly impressed with specific programmes, such as preparing for transition to post-primary school and dealing with bullying. As with the response of social workers, teachers also believe that the service provided someone to talk to in relation to specific family situations and have confidence in the capacity of the project to successfully engage with families.

Brady *et al.* (2008) reported similar findings in relation to a community-based family support service in Mayo and Galway. Here, the family support service was established under the HSE but was undertaken in partnership with the local Community Development Projects (CDPs), which had varying target groups, and Foróige. Essentially, this family support service was delivered through a number of existing CDPs, most of which were already in contact with and providing services to children and families. While the HSE and the CDPs both claim to have benefited from the partnership, with the vast majority of professional respondents citing the forging of strong relationships between them, it is clear that this relationship was negotiated and took time to emerge.



4.9 Inhibiting Factors and Obstacles to Inter-agency Working

4.9.1 Overview

With regard to inter-agency working Buckley (2003a) states that

'...collaborative work is not always simply or easily achieved and it cannot be assumed that professionals at different levels, with differing backgrounds and professional perspectives will have the information, knowledge, skills or mutual trust necessary to achieve the desirable degree of co-operation'.

Put simply, while inter-agency co-operation may be desirable it is not easy. Obstacles to inter-agency working are a common theme in the literature reviewed here. Buckley (2003b) provides a framework in which these obstacles can be located. This framework identifies three types of barrier or obstacle: (i) professional obstacles; (ii) psychological obstacles; and (iii) structural or organisational obstacles.

4.9.2 Professional Obstacles to Inter-agency Working

Professional obstacles refer to obstacles that place unrealistic parameters on the role of various professionals. It includes barriers such as narrow or otherwise inappropriate role definition, lack of clarity in relation to the responsibilities of different individuals and agencies, varying levels of knowledge of the child protection system as well as ethical dilemmas. Some of these barriers have been referred to in earlier sections of this chapter. Clearly relevant here is Butler's (1996) 'dirty work' of child protection, where other agencies and professionals see the confrontational, action-oriented work of child protection as the remit of the health board social workers.

Buckley *et al.* (1997) reported that lack of clarity around professional roles was one of the main obstacles to inter-agency co-operation. For example, statutory social workers in the employ of the health boards expected other social workers, such as those employed by the local authority, to take on a child protection role. Where this understanding was articulated, agreed and had definite limits, the arrangement worked well. Where it was not clear and agreed, it became the source of professional tensions that militated against inter-agency working.

Health board social workers, however, according to Buckley *et al.* (1997), want other professionals and agencies to accept responsibility for at least some child protection work. The refusal of such agencies to accept responsibility undoubtedly stems from both a reluctance to become directly involved in this work for ethical, professional or personal reasons, but also arises from their understanding of their own role in child protection. Similarly, the reluctance of doctors, particularly general practitioners, to become more directly involved in inter-agency child protection work stems from ethical considerations about doctor-patient confidentiality, but also because they do not see this as their primary, or as a desirable, role (Buckley, 1999a).



A number of staff in Buckley's 2003 report (Buckley, 2003b) believed that their position and role in inter-agency settings is misunderstood and under-valued, and that this has led to unrealistic expectations of what they could achieve. Some reported that while they saw themselves as equally important in the child protection network as others, they also thought that they were not equally valued.

Horgan (1996), whose work focuses on child sexual abuse, places such discussion of professional roles in the context of responsibility and cites some of the obstacles this presents to inter-agency working. She argues that professionals find it difficult to hold fast to the essence of a high quality child protection practice when there are many competing organisational demands and contexts. Tensions and practical difficulties then arise due to the need for professionals to maintain their professional identity on the one hand and the blurring of professional boundaries on the other. For example, social workers must have reasonable evidence of child abuse before pursuing cases primarily in the family courts, whereas gardaí come from a background of having evidence beyond reasonable doubt and presenting cases primarily in the criminal courts. Bringing these two perspectives, experiences and professional cultures together under the banner of child protection requires considerable skill and flexibility on the part of all those involved. In addition, Horgan raises the tensions that arise between those professionals that must be involved in child protection cases, such as health board social workers, and those who can choose to be involved, such as teachers or general practitioners. She concludes that the achievement of effective inter-agency co-operation '*...entails opening up our work to scrutiny, extending the individual's professional responsibility for children's welfare and moving beyond the narrow confines of professional duties*'.

Buckley (2000) makes a similar distinction between statutory and non statutory duties. In these instances professionals and agencies sometimes used their 'voluntary' status as a way out of engaging with child protection work and over-stepping their professional boundaries. It is not difficult to see how this leads to mistrust and a lack of respect between agencies.

With specific regard to the inter-agency co-operation between An Garda Síochána and health boards, Buckley *et al.* (1997) draw attention to the different functions of the two organisations and to the perceived lack of understanding by Gardaí of the complex nature of the problems facing families experiencing child abuse. Their approach was often seen as insensitive and, reflecting their organisation's primary function, to be based on securing prosecution as opposed to the health board's concern with welfare.

4.9.3 Psychological Obstacles to Inter-agency Work

Psychological difficulties include professional rivalries, professional stereotyping and 'baggage' from previous experiences. McKeown *et al.* (2001) identify negative professional stereotypes about organisations, agencies and individuals as one of the key inhibiting factors to inter-agency working. Buckley (2003b) refers, for example, to a case where a social worker and a general practitioner clearly had a prior history and that this came to dominate a case conference.



Horgan (1996) places such professional rivalries and 'baggage' within the concept of power and status. The power and status of a professional or professional body is formed over a long period, is associated with certain social and economic characteristics, and imbued with particular personal qualities and characteristics. Professions therefore engender a very strong sense of loyalty and are perceived as demanding particular professional and social values and a particular level of respect. This then impinges on the degree to which individual professions are open to question or challenge by others whose profession is not considered to be of equal standing. Horgan herself gives the example of social workers feeling unable to question or challenge the views expressed by a consultant paediatrician due to the standing of his position. The difficulty this poses is that key professionals are always listened to because of their professional status as opposed to their knowledge of child abuse or of a particular child and family.

Buckley (2000) states that power is a key element of a profession's self-image and can rest in legal responsibilities, authority or command of resources. The unattractive position of the statutory social workers is that they have a high level of responsibility for child protection work, but no authority over the other agencies on whose co-operation they depend. Where conflict arose between the health board social workers and others, it was often connected with professional identity. This was particularly the case, as has been suggested earlier, with regard to non statutory medical or clinical staff, who did not adopt any sense of obligation, responsibility or in some cases awareness of child abuse in their professional role. As the statutory social workers have no authority to make these professions co-operate, inter-agency and indeed multi-disciplinary co-operation flounders. In addition, Buckley goes on to point out that in the absence of any administrative mandate to share or divide work in any particular way, inter-agency and inter-professional hostilities have frequently dominated discussions to the detriment of families and children who require their services.

4.9.4 Structural or Organisational Obstacles to Inter-agency Working

Structural or organisational obstacles cover areas such as the fragmentation of services and high staff turnover, inadequate or poorly allocated resources, poor communication networks, lack of senior level commitment and lack of administrative back-up. These are the most common type of barriers cited in the research.

As stated above, McKeown *et al.* (2003) are critical of the failure of the HSE and health boards to provide an overarching structure and driver for inter-agency work with vulnerable children and families. They are also critical of the lack of integration between the services provided by the health boards. Further to this, they draw an uncomfortable picture of how rigid divisions between child protection and child welfare and family support services and professionals may develop to the detriment of all concerned. This rigid division prevents the development of a continuum of need and a corresponding flexible continuum of services that reflect the reality of children's and families' changing needs. The challenge is therefore to develop fluid multi-disciplinary services within and between the relevant agencies.

One of the most significant barriers to effective inter-agency working identified by Buckley (2003a) is the lack of a clear mandate for all the organisations involved, to work in this way. Some institutions,



most specifically schools, do not have such a mandate and this complicates their involvement in inter-agency child protection work. McKeown *et al.* (2003) state that in the absence of a mandate to work together, services for vulnerable families and children often work in isolation and decide what service they will and will not offer. This results in families having to adapt to fit the services on offer rather than the services adapting to meet their needs.

However, even where such a mandate is present, for example in Springboard, rigid territorial views of their role in family support services results in competition and power struggles among organisations and agencies over funding and clients, as well as a general devaluing of the contribution which others can offer (McKeown *et al.*, 2001). In addition, they also identify high staff turnover, a lack of understanding and recognition of the value of inter-agency work and a lack training on the process of working on an inter-agency basis, including a lack of information on the respective roles of different organisations and agencies as key factors that hinder inter-agency work.

The 'duty' system operated in the health boards was also identified as one of the main organisational barriers to inter-agency work (Buckley, 2000). In this system a 'duty' social worker is present each day to receive referrals, and take queries from external professionals and members of the public. Difficulties arise because the duty social worker changes on a daily basis and is responsible for handling emergency cases when on duty as well as their own long-term case load. Non-emergency cases may therefore be related to one duty social worker but, if it cannot be dealt with on the same day, it will be passed to the duty social worker who takes over on the following day. In cases where the referral required further investigation, a number of different social workers may need to gather information from the same referring professional. This has led to a considerable degree of frustration among external professionals and agencies and does little to promote good inter-agency relationships.

A further organisational barrier to inter-agency co-operation is poor communication and feedback. This arises for a number of reasons including rapid turnover of staff, poor data recording and dissemination procedures, and a lack of a regular forum for statutory and non statutory actors to come together with child protection social workers to exchange information and provide feedback on the progress of cases (Buckley *et al.*, 1997). Also in this vein McKeown *et al.* (2001) refer to failure to communicate on a regular basis and a lack of referrals between services.

4.10 The Myth of Inter-agency Co-operation

In her concluding analysis, Buckley (2003b) raises what she calls '*the myth of inter-agency co-operation*'. This presents a somewhat bleak picture of inter-agency work and asks two questions: is inter-agency work an essential part of child protection services?; and is inter-agency co-operation possible?

In considering these questions, Buckley revisits a number of the issues raised above. In doing so the fragile base on which the presumption of inter-agency co-operation is based is thrown into sharp relief. Quoting Whittington (1983) Buckley states that



'...in the absence of joint rules, divisions of labour or an overall authority, agreement on courses of action have to be negotiated within the limits set by organisational factors and is worked out through the encapsulated view of the professional/occupational cultures of the respective workers concerned'.

Buckley (2003b) goes on to argue that it is this that allows individual professionals and professions to abdicate their responsibilities in relation to child protection and essentially 'dump' these on social workers in the employment of the health boards. She also argues that this lack of willingness to accept responsibility also reflects the 'dirty' nature of much child protection work, where other agencies and professionals used professional ethics, norms and standards as means of distancing themselves from this. For Buckley (2003b) this situation is worsened by the fact that the health board social workers lose out in the power struggles that characterise much of the inter-agency work documented, and that they have no authority to insist on co-operation from other agencies and professionals. From this perspective, effective inter-agency working appears to be somewhat unattainable and Buckley (2003b) concludes:

'An assumption that professionals in child protection can or will, in the context of conflicted power and responsibility, work together to achieve a compromise on the 'division of labour' (Dingwall *et al.*,1983) appears quite naïve.'

4.11 Key Chapter Findings

A number of reasons for the development of inter-agency approaches to child protection and development have been posited in the literature. These include the increasing involvement of medical technology and staff in the diagnosis of abuse, a recognition that both abuse and welfare cases are multi-dimensional, and a desire to streamline the services to better meet the child and family's needs. Policy and official practice guidelines assume that inter-agency working is possible and desirable, despite a clear lack of empirical evidence to support this. Some of the literature reviewed here suggests that the views of many policy-makers, as evidenced in policy and national practice guidelines, are based on an idealised view of inter-agency working in child and family protection and welfare (Buckley, 2002) rather than on knowledge of how agencies and services actually work on the ground.

The following key issues emerge from the literature:

- The discussion of benefits of inter-agency working predominantly focuses on benefits accruing to the organisations or professionals involved, as well as their views on benefits. The views of families and children are notable by their virtual absence. Only Buckley (2007) reports directly on the views of service users and identifies the lack of inter-agency communication as a difficulty for service users who have to repeat their stories to a variety of agencies and professionals.
- A number of enabling factors are identified in both child protection and child welfare studies. These include good communication, mutual understanding, agreement of goals and positive professional attitudes. While difficulties are acknowledged, it is suggested that inter-agency



training be adopted as a key strategy in overcoming these. Buckley (2002) states that training can only have this positive impact if it is underpinned by agreed strategies, commitment at senior level and a shared responsibility and ownership of the work.

- The available literature highlights the contradictory views of those involved in some child protection case conferences. While social workers are generally happy with the case conference process, some feel that they are left with the responsibility of implementing what are often untenable action plans (Buckley *et al.*, 1997). Other professions, such as PHNs and GPs are less than willing to accept responsibility for the 'dirty' hands-on work of child protection because they felt it compromises their primary roles and ethics (Buckley, (1997); Butler, 1996; Horgan, (1996) quoting Woodmansey, (1990)).

- The lack of shared responsibility is exacerbated by what Buckley (2003b) calls the exaggeration of hierarchy. This refers to the privileged position afforded to the views of higher professionals such as doctors and psychiatrists, over those of the workers that are in closest contact with children and families such as social workers and PHNs. A number of difficulties were also raised in relation to the working relationships between Gardaí and social workers, despite the existence of official national guidelines on such working relationships.

- Much inter-agency and multi-disciplinary work on the ground in both child protection and welfare is dynamic, informed by and based on personal relationships between staff members. This is a less than ideal scenario as inter-agency work can falter due to staff changes and turnover. This can also result in inconsistent services across geographical areas depending on the nature of the personal relationship between staff in different organisations. Such informal relationships are important in inter-agency work but need to be supported by more formal linkages. The lack of such formal linkages as well as the absence of accepted joint rules and procedures, power imbalances among professionals and lack of a mandate to work co-operatively all contribute to what Buckley (2003b) calls the '*myth of inter-agency co-operation*'.

