

Integrated children's services:
conformity, diversity and
managing the market



Sharing our experience

Practitioner-led research 2008-2009

PLR0809/017



This report is part of CWDC's Practitioner-Led Research (PLR) programme. Now in its third year, the programme gives practitioners the opportunity to explore, describe and evaluate ways in which services are currently being delivered within the children's workforce.

Working alongside mentors from Making Research Count (MRC), practitioners design and conduct their own small-scale research and then produce a report which is centred around the delivery of Integrated Working.

The reports are used to improve ways of working, recognise success and provide examples of good practice.

This year, 41 teams of practitioners completed projects in a number of areas including:

- Adoption
- Bullying
- CAF
- Child trafficking
- Disability
- Early Years
- Education Support
- Parenting
- Participation
- Social care
- Social work
- Travellers
- Youth

The reports have provided valuable insights into the children and young people's workforce, and the issues and challenges practitioners and service users face when working in an integrated environment. This will help to further inform workforce development throughout England.

This practitioner-led research project builds on the views and experiences of the individual projects and should not be considered the opinions and policies of CWDC.

Integrated children's services: conformity, diversity and managing the market

David Atkinson and Juliette Yardley
February 2009

Contents

Abstract

1. Introduction
2. Aims of the Research Project
3. The Context
4. Methodology
5. Findings
6. Implications for Practice
7. Conclusion

References

Appendix 1: Planning for Focus Groups

Appendix 2: Email invitation to staff

Appendix 3: Letter to parents of young people

Acknowledgements

Professor Andrew Bilson, University of Central Lancashire

Tilly Heigh, Halton Borough Council

Amanda O'Brien, Halton Voluntary Action

Sharon Sandell, Halton Borough Council

The young people and staff who took part in the focus groups

The staff, trustees and volunteers of HITS

Contact: davidatkinson@hits-halton.org.uk HITS, 84 Grangeway, Runcorn, WA7 5HA; a pdf of this report may be downloaded from www.therealsite.co.uk

Abstract

This research looked into using the model of a children's trust as the delivery vehicle for integrated children's services. The research explores what these developments mean for service delivery in practice, for organizational identity and autonomy, for lines of accountability and whether the new structures should be viewed as a new 'organizational form', or as 'arrangements' for market management.

Primary data was gathered through focus groups and one to one interviews with young people. These include six participants from HITS young women's group, four participants from Connexions and four young people from the Youth Service. The Director of Children's Services took part in the young people's groups. As well as young people, staff members were involved in focus groups and one to one interviews. There were seven managers from the voluntary and statutory sectors and seven practitioners from the voluntary and statutory sectors.

The question for exploration was whether the roll out of integrated services demands conformity that constrains diversity of service provision (respondents preferred the term 'consistency' to 'conformity').

A useful theoretical framework for understanding children's services was found to be 'the market', in which commissioning has a key role in meeting identified need by matching the supply of services with demand. It was observed that 'commissioning' takes place at individual, operational and strategic levels, and as an activity it is not confined to 'commissioners'.

The principle findings were: that the children's trust should be an enabler, not a provider of services; that the trust's role was to regulate the market by achieving consistency through common standards and common processes; it need not be the sole commissioner of services for children and young people.

These findings were consistent with emerging research and with government guidance which move children's trusts from being an organizational 'form' to being organizational 'arrangements'. The lighter touch of 'arrangements', allows continuation of the diversity valued by our respondents; however, as such diversity remains threatened by market forces driving towards consolidation.

1. Introduction

This research was commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council as part of the Practitioner-Led Research programme, under a theme of 'Integrated Service Delivery'. The research was undertaken by staff from HITS, a voluntary agency which has been providing services for children and young people in Halton, Merseyside, since 1982. Knowledge of local services and individuals, membership of multi-agency groups, and a researcher with prior experience of research work, made HITS well positioned to undertake the research.

The topic of the research was children's trusts as the delivery vehicle for integrated children's services. The research explores what these developments mean for service delivery in practice, for organizational identity and autonomy, for lines of accountability, and whether the new structures should be viewed as a new 'organizational form', or as 'arrangements' for market management.

2. Aims of the project

The aims of the project were to find out:

- how managers and practitioners make sense of the 'reality' of integrated children's services, and whether their understanding changes as a result of participation in the research project
- about service users' views of the value of integrated working.

A senior manager in Halton has stated that the children's trust is 'a virtual organization'. Explored more fully below (3.2), this statement provided a framework for interpreting 'integrated children's services' developments as demanding conformity (and by implication reducing diversity) in order to meet the requirements of the 'organization', and the research question:

Does the roll out of integrated services demand conformity that constrains diversity of service provision – perspectives of young people, practitioners, and managers?