- A wide range of inhibiting factors and obstacles are documented in the literature and can be classified under three headings: professional obstacles, primarily a lack of clear professional roles, responsibilities and capacity; psychological obstacles, including professional rivalries, stereotyping, professional self-image, perceived power and 'baggage' from previous experiences; and structural or organisational obstacles, most significantly the lack of a mandate for organisations to work on an inter-agency basis, the duty system operated by health sector social workers, and poor communication.

It should be noted that much of the research on which Chapter 4 is based pre-dates significant developments in the children's sector. These include the enactment of the Children Act, 2001, the development of the National Children's Strategy, the establishment of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the provisions in *Towards 2016*. These may provide a greater impetus for the development of inter-agency working in the child protection and welfare field by putting in place



national and local structures to facilitate this. Without increased contemporary research, however, this remains unknown.



5 INTER-AGENCY WORK IN EDUCATION

5.1 Chapter Introduction

Inter-agency work in the field of education – and particularly in educational disadvantage – emerged around the same time as the integrated approaches to combating social exclusion discussed in Chapter 3. This was not coincidental as the emergence of inter-agency work in the educational area was directly linked to a growing awareness of the relationship between educational disadvantage, unemployment and the risk of poverty. Throughout the late 1990s, a series of OECD reports had highlighted the potential benefits of greater integration between education and other services in dealing with children at risk (OECD, 1995; 1996; 1998). Other relevant factors driving greater integration are discussed by Stokes (1996), Cullen (2000), Conaty (2002), and Kelleher and Kelleher (2005). These include the shift in pedagogy characterised by a growing awareness that education extended beyond what took place within the formal system, a growing acknowledgement that educational disadvantage is rooted in the complex interaction of factors at home, in school and in the community, and the assertion that parents and young people had a right to be consulted in relation to their education.

The prevailing circumstances, which resulted in a greater drive to combine the key actors in interventions that would address educational disadvantage, have been summarised by Kellaghan *et al.* (1995) as follows:

'The supreme confidence of the 1960s that educational provision on its own could solve the problems of disadvantage, a view that gave way to a pessimism in the 1970s about what education could achieve has now been replaced by the view that while education has a role to play, that role is not sufficient in itself to deal with disadvantage.' (Kellaghan, Weir, Ó hUallacháin and Morgan, 1995)

At the same time, the establishment of the ABPCs at local level provided a context which facilitated the emergence of inter-agency work in the field of education. Firstly, the LDSIP introduced in 1995 formally extended the remit of the ABPCs into the field of education. Secondly, the community and voluntary sector was demanding to have its voice heard in policy development and service delivery in a wide range of areas including education. The culmination of these factors can be seen in the report of the National Anti-Poverty Strategy Working Group on Educational Disadvantage which advocated the promotion of partnerships, widespread collaboration and consultation and the development and expansion of local networks. Consequently, among the policy issues in education at that time were the development of partnerships and the co-ordination of government services (Boldt and Devine (1998).

Subsequently, two distinct spheres of activity emerged which continue today. This chapter presents the literature in relation to these. The first sphere is where inter-agency work is promoted by local development agencies which operate with a social inclusion remit. In this model, local schools are part



of the inter-agency approach, but the lead agency is usually a local development or community organisation. Key examples of initiatives in this sphere include:

- projects implemented under the LDSIP, delivered by the ABPCs, Community Partnerships and Leader Partnerships;
- projects delivered under the Integrated Services Projects, managed by Pobal;
- projects funded under the educational strand of the Peace and Reconciliation Programme;
- four pilots under the Combat Poverty Agency's (CPA's) Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage;
- initiatives spearheaded by universities including third level access programmes, which involve schools and local agencies.

Frequently these initiatives can overlap, for example where programmes implemented by a university incorporate projects delivered by the ABPCs.

The second sphere of inter-agency activity is comprised of integrated programmes delivered by the DES. Within these, national initiatives are implemented at local level by individual schools or networks of schools. Frequently these involve local level 'partnership' structures (usually committees) to oversee their implementation. The extent to which other agencies are involved varies across different initiatives, as does the involvement of parents as stakeholders. Figure 5.1 summarises the DES initiatives which have an inter-agency dimension.

There is some formal linkage between initiatives implemented by local organisations and those implemented by the DES. For example, the Department has funded posts of Educational Co-ordinator in the ABPCs and is represented on the board of Pobal.



Figure 5.1: Initiatives of Department of Education and Science with Inter-agency Dimension

Programme	Description	Inter-agency dimension	Mechanisms to support inter-agency work
Home School Community Liaison Scheme	A preventative strategy targeted at pupils at risk of not reaching their potential and focused on building a partnership between the school, parents and the community.	Networking and promoting the co-ordination of the work of voluntary and statutory agencies is seen as increasing effectiveness in delivering integrated services.	Local committees ensure 'community ownership' and serve to advise and support the local co-ordinators. Committees comprised of parents and representatives of voluntary and statutory agencies. Trained co-ordinators identify needs and have those needs met by relevant agencies.
Giving Children an Even Break	A measure targeted at tackling disadvantage in primary schools through the provision of additional teaching and financial allocations to participating schools.	<i>'The effective delivery of educational and other necessary services should be assisted locally through collaboration by both voluntary and statutory agencies.'</i>	Actions in relation to collaborative planning with the representatives of local statutory and voluntary agencies for the integrated delivery of appropriate services for the targeted young people and their families and the provision of suitable in-school and out-of-school supports.
School Completion Programme	A programme aimed at retaining young people in school and improving the quality and outcome of their educational participation.	The programme brings together all relevant local stakeholders (home, school, youth, community, statutory and voluntary) to tackle early school leaving.	Local Management Committees oversee the development and implementation of Retention Plans. These include multi-faceted actions including after-school and out-of-school supports and collaborate with relevant statutory and voluntary agencies at local level.

Reflecting the literature available, this chapter primarily focuses on interventions delivered within the local development sphere, although it must be noted that the abatement of research interest in inter-agency approaches generally, discussed in Chapter 3, is evident in this area too. We rely, to an extent therefore, on descriptive documentation relating to these models complemented wherever possible with more critical or analytical material. There is very little literature available which reviews or evaluates the DES initiatives, either from the perspective of their impact on educational disadvantage or that of the effectiveness of the inter-agency dimension. In this chapter, we bring together the main findings of such material as is available. The two main texts examined are a Value for Money Report (2006) and an examination into the dynamics of early school leaving in Dublin's south inner city which incorporates two SCP clusters (Downes and Marshall, 2007).

5.2 Definitions of Inter-agency Working in the Field of Education

One of the notable features of the literature on inter-agency work in the area of education is the fact that few commentators (or practitioners) have sought to develop formal definitions, although several (including Eivers, 2001 noted in Chapter 3) refer to the OECD definition of integrated services. Another exception is Stewart (1999) who refers to Himmelman's (1994) classification of inter-agency approaches and its relevance in the Irish context. More generally, within the literature there appears to be a tendency to use the term 'partnership' as a type of catchall term that embodies various types of collaboration at the point of planning and at the point of service delivery.

The terms partnership is also used interchangeably with those of inter-agency and integrated approaches to describe different aspects of networking, collaborating and co-operating. A commonality, however, is that these terms are used to describe interventions that seek to develop linkages between the home, the school and the community. Cullen (1997) for example, suggests that *'the integrated approach is a way of tackling problems inherent in the relationship between the home, school and community in circumstances where educational disadvantages persist'*.

Although we do not consider them in any depth here, it is worth noting that the DES uses the term integrated approaches to describe the co-ordination of its own programmes within the school setting. For example, the School Completion Programme (SCP) is based on the concept of integrated services at two levels. Firstly, the programme involves a review of the use and deployment of existing and traditional financial and personnel resources in the schools and in their catchment area(s). Secondly, it entails the co-ordination of a range of more recent DES provisions so that their benefits can be maximised for the targeted young people.

5.3 Rationale

From the early literature, it is clear that the rationale for inter-agency approaches in relation to educational disadvantage was driven in the first instance by the factors looked at earlier in this chapter, together with an awareness noted by Walsh *et al.* (1998) and Haase (1996) that educational disadvantage was concentrated in specific localities. This led to a coalescing of district approaches and inter-agency work which has permeated into the field of education and particularly educational



disadvantage (Crooks, 1999). In general, the rationale for inter-agency or integrated approaches in the field of education is to address the experience and reproduction of educational disadvantage at the local level. Within the social inclusion context, this had a dual focus: to address the needs of young people at risk of early school leaving; and to intervene in the reproduction of social exclusion more generally within the community. For example, between 1994 and 1999, the Operational Programme for Local Urban and Rural Development which funded the ABPCs, aimed to '*provide an integrated approach to local development through a cohesive framework which will assist in promoting education and training measures to prevent early school leaving leading to social exclusion*'. Given this duality of focus, a secondary rationale, particularly evident in the early years of the ABPCs' work was to complement and reinforce interventions into long-term unemployment, through providing early childhood interventions to the children of participants on labour market programmes (Cullen, 1997).

A more critical approach to identifying the rationale for inter-agency work in the area of educational disadvantage is that taken by Sproule *et al.* (1999), drawing on the earlier work of Lynch (1977). This is summarised in the Figure 5.2.



Figure 5.2: Rationale for Inter-agency Interventions

Assumption	Explanation	Location of Problem	Concept	Example of Remedies	Example of Programmes
Essentialism: children fail because they are intellectually ill-equipped for system demands	Pathological: failure resulting from low IQ, psychological and mental inadequacy	In the mental deficiency of the individual	Low ability	Remedial education	Remedial programmes, Traveller resource teachers, learning support projects
Consensualism: children fail because they're deprived	Lack of capital, deficient cultural experiences of groups	In the social deficiencies of individual, or groups	Deprivation	Compensatory education and social work intervention	Family support workers, social work interventions, Home School Liaison Programmes
Credentialism: children don't fail, schools fail	Failure comes from the structuring of the school system and unequal distribution of resources	In the relationship between institutions and administrative mistakes	Disadvantage	Institutional change and positive discrimination policies	Targeting of resources at disadvantaged areas. Additional resources
Society uses the education system to create and perpetuate failure	Failure arises from the need to protect an economic system based on profit	Relationship between working class and political and economic sphere	Exploitation	Redistribution of economic power and control	Capacity building approaches for equal relationships
Source: Sproule <i>et al.</i> (1999).					

Sproule *et al.* explicitly do not prioritise one framework over another but rather seek to indicate the range of explanations for educational disadvantage that is possible and the links between the explanations and responses and the ideological premises identified by Lynch (1977). The authors do suggest, however, that a narrow framework of analysis can result in barriers to more integrated approaches and the resulting solutions tend to be one dimensional in their response, affecting the quality of outcomes. Cullen (2000b) has written on the policy implications of inter-agency approaches in education. He has argued that while much of the debate in relation to these approaches has arisen in the context of welfare concerns for children who are at risk or out of school, such approaches are attempting to implement a more comprehensive response to the issue. He suggests:



'...the focus is more on changing the way in which organisations, and those with whom they work, define, analyse and respond to problems such as early school-leaving than only with intervening to change those who are individually affected'. (Cullen, 2000b)

However, in a more recent review of interventions into educational disadvantage in the Dublin area (including those of the DES), Fleming and Murphy (2000) found that interventions tended to be based on one or more of a range of specific assumptions rather than on comprehensive societal analysis. That is, the cause of early school leaving is seen to lie primarily either with the individual, the parents, the local community and the school *or* with society. Further evidence of this is provided by the fact that there appears to be a tendency to present analysis of educational disadvantage in terms of statistics on early school leaving etc., rather than on identifying underlying factors.

5.4 Objectives/Key Actions

The primary aim of inter-agency work in the field of education is to address educational disadvantage. However, within this broad aim the specific objectives of individual initiatives vary considerably. Such is the extent of variation that these do not lend themselves to succinct summary. However, the examples noted below should serve to indicate the kinds of objectives that inform inter-agency work:

- The Drogheda Partnership sought to promote a whole school approach to securing the educational well-being of children by addressing their nutritional needs within the context of providing a labour market intervention for their parents. Within this, FAS Community Employment was used to train parents in a disadvantaged area in food preparation and the running of a canteen to provide nutritious meals to children at school in the area (Atherton, 1999).
- County Leitrim Partnership sought to improve the educational prospects of children with disability. It supported the establishment of a local branch of the Association for Children with Learning Difficulties, which then worked with local schools to train teachers in awareness of dyslexia and provide services to children with dyslexia. It also supported an intervention to bring children with special needs into mainstream schools. Two primary schools and two secondary schools facilitated the integration of children through a process of consultation involving parents, psychologists, social workers and teachers supported by the partnership (McNelis *et al.*, 1999).
- The Working Together Project was a joint project of the Centre for Educational Disadvantage Research and the Targeting Educational Disadvantage Project at the Curriculum Development Unit, Mary Immaculate College Limerick and involved a network of schools in the Limerick area. The project sought to address behavioural issues in the classrooms by promoting positive behaviour among school pupils (Lyons *et al.*, undated).
- The Bridging the Gap project was initiated by UCC with support from philanthropic organisations and public funds to support pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to stay in fulltime education and achieve their full potential. Specifically it seeks to 'bridge the gap' between the educational opportunities and achievements of pupils in schools in disadvantaged areas of Cork city and



those in other areas. It involves a network of over 40 schools and three out-of-school centres and involves measures to support the professional development of teachers, school based research and school and community level initiatives (Deane, 2006).

- The CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage established and supported four locally based networks whose role was to develop an integrated response to the problem of educational disadvantage within their areas. By so doing, they would give disadvantaged children/young people opportunities to progress and transfer between the formal and informal education systems according to their needs and to maximise their participation in and benefit from these systems. The dual aims of the programme were as follows: to establish and support locally based networks to develop an integrated response to educational disadvantage; and to develop structures that have the capacity to draw on local experience to influence policy at national level (Cullen, 2000). In this context, the programme was not intended to provide clear outcomes for cohorts of young people at risk or experiencing educational disadvantage, but to draw together the very broad range of players with responsibility for addressing educational disadvantage at local level and thus provide lessons for more effective collaboration in the longer term (Cullen, 2000).
- The SCP is a DES programme. The main aims of the SCP are to retain young people in the formal education system to completion of senior cycle, to improve the quality of participation and attainment in the educational process, to bring together all relevant local stakeholders to tackle early school leaving, to provide supports towards the prevention of educational disadvantage, to encourage young people to return to school and to influence policy relating to early school leaving. As noted above, the SCP involves reviewing the deployment of resources and the co-ordination of DES provisions for the benefit of young people.

5.5 Formal Structures

The formal structures of inter-agency approaches in the field of education have not received much attention in the literature – a situation which probably reflects the fact that the main mechanisms of inter-agency work have tended to be committees or steering groups rather than new agencies or structures. In that sense, they are more akin to the 'partnership approach' as identified by Powell and Geoghan (2004) than to the formal structures pioneered by the ABPCs. An exception to this is the CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage which established more formal local structures based on the ABPC model (CPA, 1995).

A number of elements which are more or less common can be identified from the work of Cullen (2000) and in the more descriptive accounts of actions under the LDSIP (Pobal, 2005). These are:

- a lead agency to take overall responsibility for initiating and playing a key role in implementing the initiative;
- a management group or steering committee comprising of representatives of relevant agencies (see actors below);



- sub committees to broaden out the participative base;
- a local school or a network of local schools which usually serve as the main site of implementation of actions;
- interaction with agencies and personnel involved in delivering elements of the intervention (not all of which will necessarily be represented on the steering committee);
- a facilitator or co-ordinator to oversee the activities – where ABPCs are the lead agency, this role is usually played by the Education Co-ordinators funded by DES;
- mechanisms of consultation with the community are also used and less frequently, mechanisms to support the involvement of parents and children.

In terms of inter-agency approaches implemented by the DES, schools provide key elements of the structures of integration, augmented at local and sometimes national level. For example, the SCP is a national programme and as such is supported at national level by a team that is comprised of a National Co-ordinator, Assistant National Co-ordinators, a Research and Development Officer and two Administrators. The co-ordinators advise on and monitor the development of local multi-agency plans and targets that provide for a range of specific additional services for targeted young people who are deemed to be at risk of early school leaving. At local level, the concept of 'cluster' is used to describe the participating schools and other agencies and these are supported by a local co-ordinator. In addition, each SCP cluster establishes a formal Local Management Committee to oversee the development and implementation of a Retention Plan.

The need for structures at local level is frequently highlighted in the literature. Cullen (2000b) argues that '*it seems quite straightforward that local structures are required to help mobilise relevant agencies and to develop appropriate protocols for sharing information and engaging in case conferencing*'. He also notes that the absence of local educational structures can act as an obstacle to local attempts to tackle educational disadvantage (Cullen, 2000b). These sentiments were echoed in Fitzpatrick Associates' (2006) evaluation of RAPID that identified the lack of involvement of the DES as a barrier to the effectiveness of that programme.

5.6 Actors

In contrast to the lack of attention paid to the structures of inter-agency approaches, most commentators in this field are at pains to note the extensive range of actors involved in the planning and delivery of inter-agency approaches (see for example, Sproule *et al.*, 1999; Atherton, 1999). In general, the key actors will be the lead agency, local schools or a network of local schools, and the relevant agencies required to address the issues that are targeted by the intervention or to deliver the actions required. Relevant local agencies may include youth services/community based youth projects, childcare/family support services and special educational interests such as those that cater for children from the Traveller community or children with disabilities.

When specific problematic issues are being tackled (for example, drug addiction) the list of formal partners can be quite extensive. Neville (1999), for example, in documenting the work of the Wexford Addiction Support Programme, delivered by the Wexford Partnership, notes membership of the



steering group as comprising 12 organisations. These were the South Eastern Health Board, An Garda Síochána, Probation and Welfare, Customs, the National Drugs Strategy Team, Wexford County Council, Wexford Corporation, Irish College of General Practitioners, Aiseirí Treatment Centre, Wexford Mental Health Services, Wexford Vocational College and Wexford Area Partnership.

Neville (1999) is describing membership of the steering committee. However, noting the distinction between the structures of formal partnership and an inter-agency approach to service delivery referred to earlier, the role of the represented agencies in service delivery cannot be determined on the basis of their participation on steering groups. Consequently, the actual impact of representation at board level on integrated service delivery can be very diverse. Moreover, there appears to be little attention in the literature to identifying the impact of the various actors at service delivery level. In a rare attempt to assess the actual contribution of the various participating organisations to positive outcomes, Bernard (1999) in describing the implementation of early childhood services in a rural area, attributes success to the complementary functions undertaken by different partners, as follows:

- involvement of local communities, and in particular parents, in the planning, managing and organising of the service;
- the availability of support, information, training and expertise, provided by the IPPA The Early Childhood Organisation advisory service, the Mobile Play service, the equipment libraries and the regional training team;
- the capital and running costs grant aid from the Western Health Board and the Roscommon Partnership Board;
- the IPPA The Early Childhood Organisation and WHB framework at regional level which underpinned and supported the local development through research, planning, evaluation and policy development.

The role of the community and voluntary sector in responding to educational disadvantage is particularly worth noting. The sector's involvement was facilitated by initiatives such as those spearheaded by the ABPCs and the Peace and Reconciliation Initiative. The CPA's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage was also strongly committed to a community development approach. *'The Agency envisaged that, through an integrated approach, community groups could develop a more effective role in tackling educational disadvantage in conjunction with school and other local bodies'* Cullen (2000).

Within the DES sphere, the SCP facilitates the involvement of a range of the Department's provisions and therefore also a range of actors within the Department's own remit. These include psychologists with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) personnel, the National Education Welfare Board (NEWB), those providing learning support, resource and guidance services and school staff involved in the Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP), Transition Year Programme (TYP), Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA) and Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP). Integration at this level also includes services and activities that are based on learning from the 8 to 15 Early School Leaver Initiative and the 'Stay in School' Retention Initiative. The SCP is also linked to other initiatives such as youth services and



initiatives supported by the CPA and ABPCs. Through the SCP the schools also work in partnership with community, youth and sporting organisations and with the local representatives of national statutory bodies such as Community Gardai, JLOs, social workers, health service personnel etc.

5.7 Actions

The literature, and particularly the early literature, describes a very wide range of actions undertaken by inter-agency approaches in the area of education. Broadly speaking, actions can be classified into those which focused on schools and other service providers and those which focused on young people and their families. Among the former are actions designed to facilitate networking and information sharing among schools and actions designed to promote professional development. Among the latter are actions that provide new educational opportunities for young people, for example in areas such as arts and peer support for parents. Most interventions combine a focus on both types of activities, sometimes combined with additional strands of action. Within the earlier literature describing the implementation of school level actions, for example, the concept of the whole school approach is evident in incorporating actions such as parent support, inputs for school staff, pre-school activity, interventions during school and afterschool, transition, and agency participation.

Deane (2007) describes the five main strands of the Bridging the Gap project as:

- a. research and data collection which included both support for doctoral research and the systematic
- b. collection and analysis of data at the level of the participating schools;
- c. networking between UCC (the lead agency) and the participating schools and developing links with other relevant agencies;
- d. dissemination activities to highlight the work of the project and impact on national policy; professional development to support and enhance the participation of teachers; and
- e. a range of school based projects which provided opportunities for young people within the participating schools to engage in activities such as speech and drama, environmental and local history projects, music literacy and performance and video production.

The activities of the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage implemented by the CPA were focused solely on bringing together the key organisations and individuals concerned with educational disadvantage and supporting this network through exchange of information, contacts, ideas around good practice and other developments. The networks co-ordinated inter-agency meetings and fora around specific issues such as literacy, Travellers' education and school absenteeism. They promoted the formation of specific interest groups around local educational issues. They spread information about the networks and other local education groups through newsletters, posters and leaflets. They organised seminars and support meetings with parent bodies, teachers groups, youth groups and other interested parties. They also provided advice, guidance and practical supports to activities that intervened directly with early school leaving or other disadvantaged target groups that had important integrative dimensions (Cullen, 2000). The objectives of the



Demonstration Programme were to promote learning for the future development of policy and practice:

'The demonstration aspect of the programme will consist of the modelling of a coordinating process and structure ...where there is a real possibility of achieving concrete results in order to draw out the policy and practice lessons and to disseminate these to a wide audience of both policy makers and practitioners.' (CPA, 1996)

The participating networks, however, did engage in providing supports to students and pupils and to their families (Cullen, 2007).

The SCP operates at three dimensions: that of the integration of school and community; that of targeting and supporting young people; and that of staff development. Within the school/community dimension the SCP implements actions to integrated school and community services, to support parental involvement and to link with afterschool and holiday time activities. Targeting and supporting young people involves identification of individual attainment levels and learning needs, providing teaching methods to match learning levels, ability and needs and mentoring. Staff development focuses on actions to support collaborative ways of working (i) with parents and (ii) with local voluntary and statutory agencies, school development planning and the development and enhancement of staff attitudes, skills and ways of working in relation to their expectations of educationally disadvantaged young people.

Unlike partnership approaches generally, where a distinction can be made between inter-agency work at the level of the 'partnership' and inter-agency work at the point of service delivery, in educational interventions these two are more closely linked. Essentially, the distinction between student focused activities and broader focused activities can be understood in terms of a focus on those at risk of educational disadvantage or on the wider systemic issues which are to be addressed. In this context, Cullen (2007b) has argued:

'Ideally integrated approaches are best focused on more than one system and are oriented to targeting and supporting the different systems to change and to work more effectively within a multidisciplinary framework. The main value of working from this new framework is that it provides a context for examining a broad range of influences and responses underlying educational disadvantage. It manages to bring the overall discussion and analysis beyond that of viewing early school-leaving as simply a form of educational failure.'

5.8 Benefits and Outcomes

Despite the initial high level of involvement and interest in inter-agency approaches in relation to educational disadvantage, the same evaluation deficits noted in Chapter 3 apply to these interventions also. Fallon (2003), on the basis of an audit of research conducted by the CECDE, has noted that '*there is very little indigenous research on integrated responses to educational disadvantage*'. Where they do exist, evaluations tend to focus on the delivery of the interventions (the process) with weak indicators of outcomes: a feature which reflects the lack of systematic data



collection. Consequently, evaluations are unable to assess the extent to which the initiatives achieve their primary aim of reducing the risk or incidence of educational disadvantage. Moreover, evaluations tend to be of specific inter-agency interventions even when these are delivered as part of a national programme, and few involve the views of children and young people.

Some benefits of inter-agency work in the area of education have been identified, but these have tended to focus on positive outcomes at the level of the schools and agencies rather than at the level of the young people.

- Duggan (1998) in an evaluation of the educational strategy of the Ballymun Partnership noted that the involvement of schools and school principals in inter-agency work has facilitated schools to become more aware of and involved in local development initiatives and community development more generally. The same writer also noted that the networking of schools under the auspices of the partnership has promoted co-operation between schools, eliminated competition between them for DES projects and helped to provide the basis for the establishment of the Department's initiatives at local level (Duggan, 1998).
- Cullen (2000) in commenting on the networks funded by the CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage argued that they have facilitated and co-ordinated personnel from a variety of formal and informal educational sectors to come together to research, plan and develop collaborative actions (Cullen, 2000).
- Deane (2007) in evaluating the Bridging the Gap project noted benefits at the level of the school as the achievement of educational goals, new beneficial networks, better planning, leaderships skills for principals and teachers (Deane, 2007). The same evaluation also noted benefits to teachers in terms of their expectations of pupils, improved interaction with parents and families, increased professional skills and improved classroom practices.
- Pobal (2004) identified the impact of educational actions under the LDSIP as including better understanding on the part of teachers of the needs of young people, the development of new resources for teachers and enhanced educational provision.
- Rourke (1999) in his overview of the integrated approach implemented by the CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage identified positive outcomes in terms of the capacity of schools to offer a wider range of services, greater awareness of different approaches, a greater understanding of the multi-dimensional needs of many young people and the development of good working relationships at the local level.
- Deane (2007) identified a wide range of benefits captured by ongoing data collection at the level of the young people. The evaluation found measurable improvements in literacy and language development, in performance in specific subjects including mathematics, science and information technology and in attendance, behaviour and quality of homework. The evaluation also refers to



(but does not provide the data on) measured improvements in Junior Certificate results, retention to senior cycle and aspirations for further education.

- Pobal (2004) described but did not quantify the outcomes from LDSIP projects in the area of educational disadvantage as including the enhanced social and personal development of young people, anecdotal evidence of increased academic achievement (the report acknowledges lack of data to support this claim), students coping better within the system, and improved school attendance and retention.

Two of the more comprehensive accounts of outcomes at the level of integrated service provision in the area of educational disadvantage are those of Eivers (2001) who undertook a review of integrated service projects in four areas, and Cullen (2000) who evaluated the four pilot projects funded under the CPA's Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage. Overall, Eivers found that integration was rarely achieved in practice and that in rural areas the situation was particularly bad. She concluded: '*While much effort, both at central government and local level, has been invested in developing more integrated approaches to dealing with at risk young people, provision largely remains disjointed*' (Eivers, 2001). Eivers also noted that the more services for the area, located in the area, the greater the degree of integration.

The CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage did not seek to deliver interventions directly to young people, but through the establishment of networks at local level to facilitate the emergence of such interventions from the community or their own members. Although the overall evaluation was favourable, Cullen too notes the difficulties in building collaboration across partners in different sectors:

'At times relationships between agencies across the various sectors concerned with educational disadvantage were difficult and it took a lot of conviction for personnel and their agencies to form successful collaborations. The effort taken to understand the perspective of different people working in this area, to acknowledge where other personnel were coming from and to learn from and to respect their contribution were of key importance.' (Cullen, 2000)

In June 2006, the Comptroller and Auditor General published a Value for Money Report which assessed the impact of a number of educational disadvantage initiatives including the Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme (HSCLS), Giving Children an Even Break (GEB) and the SCP. The examination set out to evaluate how the specific resources were targeted, allocated and applied, what was being done to address the consequence of disadvantage and to identify opportunities for improved practice and the arrangements for evaluation of effectiveness. The report focused on the SCP, HSCL and GCEB as individual schemes and did not examine the integration of these services for improved outcomes for young people. The effectiveness of the initiatives was examined primarily in terms of the rate of improvement in literacy and numeracy levels and in school attendance.