3. Context: children's trusts and integrated services

3.1 Legislation and guidance

The concept of 'children's trusts' was raised in the *Every Child Matters* green paper in September 2003. The document, published by the government in response to Lord Laming's inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié, proposed running children's social care, education and some health services together in trusts, alongside services such as youth offending teams. The children's trust

was seen as the vehicle for the delivery of 'integrated children's services':

'The government's long term vision is to integrate key services within a single organizational focus. The preferred model for achieving this integration is children's trusts.' (DoH 2003)

The Children Act (2004) provided the legal basis for *Every Child Matters*. Children's trusts were to be accountable for the five new outcomes: be healthy, be safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic wellbeing. The trust would be:

'a single planning and commissioning function supported by pooled budgets'.

Unsurprisingly, 'a lot of people thought we had to set up this thing called the children's trust' (local authority strategy manager (Audit Commission 2008: 27)).

Subsequent guidance retreated from the emphasis on organizational form, focusing instead on the purpose of the changes:

'children's trusts are not legal entities' but 'a set of arrangements' which should 'produce integrated working at all levels, from planning through to delivery, with a focus on improving outcomes.' (DfES 2005)

The legal status of children's trusts was to be that of the 'unincorporated association' (Audit Commission 2008: 67). In the face of reluctance to pool budgets, the emphasis shifted to 'aligned funding', where partners work together towards shared objectives and commission services jointly, but funding streams remain separate (pp. 50–51).

The Audit Commission found that changing government guidance caused confusion: children's trusts may be better seen as arrangements for 'organizing' rather than as an organization entity, albeit a virtual one.

3.2 In search of a theory base

There are a variety of theoretical perspectives on 'the organization'. Building on the work of 19th-century sociologist, Max Weber, there is an 'ideal type' of 'structure' in which roles, responsibilities and authority are allocated through a centrally controlled hierarchy (Luthans 1989: 559). More recently, the organization has come to be understood as a 'social entity', 'brought into existence in an ongoing way by humans to serve some purpose' with 'nominal boundaries' which 'give a degree of consensus about who or what is part of the organization, and who or what belongs elsewhere' (Rollinson, Broadfield and Edwards 1998: 2).

Adopting these perspectives, the children's trust is not an 'organization': the 'organizations' that make up the trust, and not the trust itself, have control of their own boundaries (who is hired and fired); the trust agencies are not

subject to control by the trust because (with the exception of the Council) they are ultimately accountable to governing bodies outside the local authority. Other perspectives shift emphasis to 'organization' as a means of 'organizing' rather than as an end state (Chia 1995), and relax the boundary condition in favour of 'network strengthening practice' (Malave 1998; 126).

In Halton, the pre-children's trust arrangement was termed 'the Alliance', but the prescriptive background to the Alliance and the dominant position of the local authority make a poor fit with much of what the literature has to say about successful strategic alliances (Pansiri 2005; Kanter 1994). An alternative view is that the trust is a *network* with the local authority in a nodal position from which it drives the other partners along (Johnson and Scholes 1999). The children's trust structure may be viewed as network management, as in a study of the Local Strategic Partnership ('superboard') model on which it was based (Johnson 2005).

Institutional theory asserts that organizations operating within a recognized 'field' tend towards similarity because they need to conform to rules and other requirements so as to receive support and maintain legitimacy (Scott and Meyer 1994: 24). This provides a perspective on children's trusts, where the adoption of 'common processes', such as the Common Assessment Framework and the 'Common Core' for workforce skills and competencies, are explicitly conformity-inducing activities.

The 'field' in which children's trust 'member' organizations operate may be understood as a 'market' (in the economic sense) and integrated children's services as an exercise in market management through the control and manipulation of supply and demand. A variety of mechanisms control supply side activity: 'co-location' of staff from different agencies; 'virtual teams' (where staff do not co-locate but share processes and end users); the 'lead professional' arrangements for co-ordinating the various agency pieces in individual casework; 'joint commissioning' of provision. The Common Assessment Framework attempts control of demand side activity by regulating access to provision. The Children and Young People's Plan may be understood as the ultimate arbiter of supply and demand regulation in children's services.

Applying the economic market concept to public services is problematic in that the end user has no purchasing power and therefore limited capacity to exercise choice. A goal of maximizing market 'contestability' is undermined by the market character which is that of oligopoly: there are a number of competitors (but much less than in perfect competition) with dominant 'firms' (in particular statutory agencies) and collusion within the market (NAVCA 2007; DfES 2006). Judith Smyth (author of *Integrated Commissioning: a Practical Guide*, DCSF, forthcoming) has stated that all markets tend to consolidation and reduction in diversity, as larger firms compete for dominance and smaller ones are eliminated or conform to survive (Smyth 2009).

3.3 Research

Recent surveys of the literature find very little research that demonstrates the impact of integrated working on outcomes for children and families (Lord et al. 2008; Robinson, Atkinson and Downing 2008). There was little enthusiasm for prescriptive, 'one size fits all', models:

'the outcomes of integrated working are situation specific and...diverse approaches to the degree/extent of integration may be equally valid, rather than there being one ideal model...full integration of services is not necessarily the way forward. Rather, a looser arrangement allowing the right people to work together at the right time to deal with the right issues, was felt to be more powerful.' (Robinson, Atkinson and Downing: 3)

These authors found a range of inhibitors to integration: loss of organizational autonomy and a greater reliance or dependence on partners; cultural differences among managers and professionals; different agency policies, procedures and systems; tensions caused by the persistence of divergent missions and differing assumptions about the vision underlying whole-system integration.