The report notes that the findings were disappointing: relative standards of literacy in designated disadvantaged schools actually fell in the period between 1998 and 2004. In both 1998 and 2004, pupils in designated disadvantaged schools had significantly lower average scores than pupils in other schools, but the gap was actually bigger in 2004 than it had been in 1998. The report notes that, bearing in mind the resources applied through the various disadvantage initiatives and the general increase in financial allocations to the primary sector, it is disappointing that reading standards in designated disadvantaged schools have not improved (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2006).

Currently there are 124 SCP projects nationally. To date no national level evaluation of the SCP has been carried out. One available research study examined the individual and environmental factors which militate against school completion in two SCP areas in Dublin's South Inner City (Downes and Marshall, 2007). The research was targeted at the factors contributing to early school leaving as opposed to early school leaving itself. Consequently (and unusually) it consulted extensively with young people in the schools and also involved parents, teachers, relevant professionals and local service providers.

The research found that the impact of the SCP varied across different schools in the two SCP clusters. For example when young people at primary level were asked about their *intentions* to stay in school, the proportion saying they wanted to stay in school until Leaving Certificate varied from 100% in one school to 29% in another. There was a gender dimension to this, with girls being far more likely to want to remain in school than boys. At secondary level the proportion of students who said they did not want to complete senior cycle increased from 4.5% in first year to 12% in second year. The research expressed some concerns that the most vulnerable young people are slipping through the net.

Downes and Marshall (2007) concluded that the programme as operated in the south east inner city is somewhat narrow in focus with insufficient linkage to other services. In particular the research noted the lack of co-ordination across schools and out-of-school projects, particularly breakfast clubs and afterschool projects. The lack of collaboration necessary to implement a strategic approach to school completion across schools, afterschool projects and other local services was a cause of concern.

Interestingly, this review also made a link between the broader amenities available within a local area and the educational well-being of young people. The authors note the lack of neutral public spaces in the south west inner city area, which young people could feel belong to them and are not associated with being the territory of 'others' in the area. They recommend that supports are put in place to maximise the use of school buildings as shared public spaces belonging to the community and in doing so highlight the extent to which the outcomes of inter-agency work in the area of education may be affected by much broader areas of public policy.

'As those most at risk of early school leaving may lead particularly unstructured lives, there is a need for services that provide not simply "programmed space and programmed time". This need for more drop-in spaces is even greater due to the distinct lack of public space available for people in the South



West Inner City area. **This is a public planning issue.**' (Downes and Marshall, 2007, emphasis added)

5.9 Inhibiting Factors

The problems affecting inter-agency working noted in the previous chapter also impinge on inter-agency work in the area of education. More specific problems in relation to financial resources include Cullen's (2000) assertion that networks frequently lack the capacity to resource inter-agency actions that arise from their collaboration. Stokes (1996) has noted that the actual resources that are made available can have the effect of turning interventions into something other than what was originally planned. Stokes has also noted the zero sum mentality operating among agencies in relation to funding opportunities, which can make collaboration and co-operation difficult (Stokes, 1996).

Relational issues also impinge on inter-agency work in this area. Stokes (1996) has argued that sometimes inter-agency and inter-departmental structures that are set up to generate action on an issue are themselves the greatest obstacle to progress. The same writer has suggested that while actions spring from a positive intent, they often lead to rivalries and territorial disputes among promoters which are negative to the interests of the target groups (Stokes, 1996). Even without these tensions, relationship issues can be difficult. Duggan (1998) for example has suggested that inter-agency relationships can be pragmatic rather than strategic, leading to obstacles to long-term planning, while Cullen (2000) points out that the process of network formation is very slow and erodes the timeframe for delivering action. The lack of a common language across agencies and poor communications across professional boundaries has also been identified as delaying agenda setting (Cullen, 2000; Eivers, 2001).

Sproule *et al.* (1999) note that schools have a history of working independently and therefore may find it particularly difficult to engage in collaborative work. They suggest this can be overcome by local partnerships working with home school liaison co-ordinators and the career guidance teachers who were more familiar with external agencies (Sproule *et al.*, 1999). Lack of professional development more generally has been identified as a deficiency in interventions to combat educational disadvantage (Archer and Weir, 2005). Weir (2004) noted the delay in appointing co-ordinators for the Giving Children an Even Break (GEB) programme along with the lack of in-service training for teachers and a failure to provide a support team for participating schools as hindering the implementation of the scheme. Drawing on the international literature Cullen (1997) notes other shortcomings including the fact that services are crisis orientated rather than preventative and the lack of functional communication among the various public and private agencies within the system.

Eivers (2001) identified barriers or inhibiting factors at the level of specific agencies and these are worth detailing here:

Health Services: In her review, Eivers (2001) found that the Health Board were frequently isolated from networks of local service providers. Acute staff shortages exacerbated this, particularly amongst



social workers and public health nurses. Additionally, the case load approach rather than a district approach, taken by the Health Board, was perceived to inhibit integrated services. Senior Health Board staff were also **seen to be unsupportive of integrated services**.

Government Departments: The involvement of government departments and statutory agencies often served to frustrate rather than promote integrated services. Inter-departmental communication and integration was even less of a reality at national level than at local level. The lack of information on pupils at departmental level limited evidence based policy making and provided a poor basis for liaison. The existence of gaps in activities for young people also inhibited integrated services. Such gaps were noted in developmental youth work, early intervention programmes and psychological services for schools.

Schools: Eivers found that teachers felt their role allocation did not allow them time to engage in co-operation with other agencies. School personnel were also restricted to school hours which limited their contact with parents (Eivers, 2001).

Youth Sector: The shortage of youth workers was a critical factor in inhibiting integrated service delivery. An urban bias in social policy and provision was also identified with rural youth largely ignored and very few services for at-risk families available at local level within rural areas.

The Value for Money Review of Department of Education and Science Initiatives (Comptroller and Auditor General, 2006) also identified some operational weaknesses in the programmes assessed. Most notably, deficiencies in the relationship between schools and other agencies involved, particularly the HSE were identified. The review found that schools did not have dedicated lines of communication with health service staff, reports associated with referrals were not confidential and little feedback was received. The interaction of HSCL co-ordinators with other agencies was very varied: about half interacted with community or public health nurses, just over a quarter attended case meetings with social services if requested by the parents and a small number reported interaction with the social services if there was a concern regarding a particular child. Lack of co-ordination between the schools and other agencies was also noted including the NEPS, the Gardaí and the Juvenile Liaison Officers. Some SCP clusters were unhappy with the level of support received from the participating schools and some reports of resistance to co-operation on the part of teachers was noted. Moreover, the report found that links between the HSCL service and other school personnel were hampered by a lack of opportunity to communicate mutual concerns. Some SCP co-ordinators felt that although local autonomy was beneficial there was room for the development of a more centralised approach in relation to the preparation of policies and procedures. The review suggested the need for guidelines on the relationship between clusters and schools.

5.10 Facilitating Factors

An assessment of the four pilots under the CPA Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage by Cullen (2000) and the review of four pilot integrated services models by Eivers (2001) highlighted a number of key facilitating factors. Cullen (2000) suggests that the broad aims and objectives must be defined precisely. Broad aims are relevant to the complexity of educational



disadvantage but may be long term and lack the immediacy necessary to forge collaboration. A clearer focus can have more precise aims and resolve this (Cullen, 2000). The same writer has argued that supporting parental involvement must be built in and resourced from the beginning. However, resistance to parental involvement at management level may need to be addressed and special capacity building at an early stage may be required (Cullen, 2000). Sproule *et al.* (1999) argue for the need for consultation with young people and their families in order to identify needs. These writers also note that the more marginalised groups such as the Traveller Community and young people with disabilities need more support to include their needs in these processes.

Eivers (2001), echoing Sproule *et al.* (1999) notes that the participation of schools in inter-agency work at local level was heavily dependent on the attitudes of teachers, the principal and to a lesser extent the HSCL Co-ordinator. Cullen (2000) has argued that departmental involvement in integrated initiatives is necessary to support teacher and school involvement and he also suggests that incentives to schools to participate should be considered, through additional funding channelled through a local structure. The Bridging the Gap project which included a focus on professional development found that this was a significant factor in contributing to the overall impact of the project (Deane, 2007). Sproule *et al.* (1999) call for the provision of appropriate and adequate resources to allow the development of integrated approaches. These should include capacity building supports for parents, in-service training for teachers, management resources etc.

Co-ordinators of inter-agency initiatives were also identified as having a key role to play in the success of inter-agency working (Cullen, 2000; Conaty, 2002). However, delays in recruiting them hindered progress (Weir, 2004) and also highlighted a lack of clarity about their roles (Cullen, 2000). Co-ordinators need to learn the language, culture, ethos and work methods of their colleagues from other disciplines and agencies (Cullen, 2000). The value of centralised support to inter-agency initiatives was also identified by Cullen (2000). In commenting on the role played by the CPA in supporting the networks funded by the Demonstration Programme on Educational Disadvantage, he writes:

'At a central level, the CPA played an important role in holding the effort together as a programme. In addition to providing ongoing support and back-up to individual networks, the Agency provided a flexible structure for promoting policy issues and for developing inter-network activities. This approach facilitated the networks to avail of training, share experiences, discuss common issues and to explore ways of jointly moving forward on key ideas.'

The issue of sustainability of programmes is scantily covered in the literature and appears not to be accorded priority. Cullen (1997) presents US findings in relation to the sustainability of inter-agency interventions in California. Three key factors were identified as contributing to sustainability: a high level of parental involvement was seen as an indicator of wider community support contributing to local will, momentum and demands for continued change; collaborative working styles were also positively assessed. In particular, smaller focused, more stable collaborations were more confident about their future and the greater their tendency to have shared decision making the more persons



and agencies with a long-term commitment. Real collaboration could be the key to keeping agencies together at the table and this was a pre-requisite for long-term service delivery reform.

5.11 Key Chapter Findings

While it is clear that inter-agency work in the field of education is both of long duration and extensive, the literature is patchy, much of it is out of date, and evaluative material in particular is scarce. Nevertheless, it is clear that the commitment to inter-agency work remains strong in this area and a body of knowledge has been generated with regard to at least some of the aspects of inter-agency working. Issues highlighted include the relevance of local structures over processes, the difficulties in ensuring systematic integration of school and community, the duality of focus between young people and the wider system and issues concerning professional development and other supports for teachers.

The following key issues emerged in the literature:

- Inter-agency working in the field of education is primarily informed by the need to address educational disadvantage, which is primarily measured by indicators such as early school leaving. However, a more critical approach to the rationale underpinning such inter-agency work as espoused by Sproule *et al.* (1999) suggests that identifying the source of the educational problem should inform the level, type and extent of inter-agency working. This echoes Montgomery and Rossi's (1994) argument regarding the value of a theoretical basis to inter-agency working.
- There is a very wide range of actors involved in inter-agency work in the field of education and a corresponding diversity in actions undertaken on an inter-agency basis. However, the lack of local education structures and the low level of engagement by the DES with other agencies have been cited as barriers to systemic change in this field (Cullen, 2000b). Development of inter-agency as well as multi-disciplinary approaches is considered vital if the range of issues that underlie educational disadvantage is to be addressed.
- Clear aims and objectives, support for parental involvement, adequate resources and supports for teachers, capacity building for schools and parents, incentives for schools to engage in inter-agency work, effective and supported co-ordination at national and local level, and national level support were all identified as key facilitating factors for inter-agency work. At the policy level, Sproule *et al.* (1999) suggest that the transfer of learning between the local and national levels is essential to successful inter-agency work.



- Much of the available evaluation literature is primarily focused on the benefits that accrue to schools, other organisations and their staff. These benefits included a better understanding of the needs of children and young people, a better awareness of the wider social context in which they are working, improved relationships with parents and higher expectations of pupils. With regard to students, evaluations of some inter-agency initiatives report improved academic performance and outcomes. However, findings are not consistent: some evaluations show mixed gains across schools and at worst a decline in relative literacy and numeracy standards. Evaluations also show that integration and co-ordination across agencies was difficult (Cullen, 2000) or rarely achieved (Eivers, 2001).
- Lack of experience of working on an inter-agency basis, staff shortages, gaps in services, poor communication within and between government departments, and between government departments and local services were all cited as obstacles to inter-agency working in the field of education. These obstacles were noted even where inter-agency work was the focus of the initiative, such as in the HSCLS and the SCP.

Finally, we can note an overriding concern that transcends both spheres of activity looked at here. This is the difficulty of transferring learning from the multiplicity of initiatives that are implemented at the local level to the national context. At this point, despite the extent of experience on the ground, the issues for policy identified by Sproule *et al.* (1999) remain current. These were: the need for stronger links to be developed between local strategic approaches and national decision making in relation to policy and budgets that impact on local approaches; the need for national initiatives to build on the experience and effort of local responses through for example, mainstreaming best practice at national level; and, the need for greater integration between educational initiatives promoted by the DES and those promoted by local community organisations, in order to ensure cohesion and co-ordination of activities.