Many key findings of the study by Lord et al. (2008) echo those of other research on integrated working. The importance of clarity of purpose, strong leadership and management, developing common language and trust between partners and understanding responsibilities are all identified as enablers of integration by other studies. The 'language' of integration is an indicator of the extent to which it had become established.

4. Methodology

The principle method for gathering primary data was focus groups. The small group is a useful tool where the 'reality' is neither fixed nor determined, as in the case of integrated children's services. Focus groups (and interviews) are 'social situations' through which meanings and the understanding of an individual may be explored and developed. Steyaert and Bouwen (1994: 74) argue that 'members of small groups are natural researchers in that they are constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing, social realities'. It was expected that some participants (particularly the young people) would not have explored the issues before and would develop their understanding through conversation with the facilitators and with others in the group. It was realistic to expect that the young people would be able to contribute to a focus group conversation. Shewring (2008) found that young people who had been 'the centre of a multi agency team' knew 'what the phrase means', while a Halton Youth Cabinet report (2008) asserted that young people are more aware of integrated youth services issues 'than most people give them credit for'.

The researchers decided that potentially different perspectives on the topic held by managers, practitioners and young people would strengthen the data, and that focus group composition should be based on these separate groups. It was thought that practitioners may be deterred by the presence of managers, and young people by the presence of staff. No distinction was made between the voluntary and statutory sectors, because the researchers believed that contrasting perspectives would add value to the focus group discussion.

Follow up one to one interviews were held with six of the staff participants, chosen to ensure an even spread of voluntary and statutory sector subjects, but otherwise by random selection. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to explore in more detail the main themes emerging from the focus group data.

4.1 The focus groups

The main strategy for recruiting focus group participants was open invitation by email to a range of contacts in the statutory sector (primarily Halton Borough Council), and to Halton's Children and Young People Third Sector Partnership (a network for voluntary organizations). Recipients were invited to take part in the manager and practitioner groups, and to nominate young people for a focus group. The email had been preceded by notice of the research being given at various partnership meetings (see 4.4).

There was an even spread of representation across the voluntary (7) and statutory (7) sectors in the staff groups. Two voluntary organizations volunteered young people for the research: HITS (the researchers' employer), offering an established group of young women (14 to 16 years old); and Halton Autistic Family Support (HAFS), which works with young people diagnosed with autism and related conditions. Statutory sector organizations, Connexions and the Youth Service, volunteered young people to take part.

The following focus groups were held:

- Managers from the voluntary and statutory sectors (7 people).
- Practitioners from the voluntary and statutory sectors (7 people).
- Young people: the HITS young women's group (6); another with Connexions and the Youth Service young people (4). The Director of Children's Services took part in the young people's groups, young people's perspectives on integrated children's services being of interest to him. In addition, the researchers believed that his involvement would help secure high level 'buy in' for the project.

The focus groups were held at HITS' premises in Runcorn, each with two facilitators. A third person took handwritten notes, and in the case of the staff groups, monitored audio recording. Video (as well as audio) recording was made of one of the young people groups (the young women declined the video).

Each of the focus groups was approached differently: the researchers assumed relatively little understanding of integrated children's services on the part of the young people, and experience of the first (practitioner) group influenced the approach to the (second) manager group. The young people were asked to share their knowledge of the range of services, of how to access the services, and their experience of services working together. The practitioner group was asked to explore the concepts of 'diversity' and 'conformity' in relation to integrated children's services. For the manager group, a series of statements (research and unattributed statements from individuals) was used to stimulate discussion (Appendix 1).

Analysis of the data from the focus groups led to the identification of 'themes' which were then tested against the data by the simple expedient of sorting the data into a separate envelope for each theme. Significant 'left over' data could then point to an error in initial analysis. The themes were also tested in the follow-up interviews.

4.2 Limitations

The principle limitation was the small scope of the project, with just 24 respondents (14 staff, ten young people). The young people had limited prior knowledge of integrated children's services, and although it was interesting to find that one group (the HITS group) were far the more knowledgeable about the range of services, it did not help in answering the research question. The second (managers) group produced richer data than the practitioner group. The explanation for this could be all or any of the following: learning by the facilitators from the first group, the presence in that group of someone who had previously line managed two of the participants, the managers being more accustomed to debating strategic issues.

The researchers were advised that the young people from HAFS would not be suitable to join a group with other young people and consequently they were not included in the research. This raises issues about equality of access to the research, but the researchers chose not to provide a separate response, due to finite capacity, and experience of the other young people groups suggesting that there would be limited data of value.

Time pressures, and scepticism about the value and purpose of the research, may have deterred some potential subjects. Time was cited by individuals from the voluntary sector as a barrier to their involvement.