6 INTER-AGENCY WORK IN YOUTH JUSTICE

6.1 Chapter Introduction

The Youth Justice Review (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2006) clearly states that the legislative framework for youth justice work is the Children Act, 2001. Key aspects of this Act are the adoption of a twin-track approach of welfare and youth justice in meeting the needs of children who are in need of special care or protection and children who have committed offences. The Act places an emphasis on early intervention, diversion, restorative justice and community sanctions while allowing for detention as a last resort. The Review goes further to state that '*a lot of successful work*' is being carried out by the Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme (GJDP) and the Probation Services. These services were put on a legislative footing under the Children Act, 2001. This chapter focuses on the inter-agency work undertaken by two particular aspects of these services: The Garda Youth Diversion Projects (GYDPs) and conferencing. As indicated in Chapter 4 above, there are three types of conferencing covered by the Act. One of these, FWCs, has been addressed in Chapter 4. The two remaining types of conferences are diversion or restorative conferences and family conferencing.

It should be noted at the outset that the material drawn on here is somewhat different than in previous chapters. Of particular note is the relative lack of attention paid to inter-agency working in the available literature. This may stem from a long tradition of allowing and requiring a small number of agencies, particularly those in the justice field, to attend to children in trouble with the law or before the courts. Recent changes in the field, and in particular the establishment of the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS), and the recognised need for inter-agency working in national policy documents detailed below, means that there is considerable potential for the development of inter-agency work.

However, the lack of research on inter-agency working in youth justice (including in the area of youth detention) cannot be ignored. Carroll and Meehan (2007) provide perhaps the best summary of this position.

'...the Irish youth justice system has been operating under a veil of uncertainty for many years. A limited number of reports have been commissioned by the Government to enquire into the difficulties inherent in managing young offenders and their behaviour. These reports highlight the need for better facilities within the detention institutions particularly in regard to education of young people, major reform of the legislation affecting young offenders, improved co-ordination between the relevant agencies and the need for extensive ongoing research in the area of youth justice.'

This chapter therefore relies to a greater extent on descriptive and policy data than preceding ones.



6.2 Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme, Garda Youth Diversion Projects, Restorative Conferencing Projects and Family Conferencing

The GJDP, which operates on a nationwide basis, provides that a young person below the age of 18 years may be diverted from the criminal justice system. The young person must freely admit that they have committed an offence and are cautioned as an alternative to prosecution. The GJDP employs such strategies and initiatives as formal and informal cautioning, supervision, restorative cautioning and conferencing, community policing and referral to the GYDPs. The GJDP was put on a statutory footing by the Children Act, 2001.

The GYDPs were initiated in 1991 following a number of disturbances between local youths and the Gardaí in a disadvantaged area of Dublin. On foot of a recommendation contained in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder, the Department of Justice committed to the continuance of these two projects and the expansion of projects to other areas (Bowden and Higgins, 2000). At present, there are 100 GYDPs, operating primarily in urban areas around Ireland. These projects are community-based and managed by either a local youth organisation or an independent management company. They are particularly relevant here as among their objectives is the prevention of youth crime through multi-agency co-operation. Other objectives relate to improving the quality of life within the community, diverting young people from becoming involved in criminal/anti-social behaviour, providing suitable activities to facilitate personal development and encourage civic responsibility, and supporting and improving Garda/community relations.

Restorative cautions and conferences are under the remit of the GJDP and are organised by JLOs. They are alternatives to prosecution and aim to divert the young person from the criminal justice system. Restorative cautions are covered by Section 26 of the Children Act, 2001. They involve the formal cautioning of the young offender. These cautions may be attended by the young offender, and his or her parents or guardians. Other personnel (for example a social worker) whose involvement is considered to be of benefit to the young person may also be invited. The victim is invited to attend and to invite a person or persons to support them. If the victim does not wish to attend the restorative caution they can send a representative of their choice. The principal focus of the restorative caution is to address the harm done to the victim. The young person apologises to the victim and may also agree a number of actions they will undertake to address the harm they have done.

Restorative conferences are a further process available to juveniles that have been formally cautioned, either through the restorative caution process above or through normal cautioning procedures. These are covered by Section 29 of the Children Act, 2001. Restorative conferences may be attended by the victim and the parents or other family members of the young person and others such as school teachers. Their primary focus is the welfare of the juvenile involved.

In practice, many restorative cautions do address the welfare of the young offender, although this is not its primary function. However, when the relevant persons are gathered together for a restorative caution, issues that more properly relate to the welfare of the offender may arise. This may obviate the need for a restorative conference.



Although the JLO involved may have responsibility for supervising the young person, all action carried out by the young people following a restorative caution or conference is voluntary and there are no sanctions for not undertaking the actions agreed upon. Young people engaged in restorative cautions and conferences may also be referred to a GYDP.

Family conferences, sometimes called family group conferences, also constitute a form of restorative justice. These are convened by the Probation Service at the direction of the court. These conferences may be attended by the victim, their legal representative and other supportive persons, the young offender, their parents or other family members, other relevant professionals or representatives from relevant agencies. This conference addresses possible difficulties underlying the young person's behaviour and how the family and others might take responsibility for this. An action plan is drawn up for the actors involved and this is submitted to the court for approval. If accepted by the court, the young person is not detained but must deliver on the action plan under the supervision of the family, other professionals and the Probation Officer. Where action plans are not adhered to the case returns to the court.

6.3 Rationale

Not unlike other services, the rationale for inter-agency work in the youth justice sector stems from an increasing awareness and growing evidence of the multi-faceted nature of the problems faced by young offenders. In 1992, following a number of incidents involving clashes between young people in Ronanstown, Dublin and the Gardaí and rescue services, the then Minister for Justice established the Inter-Departmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder (IGUCD) (Bowden, 2006). The report of this group, widely known as the Ronanstown Report, clearly linked the escalation of public order offences and anti-social behaviour among young people to social and economic deprivation (National Crime Council, 2002). This was seen to have arisen primarily due to housing policy of relocating families from the inner city of Dublin to its periphery over a 20-year period that began in the 1970s. Very rapid population growth coupled with a lack of social and economic infrastructure and services and high unemployment provided the conditions for clashes between young people and the Gardaí (Bowden, 2006). The IGUCD report recommended an approach that paid as much attention to economic regeneration and social inclusion measures as it did to law and order services, thereby signalling the need for those providing such measures and services to work together.

Research on the profile of young offenders also provides a clear rationale for inter-agency working. Striking similarities were found among the young participants in a study of Garda Special Projects, which are now called GYDPs (Centre for Social and Educational Research (CSER), 2001). This profile highlighted the need for a range of services to be provided for young offenders as the risk factors identified by the study were multi-faceted and inter-related. Participants were found to come from disadvantaged communities which shared the same characteristics and social problems. Community risk factors for youth offending were identified as including a lack of youth facilities, high youth populations, high levels of anti-social behaviour and intimidation, high levels of unemployment and dependency on social welfare, early school leaving, high numbers of one parent families and larger households (four or more children). The young people had low educational aspirations, and many had been previously suspended from school, although most were now regular attendees. Many



of the participants had been in previous contact with the Gardaí, had engaged in anti-social or offending behaviour, primarily the use of alcohol, drugs and theft. Many were in contact with someone who had also been in trouble with the Gardaí. The needs of the young people were also found to be common and included

'...safe and structured environments, the need to have fun and to learn and experience new things and the need for positive role models in their lives. Service providers also identified the real need to support and promote parental involvement in the young people's lives'.

CSER, 2001

Bowden and Higgins (2000) consider the issue of rationale and state that it is assumed that multi-agency and community co-operation will prevent crime and promote community safety in areas served by GYDPs. The premise for this argument is that young offenders have a wide range of needs that cannot be met by any one agency but rather requires a range of responses. Community co-operation, much of which is achieved through local organisations, provides a sense of legitimacy for locally based projects and increases confidence in their ability to address the needs of young offenders or those children who are at risk of offending.

Kilkelly (2005) reported that a significant proportion of children coming before the Children's Court came from disadvantaged backgrounds, have negative educational experiences and have a higher than average risk of becoming involved in crime, experiencing substance abuse and displaying behavioural problems. A similar profile was reported by Carroll and Meehan (2007) in their study of children coming before the Children's Court where poor family backgrounds, educational disadvantage, and experience of drug and alcohol misuse were key common factors. They also found that most offences related to public order, theft and car crime.

At the end of their extensive 18-month study Carroll and Meehan (2007) state that young people at risk of offending are easily identifiable and therefore it should be possible for agencies to intervene with and support those with unmet needs well before such young people become involved in the criminal justice system. The HSE in particular is seen to have a key role to play in this. However, co-operation and co-ordination between agencies working in the area of criminal justice is viewed by Carroll and Meehan (2007) as essential for the improvement of the Irish youth justice system. The inter-disciplinary and inter-agency aspect of this is further emphasised by the researchers in looking forward to the improvement the newly established IYJS will bring in addressing both the welfare and education needs of the young people in conjunction with meeting the requirements of the criminal justice system.

At the policy level, the absence of and need for inter-agency working has been widely noted. In its publication *Tackling the Underlying Causes of Crime: A Partnership Approach* (2002) the National Crime Council cites a number of other documents that highlight the need for inter-agency work in the area of youth justice. Among these is the discussion paper *Tackling Crime* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997), which reiterated the importance of such an approach and the links between crime and disadvantage, stating:



'There is a perception that the lack of cohesion between various State and voluntary agencies gives rise to duplication, considerable waste and a failure, very often, to identify those most at risk of drifting into trouble. While this lack of cohesion may not actually cause disadvantage, it can certainly add to the difficulties caused by disadvantage and seriously delay remedial action. It is therefore well worth while looking at the issue of inter-agency cohesion and examining how improved cohesion might contribute towards crime reduction.' (original source, Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1997, cited in National Crime Council, 2002)

The National Crime Council (2002) also cites the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform's *Strategy Statement 1998-2000*, which again highlighted the need for early intervention and diversion measures in youth justice and the need for an inter-departmental approach to law and order in partnership with the community.

'It is now widely agreed that a strategic approach to crime concerned with prevention as well as dealing with its consequences needs to be broadly based and needs to take a long term view. It would involve participation by the community generally and more particularly, an active commitment by policy planners in the areas of employment, income maintenance, housing, health and education.' (original citation Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1998, cited in National Crime Council, 2002)

The *Report on the Youth Justice Review* (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2006) clearly states that both international research and national and local consultations highlight the importance of inter-agency working in the field of youth justice. This, it is posited, will lead to the more effective and co-ordinated services for the children involved. Consultations with Irish stakeholders highlighted the ongoing absence of such co-ordination at national and local level, with the report concluding that effective leadership and greater co-ordination of services was required.

The *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010* (Department of Justice and Law Reform and the Irish Youth Justice Service, 2008) which followed on from the above review states that '*a clear and focussed lead on policy and a partnership approach to the delivery of services for children in trouble with the law*' is needed. This would involve all agencies at both national and local level working together to achieve the best services for young people. The rationale for this is loosely-based on the argument that such inter-agency working will result in better services and outcomes for children. For example, the strategy states:

'The implementation and success of the strategy is dependent on the commitment and work not only of the IYJS, but also of other agencies working together to deliver their services in a coordinated, effective and timely manner.'

The strategy also argues for



'...effective linkages between the justice and welfare systems, such as with the Health Service Executive (HSE), and with the community and voluntary sectors to ensure a coordinated approach in meeting the needs of children who come into conflict with the law'.

Inter-agency working will therefore involve justice related agencies including An Garda Síochána, the Probation Service and the Courts Service, as well as education, welfare and health agencies and community sector organisations. At a national level, the newly formed IYJS would try to bring welfare and justice together by working closely with both the OMCYA and the CAAB.

It is noteworthy here that the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010*, and the IYJS which is charged with much of its delivery, are very new additions to the youth justice field. As such there is as yet no evaluation or research-based literature on these.

6.4 Definitions of Inter-agency Working

There is a virtual absence of material on what constitutes inter-agency working in the youth justice literature. As noted in previous chapters, terms such as multi-agency working, co-operation and collaboration are used interchangeably and with no clear definition or interpretation of inter-agency work put forward.

One exception to this is Bowden and Higgins (2000). This evaluation of the Garda Special Projects does not provide a single definition of multi-agency working, but presents a number of relationship types that indicate a number of levels of multi-agency working. These types are: (i) jointly funded programmes; (ii) representation; (iii) networking and support; (iv) technical support/advice/training; and (v) sharing resources. It should be noted here that the key term used by Bowden and Higgins is *multi-agency* working as opposed to *inter-agency* working.

6.5 Formal Co-ordinating Structures and Processes

6.5.1 Overview

The primary structures and processes through which youth justice is delivered are located at the local level. These are the GYDPs, restorative cautions, restorative conferences and family conferences.

6.5.2 Garda Youth Diversion Projects

The GYDPs were initiated in 1991. There are currently 100 projects operating around the country. The most recent evaluation of these projects is that of Bowden and Higgins (2000).

One of the objectives of the GYDPs is to '*prevent crime through community and multi-agency co-operation and to improve the quality of life within the community*' (Bowden and Higgins, 2000). A key question addressed by the evaluation concerned the nature and extent of multi-agency working and community representation in the projects. Where the project was managed by a local youth organisation, an advisory committee was put in place comprising of representatives from the Gardaí,



the Probation Service and members of the local community. Although GYDPs varied somewhat, the authors concluded that community representation was primarily at the level of advisory committees where they provide support and advice to the youth organisation managing the project. One of the principal critiques made by Bowden and Higgins (2000) is that community representation is hampered by the absence of any processes for the selection or supporting of community representatives, as well as the absence of a mechanism for aggregating and articulating the concerns of the community.

With regard to the nature and extent of multi-agency working, the authors also found considerable variation in the 14 projects operating at the time and even among the five projects on which detailed case studies were presented. The principal mechanisms for multi-agency working were identified as:

- project management or advisory groups;
- networking and support work with justice and other agencies and community based initiatives;
- sharing resources with community groups/projects;
- referrals between GYDP and other agencies;
- co-funding of programmes in a small number of cases.

Networking and support was by far the most common type of multi-agency relationship with 10 of the 14 projects indicating that in excess of three-quarters of their contacts with other agencies were for this purpose. Bowden and Higgins (2000) report:

'It is evident that all Projects have been active in networking and collaboration with other agencies. They have all established support systems by linking with the agencies at advisory and management level.'

Relationships with all agencies were not the same, however. For example, the majority of projects reported that they were in contact with the Probation Service because of their representative role in the management of the project, with only six reporting that their contact with this service was for the purpose of networking or support. With regard to other youth services, contacts were predominantly for the purposes of networking, support and sharing of resources.

Referrals to the project also indicate a certain level of inter-agency contact as these came from a number of sources including the Gardaí and JLOs in particular, schools, youth services and through outreach work by the project itself, with smaller numbers being referred by social workers, probation officers, and community representatives. Less outward referral was reported and in only one project was there any mechanism to enable ongoing inter-agency follow up and tracking of project participants.

Bowden and Higgins (2000) state that there is no clear evidence that this form of collaboration or linkages between agencies will by its nature result in the effective co-ordination of the work or services of these organisations. Instead, only individual examples of success and failure in the co-ordination of services can be identified. The authors also report frustration among the projects that their inter-agency work is effectively restricted to the local level and service delivery. While they



provide a focus for multi-agency co-operation at local level, this is largely restricted to the advisory or management committee level, with no mechanism through which learning could be transferred to impact upon the policies and frameworks under which these organisations work. The authors state that

'... it is positive that Projects have independence from the centres of decision making but, on the other hand, they are relatively isolated, especially when it comes to impacting upon public policy in relation to young offenders and good practice in community based youth crime prevention. This is because Projects are multi-agency at local level. There is no strategic level forum to transfer policy issues from that level into the decision making arena within state departments'.

Despite the rapid increase in the number of GYDPs, this issue appears to remain. However, it is possible that the cross-agency National Youth Justice Oversight Group which has been established under the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010*, and the Local Youth Justice Teams that are currently being established under the strategy will provide a mechanism for the transfer of such learning.

While this evaluation yields useful information on the multi-agency aspects of the GYDP, it should be borne in mind that it is based on materials collected in 1998 when only 14 projects were in existence. Consequently, there may have been significant but undocumented changes in the inter-agency relationships underpinning the GYDP in the past decade.

6.5.3 Restorative Conferences and Cautions

As outlined above, restorative conferences and cautions are under the remit of the GJDP and are organised by the JLO. They are provided for under the Children Act, 2001 and provide an alternative to prosecution and aim to divert the young person from the criminal justice system. Restorative conferences, with which this section is concerned, address the welfare of the child involved. They are usually attended by the victim and the parents or other family members of the young person. In some cases, however, they are also attended by other professionals. O'Dwyer (2001) presents an evaluation of the pilot restorative initiatives which ran between 1998 and 2001. Although the restorative conferences provided a possible structure for inter-agency working, the evaluation reported that professionals other than Gardaí and JLOs were present in only 11 of the 68 conferences held during this period. These professionals were social workers, youth workers, a child support worker, teachers and a therapist.

O'Dwyer (2001) recommends that greater inclusion of professionals should be considered as this would help co-ordinate restorative conferences with welfare and family conferences. However, he also argues that it is not axiomatic that such professionals are necessary in each restorative conference, particularly if they are not already in contact with the young person or family concerned. This should be left to the discretion of the JLO concerned. The presence of professionals from other agencies should serve a clear purpose and not be an end in itself. The absence of other professionals may also be an indication of both the function of the restorative conferences and the type of young person it serves. This is highlighted by O'Dwyer (2001):



The first thing to be said [about the involvement of other professionals] is that offending behaviour, even serious offending, if not persistent, is not necessarily indicative of underlying problems that require the input of social workers, family support workers, guidance counsellors or other professionals.'

O'Dwyer (2001) also raises the issue of the desire on the part of families to maintain a level of privacy about the young person's involvement in delinquent behaviour. Families may not, therefore, wish to have a range of professionals and agencies involved in the conference. As this was clearly evident in only one case, O'Dwyer cautions that this can only be tentatively and speculatively considered on the basis of the evaluation.

Whether the restorative conference is attended by external professionals or not, in many instances the young person and/or their family are put in contact with additional agencies. O'Dwyer (2001) notes, however, that it is predominantly the JLO who is responsible for supervising the young person following the conference. This would suggest a degree of co-operation but this is limited to inter-agency referrals.

6.5.4 Family Conferences

Family conferences, also sometimes referred to as family group conferences, are convened by the Probation Service at the direction of the court. In contrast to restorative conferences, family conferences provide an opportunity to discuss the possible difficulties underlying the young person's behaviour. As such difficulties may be multi-faceted, there is a clearer rationale for the engagement of a wider range of professionals and agencies. Each family conference must, under the Children Act, 2001, be attended by the young offender and at least one of their parents, grand-parents, other close relative or guardian. A conference cannot proceed unless one of these is present. Also, under the Children Act, 2001 the Probation and Welfare Officer organising the conference can invite any other relevant person who they believe will be able to assist in the conference. Ultimately, this Probation Officer has the final say on who should attend the conference.

The family conference has four components:

- introductions and information giving, where the format of the meeting is outlined and the process of information sharing begins;
- restorative element where the victim, if present, tells the young offender how their behaviour has affected them and the young person can account for their behaviour and give a commitment to make amends for the harm done;
- family time, where the young person and their family members meet separately from the other participants to discuss a draft action plan that will state how the young person will make amends to the victim and mechanisms for keeping them out of further trouble are identified. This plan is often compiled with the help of the conference facilitator;
- presentation of action plan and closure, where the plan is presented to the other conference participants. The plan must be agreed by all participants, except where a person's disagreement is regarded by the conference facilitator or chair as unreasonable (Burke, 2006).



The action plan is then submitted to the court for approval.

Burke (2006), in a study of family conferences reports that the majority of cases (30 out of 47 case studies) involved no professionals beyond the justice agencies. In the 17 cases where professionals attended, these included teachers, employment and training officers, outreach workers, JLOs, social workers and education and welfare officers, with the latter two being the most common. This study also raises the issue of families not wanting to include a wide range of either family members or professionals in the conference as they wish to maintain a degree of privacy.

6.6 Strategies for Co-ordination at the Service Delivery Level

The formal mechanisms outlined above are involved in the delivery of services at local level. It is notable, however, that a considerable degree of latitude has been allowed in relation to how these mechanisms operate. For example, in the case of the GYDP, although there are strict procedures in relation to the role of the Gardaí, the JLOs and the allocation and spending of funds, there is considerable variation in the local arrangements for inter-agency work in the individual projects. This is evident even in the small number of projects studied by Bowden and Higgins (2000). In one case the GYDP was imbedded in a complex local arrangement involving a limited number of community and State agencies and actors, including FÁS, the health board, local business, the local community council, community development project and the county youth federation. Some of these interests were involved at advisory committee level, while others were engaged in the delivery of services for and with the GYDP. In another project, a limited company was founded to manage the project and this had a board of directors made up of senior Garda officers and the community Garda, the local schools, the clergy and the local youth service. Bowden and Higgins (2000) conclude that this '*...is a collaborative effort of personnel from a variety of sources*'. Despite these positive examples, it is not possible to discern the level of inter-agency work in the project in terms of integrated programmes, services or policies.

With regard to both restorative conferences and family conferences, local arrangements undoubtedly apply due to the considerable discretion allowed for in the Children Act, 2001. In respect of restorative conferences Section 32(3) states that

'The facilitator shall invite any other persons who in his or her opinion would make a positive contribution to the conference, including one or more representatives from any of the following bodies:

1. the health board for the area in which the child normally resides,
2. the probation and welfare service,
3. the school attended by the child,
4. the school attendance service,
5. the Garda Síochána.'



These provisions also apply to family conferences. Further, Sections 37(1) and 86(1) state that subject to the provisions of the relevant parts of the Act '*...a conference may regulate its procedure in such manner as it thinks fit*'.

At present, there is little literature available to ascertain the degree of variation in family conferences in terms of their local application of the legislation, although both O'Dwyer (2001) and Burke (2006) suggest that there is variation in the degree of involvement of external agencies in both.

6.7 Actors

The research literature points to the role of a number of key actors in the youth justice system. Primary among these are justice agencies including the Garda Síochána, the Probation and Welfare Service, and the Children's Court. In the case of the GYDP community representatives and youth services are also key actors. However, the available literature does not pay any considerable attention to their views on inter-agency working.

As stated earlier, O'Dwyer (2001) cautions against the inclusion of too wide a range of actors in restorative conferences and advises that external agencies and professionals should only be involved if there is a clear need for and added value from their participation. However, in a later paper O'Dwyer (2007) asserts that JLOs in particular need to be able to call on other agencies to accept responsibility for young offenders where a Garda response alone is insufficient. However, Burke (2006) reports that some Probation Officers find it difficult to co-ordinate the attendance and participation of external agencies and professionals in family conferences.

The National Crime Council (2002) draws attention to the need to involve a wide range of actors, many of which will have an indirect role in crime prevention. Services in areas such as education, training, employment, recreation, personal development, family support, parenting, health promotion and community development may all have a secondary role to play. The National Crime Council (2002) argues further that these services may be particularly important when working with children and young people as they may prevent their involvement in offending behaviour without having crime prevention as a stated aim. These services may be more acceptable to families as they do not carry the perceived stigma of being connected with crime, including crime prevention measures. It is noteworthy here that few of these services are referred to in the literature reviewed here.

One final actor to which some attention has been paid is that of the judge in the Children's Court. Kilkelly (2005) states that the judge in the Children's Court is left with the challenge of finding workable solutions to the range of social, educational, psychological and other needs which children before the court often present. In the absence of an alternative administrative body, it is frequently down to the judge to try to co-ordinate the various State agencies involved in the administration of youth justice. This exposes the lack of any real co-ordination between the various youth justice services. Kilkelly argues that this also leads to the lengthy adjournment of many children's cases where a range of reports from a variety of agencies and inquiries into the availability of options relating to assessment, placement and other services are required.



6.8 The Benefits and Enabling Factors of Inter-agency Working

Previous chapters have noted that multi-agency training can be a tool for encouraging inter-agency work more broadly. The Copping On training programme provides training on a multi-agency basis in the areas of crime prevention and awareness raising and explicitly aims to improve '*the development and support of local multi-agency responses to the issue of youth offending*'. Organisations and workers participating in the training include Gardaí, teachers, staff of the Probation Service, youth, community and social workers as well as those working in family support and counselling services. This training usually involves 16–24 participants from a number of organisations or agencies based in the same geographic area (Copping On, 2007).

The evaluation of this programme's work between 2000 and 2004 (Duffy, 2005) is principally focused on the training programme itself, but also provides some messages about whether inter-agency training impacts upon inter-agency working at the local level. Approximately one quarter of those who had undertaken the training (91) participated in the evaluation, over half (54%) stated that there was a multi-agency approach to crime prevention in their area and 38% felt that the Copping On training contributed to multi-agency efforts. The evaluation does not elaborate on what these efforts look like or comment on the nature of these relationships. Less than half (46%) of all evaluation participants stated that the Copping On training did not contribute to multi-agency working. Two principal reasons were given for this. First, there was already a multi-agency approach being taken in their area and second, there was no structure to allow for such working.

On this basis Duffy (2005) goes on to make the following recommendations to improve the contribution of the training programme to the achievement of multi-agency working at the local level:

- Copping On needs to define multi-agency working and promote this.
- Copping On needs to develop a more strategic approach to strengthening multi-agency work where it already exists and to promoting and developing it where it does not exist.

Duffy (2005) also recommends the use of follow-up training in multi-agency structures, such as the local area based partnerships, health service bodies and RAPID programmes as a means of further embedding multi-agency work in the field of crime prevention and awareness.

6.9 Inhibiting Factors and Obstacles to Inter-agency Working

The evaluation of the Copping On training programme (Duffy, 2005) reports that the annual reports of the programme show that those delivering services on the ground are well aware of the obstacles to inter-agency working. These include the amount of time needed to work effectively on a multi-agency basis, heavy workloads and meeting overload, lack of policies and strategies within and between agencies that promote multi-agency work, poor communication and lack of understanding of the respective roles of organisations, personality clashes and an unwillingness to share responsibilities and control.



Further inhibiting factors can be derived from the available literature. Legislation itself, which has put a number of the youth justice restorative and diversionary processes on a statutory footing, does not elaborate on the procedures for the participation of professionals such as social workers, family therapists, teachers etc. Instead, as noted above, it leaves such arrangements to the discretion of the Gardaí or other justice agencies (O'Dwyer, 2001). This is particularly true of both restorative and family conferences. A further weakness in relation to these conferences is the lack of communication and the absence of a forum for learning among those involved not only in restorative and family conferencing, but also among those involved in family welfare conferences (Burke, 2006). Such a forum could add considerably to the contact between the justice agencies and the relevant health services at a minimum.

In addition, the relatively weak position of external agencies in the GYDP has been noted by Bowden and Higgins (2000). External agencies and community representatives are largely involved only at the level of local advisory committees, with no mechanism in place to feed the learning from the projects into the policies of the agencies involved or to national level. While restricted to this level, power and responsibility resides with the promoting youth service or employer, with other representatives having a consultative and advisory function but no power to effect change. In addition, those representing either the local community or local community organisations are often faced with the problem of having no mandate for their involvement, which weakens their position further.

In areas where GYDPs exist, the lack of co-ordination among the project and other agencies, and other agencies themselves, is a further weakness. In a study of participants in GYDPs, the CSER (2001) report firstly, a lack of other youth agencies in the areas and, secondly, a lack of integration between these services where they were present. Workers in the GYDP felt hampered by the lack of inter-agency work and resource sharing among agencies such as Springboard, Foróige Youth Projects and Barnardos at the local level.

Hamilton and Seymour (2007) draw attention to a further weakness in the recent approach to the introduction of ASBOs, but which may also apply to restorative and family conferences. This is the placing of blame for offending or anti-social behaviour and responsibility for its remedy on the shoulders of parents and families. This approach fails to acknowledge the complex and multi-faceted nature of the problems that underpin much youth offending, and the corresponding need for multi-agency responses.