4.3 Ethical considerations

The principles guiding consideration of the ethical basis of the research were drawn from Department of Health guidance (DoH 2005), with the following seen as particularly relevant:

- The dignity, rights, safety and wellbeing of participants must be the primary consideration in any research study.

- Informed consent is at the heart of ethical research.
- Care is needed when seeking consent from children.

In order to ensure that staff participants were giving informed consent for their participation, information about the purpose of the research, and how the data would be used, was made available with invitations to the focus groups (Appendix 2).

For the young people, information was given verbally, and a letter was sent to their parents (Appendix 3). It was seen as appropriate to obtain informed consent verbally through adults who knew the young people, because information given could be adjusted in response to evidence that the young people did or did not understand what was being asked of them. The young people were deemed to be of an age (13 years and over) where they were agents of their own consent, rather than being reliant on the consent of parents. The letter to parents created a communication channel through which any concerns could be raised. This strategy was seen as justified from a children's rights perspective, the children and young people having the right to have taken into account their views about services they receive. This places the ethical considerations in line with those for consultation rather than for research: this was seen as providing sufficient safeguards for the work undertaken with the young people.

The provision of a high street voucher (£10) was seen as appropriate compensation for the time spent by young people taking part.

At the start of each focus group, a limited guarantee of confidentiality was given to participants, the limitation being the likelihood of significant harm to persons, participants and others. Consent was sought for the use of audio and video recordings: the wish of some young people not to be video recorded was respected. An undertaking was given to all participants that attributable data (audio, video, written) would not be used in any publication without explicit agreement.

4.4 Engaging stakeholders

Stakeholders are typically understood in relation to *entities*, as 'those individuals or groups who depend on the organization to fulfil their own goals and on whom, in turn, the organization depends' (Johnson and Scholes 1999), but the concept is equally applicable to *activities* such as research. In this instance, a range of voluntary and statutory agencies, commissioning or providing services for children and young people, were stakeholders. The lead researcher's membership of strategic partnership groups provided opportunity for notifying people of the research, usually resulting in lively discussions which subsequently provided material for the focus groups. The research proposal was tabled at successive meetings of the Third Sector Partnership (September, October 2008), and presented at a third meeting in December. In December, a presentation was made at a 'Children's Trust Away Day', to an

audience mainly from statutory agencies. Stakeholder response was generally positive, although one view (from the third sector) was that the case for the 'need' for the research had not been made and that stakeholder engagement should have preceded an application for funding.

5. Findings

5.1 The young people

The data was drawn from two focus groups, the first were HITS service users, the second recruited from Connexions and the Youth Service. The principle finding was that:

Young people in receipt of a targeted service provided by a voluntary agency had better understanding of integrated services than young people in receipt of universal service provided by statutory agencies.

The HITS group proved to be the more knowledgeable. They knew what each service provided and how they could access provision. They understood that services talked to each other and several had personal experience of multi-agency meetings. On the whole their view was that this was a positive process, designed to meet their needs. However, there were some challenges to this, such as poor communication, having to repeatedly 'tell your story', and lack of consultation around assessment of need. The Connexions/Youth Service group displayed little knowledge of the services available. If in need they would be reluctant to talk to a 'professional' adult, such as a teacher, their experience giving them lack of trust that the situation would be effectively handled. They did not have a good understanding of multi-agency working.

The finding was not surprising to the attendees at the staff groups, although a number of explanations were offered: that 'they don't know about us until they actually need us'; that it reflected poor preventive services: 'you have to have a crisis, diagnose the crisis and look for help in the middle of the crisis'. A class dimension was suggested: 'we over-problematize working class young people, middle class young people have better supportive networks at home', but the groups' composition could not be differentiated on 'class' lines.

5.2 The staff

The data was drawn from the practitioner and manager focus groups, and from six individual interviews. The principle findings were as follows.

Integrated services are positive

There was widespread support for the principle of integrated services:

‘The principle of integration is sound’ with the children’s trust ‘the one vehicle for driving that [integration]’ but not ‘necessarily the sole vehicle for delivery’.

Several people reported positive experiences of work in co-located teams (including cross-sector teams), and integration was seen as necessary to improve the experience of children and families: negative consequences of poorly co-ordinated services included retelling your story to each agency and instances of several professionals calling at the same family’s home at different times on the same day.

‘It is not always clear for professionals what different services offer, and it must be even more difficult for families.’

From the perspective of the third sector, integration presents a particular challenge:

‘The challenge for the third sector in the integration agenda is to integrate itself.’

Tightening of resources and commissioning practice make integration more difficult:

‘Commissioning is in danger of driving third sector organizations apart, not together: competitiveness is on its way back in.’

Many commented on the danger of organizations risking loss of their identity, especially those from voluntary organizations:

‘They must retain their autonomy and it would be dangerous not to do so.’

From a statutory perspective, third sector services are valuable, but it is difficult for the sector to have an impact, because it:

‘does not have a corporate identity and is not one body but a disparate group of bodies.’

The children’s trust should be an enabler not a provider of services

‘The role of the children’s trust is to enable (those) services to be in place, rather than be responsible for providing them.’

The children’s trust achieves this by being:

‘The vehicle for taking forward the Children’s Plan’ and ‘ensuring that that all services for children in its area are safe, legal and maintained good standards.’

Integrated planning should help eradicate conflicting targets, such as the police's target to increase use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders versus the prevention agenda of other services.

The trust should act as 'a critical friend' to ensure the maintenance of standards in terms of quality, common processes, and relevance to the five outcomes of the Children's Plan. One person commented that:

"The children's trust is like a jigsaw, the organizations and services being the pieces', but all 'part of an overarching picture'.

There was broad agreement that children's trusts need not be the sole commissioner of services, voluntary organizations also having access to additional resources. The majority view was that the Children's Plan should remain the basis for applying additional resources. A minority view was that the needs mapping behind the current Children's Plan was inadequate, undermining its credibility as the sole arbiter of resource allocation.

Diversity of service is positive

Integration may lead to better outcomes for children and young people but:

'It should never result in an odorous organization that is centrally controlled and difficult to influence and create positive change quickly' and 'if there is only one organization, who do you complain to?'

Diversity provides opportunity for a broad range of services to best meet the individual needs of children and young people:

'It's not a one size fits all approach.'

Both statutory and voluntary services provided an approach that although different in service design worked well in providing diversity:

'You're never going to stifle independence and innovation of the third sector, never will' and organizations 'needed to protect their ethos, not allowing mission drift to happen'.

These concerns were not confined to the voluntary sector. There was apprehension about a forthcoming merger of two statutory organizations:

'Whose values and beliefs will dominate?'

There was, however, a risk that 'the divide between the statutory and voluntary sectors would increase' because 'there will come a time when children's social care will only work with the most vulnerable.' Statutory organizations 'don't understand [the] voluntary sector, not the smaller organizations'.

Common processes are positive

There was widespread support for the principle and intent common processes:

‘If there are a lot of different organizational processes, how does an individual move between organizations – to stop people having to start again at the beginning – common processes try to avoid that.’

Discussion focused on the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Participants viewed this as an extremely useful process by which to best meet the needs of children and young people through a multi-agency approach, providing equality of access to services based on need.

But there were some caveats to the support for CAF:

‘The CAF process has been enabling...fully support it, absolutely necessary but smaller voluntary sector organizations do not have the resources to do so.’

The Lead Professional role was seen as a further drain on a small voluntary organization’s resources.

There was agreement with the statement that:

‘The CAF is intended to be the gateway process for access to children’s services other than at the very sharp end.’

But it was noted that some professionals misuse CAF, seeing it as a referral tool rather than an assessment process, and that it can be seen as a barrier to service access. Other referral and assessment processes persist, with some schools declining to undertake the CAF, and some statutory agencies maintaining their own processes.

There was little support for the researcher statement that:

‘The children’s trust lacks the authority to achieve conformity’ in the adoption of common processes. Contracting would give the children’s trust the necessary leverage in relation to commissioned services, and the insistence on common processes ultimately lay with the government, and: ‘even the smallest organizations should commit to the process’.

‘Conformity’ is seen negatively and the term ‘consistency’ is preferred

Participants felt that the word ‘conformity’ had ‘negative connotations’, and had an ‘autocratic and authoritarian’ feel to it. ‘Consistency’ was a word most respondents preferred to use, believing it fitted well with common processes.

6. Implications for practice

'A job of Government is to regulate markets' (Smyth 2009). If integrated children's services are understood as market management, the key activity is matching of appropriate supply with identified need. This activity is commissioning, which is:

'The activities of those who are responsible for deciding how best to use the totality of resources available to improve the outcomes of a population – in our case, children and young people.' (Smyth 2009)

Commissioning is not solely a strategic level activity confined to people called 'commissioners': the Lead Professional role involves 'commissioning' services for an individual, and voluntary organizations with their own resources may 'commission' operational activity.

The implication is that there is a need for better understanding of the role of commissioning in all its forms wherever it occurs in the children's services market. The recent establishment of a Commissioning Support Group is evidence that this is recognized by the DCSF (ECM 2009).

Judith Smyth (2009) stated that all markets tend towards consolidation. In children's services, a number of factors reinforce this tendency:

- All organizations are required to ensure, and demonstrate, that their practices and processes are consistent with the requirements of the Children's Trust in its function as market regulator. These requirements appear to place a disproportionate burden on smaller organizations.
- Funding sources are concentrated through the 'pooling' or 'aligning' of budgets.
- Some purchasers favour larger contracts with fewer organizations.
- There is evidence of services provided by voluntary organizations being 'integrated backwards' by Local Authorities. (Porter 1979; NAVCA 2007)

The implication is that supply in the children's services market will become less diverse: voluntary organizations will need to collaborate more, compete less, in order to preserve the distinction of the contribution they bring to children's services (Atkinson 2007).

7. Conclusion

This research has enquired whether the roll out of integrated services demands conformity that constrains diversity of service provision (respondents preferred 'consistency' to 'conformity').