Finally, Carroll and Meehan (2007) draw attention to the serious weakness of the absence of centralised data. A centralised databank which uses a shared identifier code for each young offender would allow relevant agencies to share information and track the progress or otherwise of young people through services.

6.10 Key Chapter Findings

The rationale for inter-agency working in youth justice stems primarily from a recognition of the multitude of problems and needs faced by young people in conflict with the law. The majority of



children who come before the Children's Court share a large number of characteristics, including poverty, poor educational experiences and a higher than average risk of re-offending. This knowledge means that their needs are multi-dimensional and cover a number of areas (across education, welfare and justice) and therefore provides a basis for inter-agency work.

The need and desire for inter-agency working is evident in a number of recent policy documents and strategies at national level. These include the *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010*. Noteworthy here is that this strategy calls for the involvement of not only a range of justice agencies but also for inter-agency working between such agencies and education, health, welfare and community service providers. However, despite considerable attention at policy level, there remains almost no material on definitions or understandings of inter-agency work in the area of youth justice.

The following are key issues that arise from the available literature.

- An early evaluation of the GYDPs showed that networking, support and inward referrals to the Projects were the most common forms of inter-agency working. However, the evaluators were not convinced that these forms of inter-agency working would ultimately lead to the co-ordination of services between youth justice and other agencies (Bowden and Higgins, 2000).
- There was considerable frustration among the GYDPs on a number of issues. The most significant include that their inter-agency work is effectively restricted to local level with no mechanisms for the transfer of learning to national level, and the lack of mandate for local community representatives on the management committees of the projects. It should be borne in mind that Bowden and Higgins' (2000) evaluation of the GYDPs is based on data collected in 1998. Just 14 projects were in operation at that time, all of which took part in the evaluation.
- The Children Act, 2001 allows for the involvement of a range of agencies in both restorative cautions and conferences and family conferences, thereby recognising their potential for inter-agency work. However, in O'Dwyer's 2001 study of 68 restorative cautions and conferences, the majority of restorative conferences appear not to include any professionals beyond Gardaí and the JLOs. While providing a potential ground for inter-agency work, research suggests that external professionals should only be involved where there is a clear rationale for this. This research further suggests that families may not wish outside agencies to be involved as they want to maintain their privacy (O'Dwyer, 2001).
- Family or group conferences also provide opportunities for inter-agency working, but recent research reports that the majority appear not to include any professionals outside the justice agencies. The desire of families to make these conferences as tight as possible in order to maintain their privacy is again raised here (Burke, 2006). An alternative view, however, is that non-justice agencies, such as schools and education bodies, training agencies, sporting organisations and family support services can have a significant, if as yet largely untapped, role to



play in youth justice cases. Such agencies do not carry the stigma attached to crime or crime prevention and therefore may be more acceptable to families.

- Based on an evaluation of the Copping On training programme, inter-agency training can be seen as an enabling factor in securing inter-agency work. However, such training needs to clearly define what it means by inter-agency, or in this case multi-agency, working and develop a more strategic approach to promoting and strengthening such approaches (Duffy, 2005).
- A number of obstacles to inter-agency working are addressed in the available literature. These include at least some of those referred to in earlier chapters such as the lack of time to work on an inter-agency basis, heavy workloads, poor communication, poor role and responsibility definition and personality clashes. Obstacles specific to youth justice include the lack of detailed direction in the relevant legislation governing cautions and conferences, the absence of a forum that allows learning to be shared and transferred upwards to national level, and the weak, primarily consultative or advisory, position of community representatives in the GYDPs. Lack of co-ordination among other youth services and the absence of centralised data also act as barriers to inter-agency work.

To conclude, it is important to reiterate that there is comparatively little recent research on inter-agency working in youth justice. For example, the last national evaluation of the GYDPs was in undertaken in 1998–2000 when only 14 projects were in existence. There are now 100 GYDPs but no further national level evaluation or research is available. As a result, there is a significant gap in our knowledge of inter-agency working in the youth justice arena.



7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Chapter Introduction

Each of the preceding chapters has presented a detailed analysis of the available research-based literature in relation to inter-agency working. These chapters have addressed the emergence and review of inter-agency working in a broad and international context, the development of inter-agency approaches in Ireland, as well as inter-agency working in the specific child-related sectors of child protection and welfare, education and youth justice. In addition, each chapter has provided a summary of the key issues to emerge within both the broader literature and literature relating to these specific sectors.

This chapter provides an analysis of issues on a thematic basis that cut across individual sectors. It also provides some suggestions on key steps that the CAAB might consider in pursuing their inter-agency work.

In this regard it is worth stating here that the CAAB's strategy document, *Strategy 2008-2010* contains the following Mission Statement.

'We will seek significantly better outcomes for vulnerable children through the co-ordinated delivery of services. We will promote stronger inter-agency co-operation and good practice through the provision of advice, guidance and support and base our work on action oriented research, experience and reflective questioning.'

Also of particular relevance here are the following strategic objectives and actions contained in the CAAB Strategy.

Objective 2: Facilitate inter-agency co-operation

Strategic Actions

- 2.1** Establish strong formal links with all agencies engaged in the provision of children's services
- 2.2** Develop 'safe-space' to facilitate inter-agency problem solving
- 2.3** Develop and disseminate protocols for inter-agency working including information sharing
- 2.4** Promote and facilitate inter-agency training opportunities
- 2.5** Provide regular opportunities for engagement and information sharing between agencies at national, regional and local level
- 2.6** Support the identification and transfer of good practice
- 2.7** Support organisations in efforts to effect positive change within the sector



These will be returned to later in this chapter.

7.2 Conclusions

7.2.1 *The Importance of Context*

- a. Inter-agency approaches are heavily influenced by the policy and service contexts in which they operate as well as the specific issues they address.**

The Irish and international literature reviewed in the previous chapters highlights that inter-agency approaches are heavily contextualised. They take their form, focus and mechanisms from the policy making and service delivery frameworks they are located within and from the substantive issue they seek to address. For example, the case conference approach to inter-agency work in child protection is influenced by social work and medical practice, by the often complex relationship between policy in relation to education, children, families and health, as well as by family and criminal law and justice. The relevance and interplay of these practices, policies and law in relation to other areas such as education or youth justice will differ substantially. Consequently, it is difficult and unwise to try to identify 'ideal type models' of inter-agency approaches that can be dropped into different settings and contexts. For the same reason, care must be taken in claiming 'best practice' in inter-agency working.

- b. However, common elements of inter-agency approaches can be identified in the literature.**

The literature also points to a number of elements of inter-agency working that transcend geographical or policy contexts and on which there is agreement or consensus. Most notably these include the factors that facilitate inter-agency working (such as effective leadership, commitment, adequate resources, good communication, a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities and appropriate stakeholder involvement) and those that inhibit it (including poor leadership, lack of commitment, poor role definition, lack of understanding of responsibilities, obstructive professional and agency culture and lack of inter-agency training opportunities). There is also consensus on issues relating to setting objectives and measuring the achievement of these. Thus while the specifics of the inter-agency initiative must determine the process, mechanisms and so on, it is also possible and necessary to be guided by available knowledge and experience.

In relation to the ongoing development of inter-agency work in the children's sector in Ireland, therefore, it will be necessary to establish approaches appropriate to specific contexts *and* it will be possible to learn from previous initiatives. Reinventing the inter-agency wheel can be avoided.

7.2.2 *The Basis for Inter-agency Working – Theories and Rationale*

- a. At present, the theoretical underpinnings of inter-agency work remain weak and require considerable development in Ireland. The lifecycle approach to policy and service development provides a context for the development of such theory.**



Strong theoretical underpinnings can validate and guide inter-agency approaches. For example, Montgomery and Rossi's (1994) work in education, as cited by Cullen (1997), highlights the value of a conceptual or theoretical approach to the development and delivery of services for children. However, such an approach is not widely evident in the children's sector in Ireland.

The emerging emphasis on a lifecycle approach in policy making, advocated by the NESC, provides both a context and an imperative for the development of a more theoretical approach to inter-agency work. It focuses on the way in which the various aspects of the lives of children are integrated and interact, and further, on how integrated policies and services can effectively support children and address many of the difficulties faced by vulnerable children in particular. Such an approach holds that a better understanding of the factors contributing to the well-being and otherwise of children in all aspects of their lives is crucial in underpinning quality services, including integrated services. Knowing the extent and nature of children's experience of disadvantage and difficult situations is important, but the lifecycle approach highlights the need for research focused on examining the underlying factors that contribute to such experiences.

b. The rationale underlying inter-agency working needs to be challenged and evidence-based.

Related to the lack of theoretical basis is the vagueness regarding the rationale for inter-agency working. Much current thinking and practice is based on the belief that intractable and complex problems require inter-agency responses and that inter-agency working leads to collaborative advantages. However, this appears to draw more on the rhetoric of inter-agency approaches than on any hard evidence of their effectiveness. Inter-agency working is seen as self-evidently a good thing, without a full understanding of how it improves upon the existing situation or what targets it is to achieve. This is not to say that inter-agency approaches are not successful or valuable, but rather that we are lacking sufficient studies to prove the case either way.

At this point, the decision to adopt inter-agency approaches should ideally be based on their demonstrated effectiveness rather than the assumption that inter-agency approaches are always the most appropriate response to the needs of children. Instead, and drawing on a more conceptual understanding of the needs of children, strategies should clearly identify when and in what ways inter-agency approaches can contribute to meeting children's needs and achieving strategy objectives, and when other approaches might be more effective.

c. Good inter-agency initiatives require good agencies and good services.

It is particularly important in the context of services for children to ensure that inter-agency approaches are not seen as a way of compensating for poor quality services, for the lack of services or for under-performing agencies. There is consensus within the literature that good inter-agency working requires both good agencies that are willing, capable and have a clear mandate to work on



an inter-agency basis, as well as comprehensive services that can be effectively and efficiently delivered on an inter-agency basis.

7.2.3 Defining Inter-agency Approaches and Objectives

- a. Definitions of inter-agency work are diverse, reflecting different approaches and different contexts. There is a need for context specific definitions and the use of continuum models.**

Clearer rationales and stronger theoretical underpinnings should result in a clearer definition of what is meant by inter-agency working, or more appropriately perhaps, what range of activities is covered by the concept of inter-agency working. In this report we note the slippage in terminology in describing inter-agency approaches. To a large extent, this reflects the fact that inter-agency approaches are context driven and therefore it is difficult to provide generic models or definitions. It seems from the literature – and from growing awareness and practice in Ireland – that defining different types of inter-agency approaches is more useful than attempting to define inter-agency work *per se*. The work of Himmelman (1992) has been particularly influential and his continuum of inter-agency approaches has ongoing relevance for the diverse body of policy and practice in the children's sector in Ireland and for guiding the development of more sophisticated and integrated forms.

- b. There is a need to distinguish between inter-agency working at the levels of planning and decision making on the one hand, and service delivery on the other as these require different and clear objectives. This helps to develop clearer objectives, targets and mechanisms for inter-agency working.**

A clear understanding of the dichotomy between decision making and service delivery is crucial if the commitment to inter-agency working contained in numerous policy documents is to become a reality through integrated services on the ground. It is particularly important in the context of a lifecycle approach to policy development and the implications of this for children and their families.

The mechanisms, objectives and targets of integration at the level of decision making are fundamentally different from those of integrated service delivery. This is to such an extent that we need a separate terminology to accommodate these two spheres and a separate understanding of what is required to support them. As things currently stand, the lack of a clearer delineation of these two can lead to an excess of activity at the level of the board (or similar management or oversight structure) and little or no activity at the level of services. Using a continuum framework such as Himmelman's, allows objectives at the level of planning and decision making to be clearly differentiated from integrated service delivery.

- c. Different service delivery contexts require different language, practices and tools.**

Part of the difficulty in developing definitions and setting clear objectives is that the practice of integrated service delivery is poorly understood as well as being highly context specific. For example, integrated services in the context of *responding* to child protection issues is very different to integrated



services in *preventing* early school leaving. Not only are there different sets of actors involved in these contexts, but the issues and structures with which they are concerned also differ considerably. Much more work needs to be done to develop a precise language, set of practices and tools to resource these practices around integrated service delivery in specific contexts.

7.2.4 Structures, Mechanisms and Actors

a. Different types of inter-agency approaches require different structures and mechanisms of co-ordination.

Different types of inter-agency approaches require different structures and mechanisms of co-ordination. For example, where the objective is to engage in planning or decision making, a forum or similar structure upon which the key agencies are represented is required. On the other hand integrated service delivery requires to be reinforced and underpinned by a formal structure such as a forum or network but is delivered through different mechanisms such as shared protocols, key workers and case conferences.

Where the objective is to engage in planning or decision making, there is a consensus in the literature that a forum or similar structure upon which the key agencies are represented is required. A considerable amount of learning has been generated in relation to these fora or other partnership arrangements. For example, the analysis produced by Pobal (2008) and discussed in Chapter 3 identifies best practice, or what it calls the optimum model of partnership. In brief, this model is characterised by high levels of participation and complementary working arrangements.

Integrated service delivery, for its part, requires to be reinforced and underpinned by a formal structure such as a forum or network but is delivered through different mechanisms. Three such mechanisms predominate in the Irish context: shared protocols, key workers and case conferences.

The former two are not yet in extensive use although interest in both is growing and the key worker approach has been advocated by NESF. To date, no written body of learning in regard to these mechanisms has emerged.

Evaluations from the UK suggest that mechanisms such as key workers can be effective in improving the delivery of services, but that key workers cannot compensate for ineffective agencies and that they require to be reinforced by local structures. Case conferencing, in contrast, is in common use in Ireland in child protection and welfare situations and is echoed also in youth justice. Research into case conferences here highlights the myriad of challenges that beset these and provides insights into just how difficult service integration is in practice, from the perspective of those delivering the service. Little is known about the benefits of this approach to the young people involved.

b. When undertaking inter-agency co-operation there is a need to ensure that all key agencies or departments are fully involved in the formal structure, while also being mindful of the need to keep this structure relatively small and flexible.