Judith Smyth (2009) stated that commissioning required striking a balance between the needs of children and young people, the needs of commissioners and the needs of service providers for viability. The indications from previous research and this project is that these needs are best served by:

- diversity of services (supply)
- conformity (or consistency) achieved through market regulation in the form of common processes and common standards.

The heavy hand implied by the early 'organizational form' of government guidance has been replaced by the lighter touch of 'organizational arrangements', allowing continuation of the diversity valued by our respondents; but that diversity remains threatened by market forces driving towards consolidation. Whether 'form' or 'arrangements', integrated services remains, in the words of one focus group attendee: 'a big ask...is it doable?' It is a question unlikely to be answered before the next wave of change is upon us: just as the current policies had their origin in one child protection investigation (Victoria Climbié), many of our respondents believe another (Baby P) may yet lead to a new shift of emphasis.

References

- Atkinson, D. (2007) *Reorganising to Capture New Realities: How Can Collaboration Improve the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Voluntary Organisations in Halton?* Unpublished MA Thesis.
<http://www.therealsite.co.uk/files/MA%20dissertation%20Collaboration.pdf>
- Audit Commission (2008) *Are We Nearly There Yet? Improving governance and resource management in children's trusts.*
- Chia, R. (ed.) (1998) *In The Realm of Organisation: Essays for Robert Cooper.* London: Routledge.
- DfES (2005) *Interagency cooperation to improve the wellbeing of children: children's trusts.*
http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/1200903D4F3C1396021B70D7146FAFE
[A.pdf](#) (13.03.07) DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.
- DfES (2006) *Overarching Report on Children's Services Markets.* Price Waterhouse Cooper.
- DoH (2003) Department of Health Guidance, Children's Trusts – Inviting Authorities to be Children's Trust Pilots, Department of Health, 30 January.
- DoH (2005) *Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care* Department of Health, Second edition.
- Every Child Matters* (ECM)
(2009).<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/strategy/planningandcommissioning/commissioningsupport/>
- Johnson, C. (2005) 'Strategic Superboards: improved network management processes for regeneration?' *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, **18**(2), pp. 139–150.
- Johnson, G. and Scholes, K. (1999) *Exploring Corporate Strategy.* Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education.
- Kanter, R. M. (1994) 'Collaborative Advantage: The Art of Alliances', *Harvard Business Review*, **72**(4), July/August, 00178012.
- Lord, P., Kinder, K., Wilkin, A., Atkinson, M. and Harland, J. (2008) *Evaluating the Early Impact of Integrated Children's Services.* Slough: NFER.
- Luthans, F. (1989) *Organisational Behaviour* (Fifth edn). McGraw Hill.

Malave, J. (1998) 'From bounded system to interlocking practices: logics of Organising', in Chia, R. (ed.) (1998) *In The Realm of Organisation: Essays for Robert Cooper* (pp. 111–141). London: Routledge.

NAVCA (2007) *Frontline Hopscotch: VCS Engagement in delivering change for children and young people: a jumpy start or 2 steps back?* Jason Lehman Centre for Voluntary Action Research for NAVCA.

Pansiri, J. (2005) 'The Influence of Managers' Characteristics and Perceptions in Strategic Alliance Practice', *Management Decision*, **43**(9), pp. 1097–1113.

Porter, M. (1979) 'From Competitive Advantage to Corporate Strategy', *Harvard Business Review paperback*, No. 90079, undated, p. 15.
Robinson, M., Atkinson, M. and Downing, D. (2008) *Supporting Theory Building in Integrated Services Research*. Slough: NFER.

Rollinson, D., Broadfield, A. and Edwards D. J. (1998) *Organisational Behaviour and Analysis*. Addison Wesley Longman.

Scott, W. R. S. and Meyer, J. W. (1994) *Institutional Environments and Organisations: structural complexity and individualism*. London: Sage.
Shewring, M. (2008) *How can multi agency partnerships affect the outcomes for children and young people, and the non-biological families they live with?* Michelle Shewring, CWDC PLR Project UIN 102 (unpublished).

Smyth, J. (2009) Addressing Conference on Commissioning, at the Reebok, Bolton, 27 February.

Steyaert, C. and Bouwen, R. (1994) 'Group Methods of Organisational Analysis', in Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (eds) *Qualitative Methods in Organisational Research*. London: Sage.

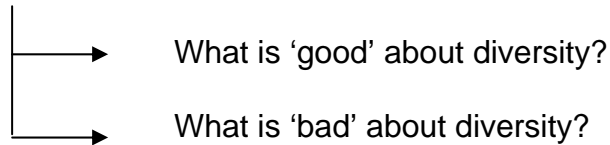
Youth Cabinet Report (2008), Halton Borough Council.

Appendix 1: Planning for Focus Groups

Practitioner focus group

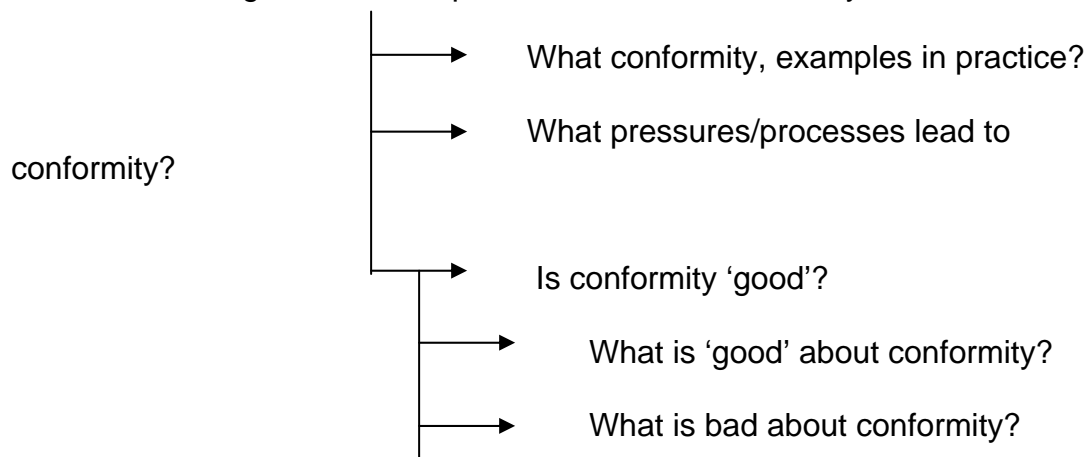
Research Question: Does the roll out of Integrated Services demand conformity that constrains diversity of service provision?

- Is diversity of service provision 'good'?

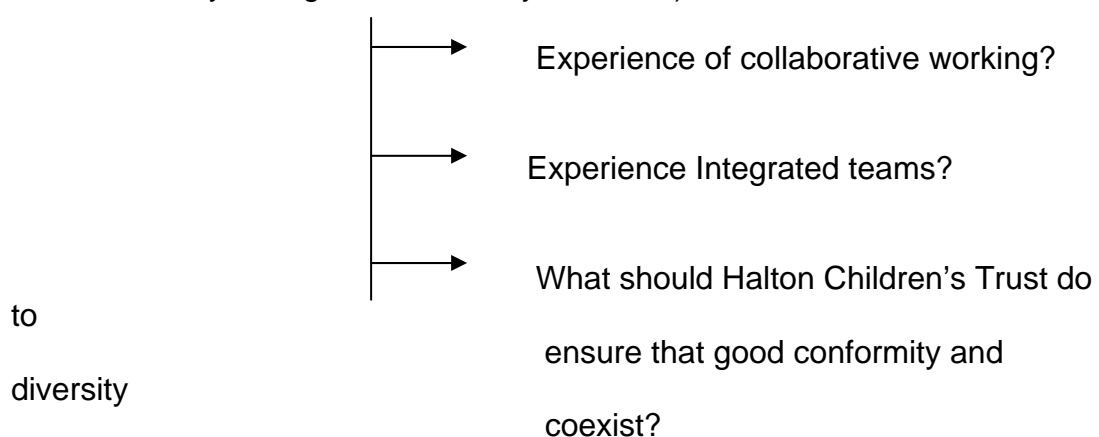


- (Was diversity promoted by the diverse and uncoordinated pre-ECM funding regime?) – *probably do not include this question*

- Does integrated service provision demand conformity?



- Is it possible for conformity and diversity to co-exist? (that is, can 'good' diversity and 'good' conformity co-exist?)



- The young people: one group knew a lot about different services, others knew very little: is this what you would expect to find?

Manager focus group

The following statements were used to stimulate discussion:

1. All services should be seen as provided by the Children's Trusts.
2. The Children's Trust should commission all services for children and young people in Halton.
3. Integrated Children's Services depends on conformity of process: but the Children's Trust does not have the authority to achieve conformity.
4. The Joint Area Review of Halton Children's Services stated: 'Excellent progress to implement the Common Assessment Framework which is having a good impact'.
5. Changing Government Guidance undermines the extent to which partnerships are driven by local circumstances: early guidance referred to 'organizational form, now uses the term 'children's trust arrangements'.
6. It's about integration, not assimilation.

1, 2, and 6 were all statements made by individuals during discussion about the Research Project, prior to the focus groups. Statement 4 is from Ofsted (2008), and number 5 is from the Audit Commission (2008). Statement 3 was created by the researchers.

Appendix 2: Email invitations sent to staff

1. Invitation to nominate young people to take part in focus group: 18.09.08

The purpose of this email is to ask you if you would like to nominate young people to take part in a focus group discussion, co-facilitated by myself and also attended by Director of Children's Services, Gerald Meehan. All I need you to do at this stage is to think about young people who would be interested in taking part and talk to them about it. I would be grateful if you could let me know you are doing this and are interested in supporting young people's participation, by Friday 3rd October. I will then ask you for individual names and contact details so that I am able to send out invitations.

The theme: young people - receiving a service from Halton Children's Trust or from a particular organization? Does it matter?