Among the key learning from the literature from the children's sector is the need to ensure that all key agencies or departments are fully involved in the formal structure, while also being mindful of the need to keep this structure relatively small and flexible. In the area of education, the limited capacity to integrate DES initiatives and other initiatives targeted at young people has been cited as a barrier to success at local level. The need for representation on inter-agency mechanisms, however, must take into account the large number of such interventions that now exist at local level, particularly in urban areas.

In the roll out of services to children, it will be necessary to avoid 'participation burn-out' on the part of key agencies. A more overarching integrated approach at local level (such as is proposed and in development within the new CSCs) may help to overcome some of these issues.

However, the learning from the SIMs looked at in Chapter 3 highlights the difficulties even at this level. The 2003 evaluation of the SIMs noted limited progress in co-ordination at local level, lack of commitment at national level and little impact on service delivery. Indecon (2008) also found that as the CDBs operate primarily in influencing other organisations, both statutory and voluntary, their potential influence is significantly dependent on the perceived priority which is attached to their functions. Clearly, in terms of the development of further work in the children's sector, it will be important to absorb the learning that has been generated by the CDBs and SIMs.

c. The community sector has an important role to play in inter-agency processes in the children's sector in Ireland, especially in relation to ensuring community buy-in and acceptance of initiatives, but in order to support the community sector's involvement there is a need to address difficulties such as a lack of resources and a lack of parity of esteem.

Most inter-agency approaches also involve the community sector as formal partners in the process and evaluations have rated the contribution of the sector quite highly. In particular, the involvement of the community in ensuring community buy-in and acceptance of initiatives has been highlighted. The National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000) also advocates the need for good working relationships with the community and voluntary organisations at local level. However, the difficulties which this sector can experience are also much referred to in the literature. These difficulties include lack of resources and lack of parity of esteem.

d. While formal structures are necessary to underpin effective integrated service delivery, these can also impede it.

Finally, we should note that while formal structures are necessary to underpin effective integrated service delivery, these can also impede it. The key issue here is the quality of participation and the difficulties caused by non co-operative partners. These can include partners who are lukewarm to participation in inter-agency work as well as those who actively obstruct integration. Mechanisms to deal with this type of situation are recommended in the literature, but there is little mention of exactly what these might be apart from some references to providing incentives to ensure compliance. Clearly, this type of issue needs to be anticipated in establishing new structures within the children's sector. Possible ways to address this might include setting clear targets for all participating agencies,



developing agreed implementation frameworks and undertaking ongoing assessment and review. If mechanisms such as these are put in place, national commitment to, and oversight of them would be essential.

7.2.5 Tools and Resources

- a. While the literature is inconclusive on the particular contribution of specific tools to inter-agency working, it is clear that tools should be relevant and specific to the particular level of inter-agency work being undertaken as well as settings, agencies and professionals involved.**

Amongst the tools that are frequently referenced in the literature are those that support technical excellence and consistency across initiatives. These include central support units, the development of strategic frameworks at national level to guide planning and activity at local level, the development of planning guidelines and related material such as self-audit templates and so on.

In general, the evaluations reviewed have cited the absence of tools as hindering inter-agency working rather than demonstrating the actual contribution these make to achieving and enhancing such work. One area that appears conclusive, however, is that different levels of inter-agency working require different tools. Thus, the types of tools that can resource staff involved in service delivery will be quite different from those that resource national co-ordination units or planning bodies. In addition, the range of settings, agencies, professionals and work processes involved in inter-agency work in the children's sector makes it almost impossible to develop generic tools of this type across the sector. However, one thing to stress is the importance of developing guidelines and tools to support target setting and data collection (see below).

- b. More generic tools to support training for inter-agency working and the transfer of learning could be developed.**

There are two areas where a more generic approach to developing tools for inter-agency work in the children's sector may be possible. These are:

- The provision of training for inter-agency work. In this regard, it is important to take a whole systems approach, that is, agencies need to be trained as inter-agency agencies and to support their staff who are involved in direct inter-agency working. This is a key area for consideration in terms of implementing services to children in the future.
- The development of mechanisms to transfer the learning from successful interventions. The lack of opportunity to learn from other examples is frequently referred to in evaluations. There is considerable potential to address this through, for example, a structured programme of research to guide strategic networking within similar areas. An example would be identifying the elements of good practice in a specific setting (such as a school/community setting), exploring how it could be replicated in similar settings and developing the mechanisms to implement it in other settings.



7.2.6. Strategic Planning, Setting Targets and Monitoring Impact

- a. Two key issues can be gleaned from the literature in relation to issues of planning and target setting. These are: (a) there is huge variability across initiatives in regard to these; and (b) there is a growing awareness that these are essential in facilitating effective inter-agency working.**

The area of planning and target setting is one where inter-agency work in the children's sector can draw on previous experience. However, three key issues need to be addressed if effective planning and target setting is to become possible.

- Good baseline data that can facilitate planning and objective setting. Inter-agency initiatives in the children's sector will benefit from the availability of accurate and up-to-date statistics and data on the situation of children and young people at local level. This information could be shared by all organisations working within the sector at local level and tailored to their specific concerns. Good baseline data will facilitate strategic planning and will also facilitate setting targets and timeframes.
 - The setting of specific rather than vague or overly general targets and timeframes within which these should be achieved. A significant failing at the moment – although it pertains more in some areas than others – is the failure to set clear targets and reasonable timeframes within which these can be achieved. In this regard, the importance of a common understanding of what is to be achieved, the roles and responsibilities of the agencies and individual staff members involved and the resources and supports available to achieve inter-agency work becomes evident. An area based approach to setting overarching targets across interventions in the children's sector at local level (guided by the CSCs) could provide a useful approach to this. This could be guided by but would need to supersede, the goals set down in the National Children's Strategy (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the indicators of child well-being.
 - Appropriate mechanisms to collect the relevant data to underpin ongoing monitoring. The failure to collect the type of data that would indicate if these targets were being reached or not contributes to the lack of evidence on the effectiveness and appropriateness of inter-agency working in various settings.
- b. Strategic planning, target setting and monitoring should contribute to the sustainability of appropriate and effective inter-agency work.**

A final issue here is that of sustainability. There is a need to be careful about the ongoing development of inter-agency mechanisms which simply add to the number of initiatives at local level and that risk consigning inter-agency work to pilot projects. Sustainability requires that organisations that are participating in inter-agency work become adept at being inter-agency organisations and that they learn from inter-agency experiences to reconfigure their existing services. These aspects of inter-



agency working and learning should be included within strategic planning, target setting and monitoring process and procedures.

7.2.7 Research and Evaluation

a. The literature reveals a number of areas in which further research and evaluation are required if inter-agency work is to develop in an informed and effective manner.

A number of issues have emerged from the literature in relation to research and evaluation. As already indicated above, these include lack of baseline data, lack of monitoring data and the lack of comparative data. A further very significant issue is the failure to include the voice of the child in evaluations of services that are primarily aimed at improving their well-being. Related to this point is the extent to which the participating agencies have been shown to be the primary beneficiaries of inter-agency approaches, with the children whom these approaches are intended to serve being secondary or even tertiary beneficiaries.

The development of a more comprehensive and systematic approach to evaluating children's services and children's policy is required as well as mechanisms to involve the participation of children within this. The central question to be asked is to what extent inter-agency working in children's services and policies improves the processes and outcomes experienced by the children concerned, over and above those secured by single-agency approaches. Evaluation on this basis will serve to improve our understanding of inter-agency working and strengthen the rationale for and effectiveness of inter-agency approaches.

7.3 Recommendations

In light of this analysis and that contained in preceding chapters the following key recommendations are suggested in assisting the CAAB, and other relevant organisations, of initiatives that can be taken to implement inter-agency working, and to provide a basis for positive action in this area. It is important to stress here that while inter-agency work has been subject to much criticism in practice, this is not a basis for arguing against inter-agency work: rather it should be interpreted as evidence of the need for greater understanding of, and planning for, inter-agency work to enable it to achieve effective outcomes

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that when planning, undertaking or reviewing inter-agency co-operation approaches and initiatives, agencies in the children's sector take into account the conclusions presented in this report (see Section 7.2) to inform their work.



Recommendation 2

A more robust approach, definition and understanding of inter-agency working should be developed in order to facilitate effective approaches. The main objective of this recommendation is to develop a sectoral consensus and understanding of inter-agency approaches.

The following steps are suggested:

- a.** A conceptual/theoretical approach to inter-agency working to inform the rationale for and the basis for adopting inter-agency interventions across a range of areas should be developed.
- b.** A more critical approach to assessing the relevance of inter-agency working in concrete situations is necessary, to avoid the assumption that inter-agency approaches are always the most appropriate response.
- c.** There is a need to clarify the language and terminology used to clearly differentiate between integrated planning and integrated service delivery. Lack of precision on this issue can frustrate the development of integrated services.
- d.** Conduct and/or commission research to aid understanding of integrated service delivery in different contexts, including the distillation of lessons for specific settings and those that can be applied to inter-agency approaches more broadly. This should include research into the impact of developments in the past 10 years or so, including the Children Act, 2001, the National Children's Strategy, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the provisions of *Towards 2016*, on putting in place national and local structures to facilitate inter-agency working.



Recommendation 3

Measures should be taken to support the development of effective structures of co-operation and to support the members of these structures.

The importance of appropriate structures at various levels – from national to local – is highlighted in the literature. Consideration should be given to the following:

- a.** Develop protocols to help ensure the participation of key agencies in local structures. This should incorporate guidelines on active and constructive forms of participation, how agencies might support front line staff in inter-agency working, the development of information sharing protocols and other mechanisms of co-operation.
- b.** Take actions to help ensure an appropriate level of meaningful involvement of the community and voluntary sector. This might include the development of guidelines for helping to ensure parity of esteem for community sector representatives as well as feedback mechanisms to the wider community. Regard for the fact that community organisations have fewer resources than statutory agencies is also necessary.
- c.** Provide guidance and assistance on ways to work with inter-agency structures to identify and respond to problems with non-co-operative or obstructing agencies. While this is an issue that needs to be addressed within the context of any specific inter-agency initiative, it is important to anticipate any such difficulties and agree mechanisms for overcoming them.



Recommendation 4

Appropriate Irish resources should be provided to support inter-agency co-operation.

Providing resources, tools and incentives for inter-agency working is recognised as important but remains somewhat underdeveloped within the literature. In developing Irish resources it would be important to draw and build on relevant international resources and tools, for example resources on the Every Child Matters website (www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters), tools developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (www.cwdcouncil.org.uk) and other relevant international resources and tools. In addressing this within the Irish children's sector, the following are important:

- a.** Develop training for inter-agency working in the children's sector. This training should address key issues such as clarifying roles and responsibilities, defining inter-agency working in the specific context and building agency-to-agency rather than, or as well as, individual-to-individual relationships. Training should also take a whole organisation approach, that is all relevant personnel within the organisation should be trained and not just those seen to have a primary role within the inter-agency process.
- b.** Develop a toolbox for inter-agency working at all levels, to include technical expertise, training and sharing of good practice. Resources to facilitate target setting, data collection and identifying impact indicators are particularly important.
- c.** Support the sharing of learning and dissemination of good practice. This could be facilitated by publications on inter-agency working in the children's sector but would need to be accompanied by pragmatic measures to bed down learning in various contexts.

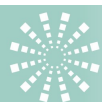


Recommendation 5

Actions should be taken to support the effective planning, strategy development and review of inter-agency working and initiatives in the children's sector.

Currently, there is a lot of unevenness across inter-agency initiatives with regard to how strategically they are planned, implemented and reviewed. Work in this area should include the following:

- a.** Help to ensure that inter-agency initiatives have good knowledge and data on the local context is essential. Ways to provide relevant data to inter-agency initiatives, to assist them in developing integrated impact indicators, and to develop data gathering mechanisms should be explored.
- b.** Help to ensure that all levels of inter-agency work are involved in strategic planning, target setting and monitoring and that this extends to absorbing the learning within organisations.
- c.** Promote a more systematic approach to evaluation with systemic participation by children and young people. Evaluations of integrated service delivery mechanisms involving a client perspective are particularly warranted.



Appendix A BIBLIOGRAPHY

References are provided here on a chapter by chapter basis. Due to the relevance of some references to more than one chapter, a small number of references may appear more than once.

The material in this bibliography is also referenced in database format on the CAAB website, www.caab.ie. The database can be searched under any or all of six headings – category, focus of publication, type of publication, commissioning body/publisher, author and year.

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Chapter 7: Conclusions Issues and Ways Forward

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Appendix B LIST OF ACRONYMS

ABPC	Area-Based Partnership Company
AIT	Area Implementation Teams
CAAB	Children Acts Advisory Board
CAC	Children's Advisory Committees
CDB	County/City Development Board
CDF	Community Development Fund
CPA	Combat Poverty Agency
CDP	Community Development Project
CSC	Children's Services Committees
DES	Department of Education and Science
DWS	Developmental Welfare State
FWC	Family Welfare Conference
GEB	Giving Children and Even Break
GYDP	Garda Youth Diversion Project
GJDP	Garda Juvenile Diversion Programme
HSE	Health Services Executive
HSCLS	Home/School/Community Liaison Scheme
IGUCD	Inter-Departmental Group on Urban Crime and Disorder
IYJS	Irish Youth Justice Service
ISI	Integrated Services Initiative
LCA	Leaving Certificate Applied
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
JCSP	Junior Certificate School Programme
JLO	Juvenile Liaison Officer
LDSIP	Local Development Social Inclusion Programme
LDTF	Local Drugs Task Force
LES	Local Employment Service
NAPS	National Anti-Poverty Strategy
NDP	National Development Plan
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NESC	National Economic and Social Council



NESF	National Economic and Social Forum
NEWB	National Education Welfare Board
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OMCYA	Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
PESP	Programme for Economic and Social Progress
PHN	Public Health Nurse
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
SCP	School Completion Programme
SIM	Social Inclusion Measures
TYP	Transition Year Programme