Time and place: 28th October 2008, at 2.00 pm , at HITS, 84 Grangeway, Runcorn, WA7 5HA.

It is the intention that the focus group will be filmed with edits from the film being used as part of a presentation on the research and its findings. Any potential participants need to be aware of this and to give their consent.

We are looking for a maximum 8 to 10 young people to take part. As well as the focus group, we plan to do one to one follow up interviews with a proportion of the participants to explore whether their understanding of integrated services has changed as a result of their participation.

The research has been commissioned by the Children's Workforce Development Council, which funds a research programme each year - this time the theme is integrated service delivery. There will also be separate focus groups for staff (managers, practitioners).

There is still some work to do on how the issues will be presented to the young people- we will 'test drive' some approaches with young people here at HITS. Participants do need to be able to grasp the concept that they receive services from an organization which is both an organization in its own right and part of a larger 'organization' - the Children's Trust. Age range 14 to 18 is probably appropriate, though not set in stone. HITS has ground floor level access and an accessible toilet so physically disabled young people can be encouraged to take part.

I have attached a summary of the Research Proposal that has been submitted to the CWDC. Any comments, suggestions, etc, will be very welcome. An online survey is also planned and invitations to the staff focus groups will follow separately. We are pushing ahead with the young people group so as to take advantage of the half term holiday.

I look forward to hearing from you by Friday 3rd October. Thank you.

2. Invitation to staff to take part in focus groups: 14.10.08

Hi

You may be aware that HITS has been commissioned by Children's Workforce Development Council to undertake a piece of research on Perceptions of Integrated Children's Services. I am contacting you now, either because you have shown an interest in the project (polite, critical, enthusiastic) or because I think you might be interested but may not know about it. The principle means of gathering data will be focus groups:

1. Young people: 2 focus groups set up for 28th October.
2. Practitioners: 1 focus group, date to be arranged.
3. Managers: 1 focus group, date to be arranged.

I would like to invite you to take part in the focus group for managers. If you would like to accept this invitation, please let me know your availability in relation to the dates below, not later than 12 noon on Monday 20th October:

Before 2.00 pm on:

14th, 17th, 27th November

1st, 2nd, 5th, 8th December

The group will last approximately 90 minutes and be at HITS. It will essentially be a facilitated conversation looking at what 'integration' does and should mean in practice from a variety of service and individual perspectives. I will be able to narrow down the starting point for the focus group discussion as things progress through conversations I am already having about this topic, themes emerging from the young people groups, and a steer from my mentor at University of Lancashire. After the focus groups, it is the intention to do a follow up interview with up to 50% of participants - this can be brief and conducted over the telephone or face to face if preferred. The purpose of the follow up interview is to see if people's perceptions of integrated services have changed as a result of their participation in the discussion: people will be able to opt in or out of this.

The main themes (not attributed to individuals) will be written up in a 3000/4000 word report which will go to CWDC and, subject to quality control, be published on their website. The findings may also be presented locally if there is an interest.

Once I know people's interest/availability, I will try and fix the date to fit, and send out a more formal invitation/confirmation.

Some people may be aware that a questionnaire was being piloted - we have decided not to go ahead with that.

Appendix 3: Letter to parents

Dear.....

I am writing to tell you about the event on Tuesday 28th October which your son/daughter is taking part in.

'Integrated Children's Services' is a term to describe the way in which services in Halton are required to work more closely together in order to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. Integrated Children's Services originated from Lord Laming's Report (2003) into the death of Victoria Climbié, where it was found that poor coordination between the services was a contributory factor in Victoria's death. Now, better integration is expected across all Children's Services, not just for the most vulnerable children such as Victoria. A research project is being undertaken by HITS to find out what young people and staff think about integrated children's services.

The session with the young people on Tuesday has three purposes:

- Educational: for the young people to find out about integrated service provision, how services work together and share information.
- Consultation: what do young people think about their experience of integrated services (if they have experience) or the idea of integrated services (if they do not).
- What would the young people like to say to senior managers about integrated services?

Gerald Meehan, Director of Children's Services in Halton, will take part in the session with the young people. Gerald will help explain integrated services to them, and hear their views.

The findings of the research will be published in a written report which will appear on the website of the Children's Workforce Development Council, which is commissioning the research. The report will not include anything which it makes it possible to identify the individuals taking part.

There will also be a 'live' presentation of the research to local agencies and to the Children's Workforce Development Council. This presentation may include voice and image recordings, but these will only be used with the agreement of the young people and will feature general comments not sensitive material about individuals.

I assure you that our primary concern remains for the well being and best interests of the young people taking part. Please contact me if there is anything that you would like to discuss with me.

Yours sincerely

David Atkinson, Chief Executive

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people and volunteers working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**
or visit **www.cwdcouncil.org.uk**

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES
email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk
or fax us on 0113 390 7744

© This publication is the copyright of the Children's Workforce Development Council 2009.
We like our communications to have an impact on you – but not on the environment –
which is why this document is printed on 100% recycled paper.