

# Limerick

Quality Assurance Framework



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| <i>Barnardos</i>                                       | <i>Limerick Literacy Project</i>                     |
| <i>Bedford Row Family Project</i>                      | <i>Limerick Social Services Centre</i>               |
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# Foreward

On behalf of the Limerick City Children’s Services Committee, I am delighted to introduce the Limerick Quality Assurance Framework (QAF). The purpose of this framework is to support all agencies working with children and families to develop a shared sense of what quality means in the sector and to provide a resource to support all organisations to work toward this standard.

The Framework was developed by the Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF) Sub-group with the support of Barnardos. The PIDF Sub-group, a sub-group of the Limerick City Children’s Services Committee (CSC), consists of four consortia (the Limerick City CSC, Start Right Limerick, Limerick DEIS Primary Schools Literacy Initiative and the Southside Education Campus). Each of these consortia has received funding from the PIDF as part of their Children’s Programme. PIDF is a joint funding initiative of Atlantic Philanthropies and Government, and it is managed by the Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick (SSIRL) Board and Management Team. The four consortia are working together to coordinate the programmes, and the development of the QAF is a joint project of the PIDF Sub-group.

Barnardos Best Practice Training and Consultancy Team was contracted to support the development of the QAF. Barnardos consulted widely with service providers from across the children and family sector in Limerick, so the Framework represents how those working in the sector view quality and sets out the standards of quality that we hope to meet in order to best meet the needs of children and families. The QAF is a resource for all organisations to support them to reflect on what they are doing well and to identify areas where they might make improvements. While the CSC will work with all organisations to support them in their use of the QAF if they need it, the use of the QAF is completely voluntary and meant only as a resource for organisations to use internally to reflect on and enhance quality.

We would like to thank all of those who have supported the development of the QAF including all of the service providers that participated in the consultations, those that participated in the pilot phase, the QAF Working Group and Barnardos Best Practice Training and Consultancy Team.

The CSC and the PIDF Sub-group believe that there is already excellent practice and high standards of quality across the sector. We all know, however, that some of the children in Limerick are not achieving the outcomes that they should be. We hope that the QAF will be a support for all of us as we strive to ensure that all children and families in Limerick City fulfil their potential. We hope that organisations will find this a valuable resource, and we would welcome ongoing feedback on the QAF.

***Tim Hanly,***  
***Acting Area Manager, Mid-West, Child and Families Services,***  
***Chair, Limerick City Children’s Services Committee***

# The Limerick Quality Assurance Framework

The Limerick Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) has been developed for organisations working with children and their families in Limerick to create a shared vision of quality for all to work towards. The Limerick QAF brings together evidence of **best practice** in children's services with local knowledge of practice and context. The overarching aim of the Limerick QAF is to promote and support the delivery of high quality services, with the ultimate aim of achieving better **outcomes** for children and their families. Engaging in the Limerick QAF is a voluntary process, with the framework being designed to support the quality of service delivery.

The Limerick QAF has been designed to be user-friendly and manageable for organisations. It has been developed to be applicable for a range of service types by identifying universal elements of quality, while respecting that organisations have different remits in service delivery. It is envisaged that the Limerick QAF will support organisations to enhance their current work, and to inform planning and service design.

The Limerick QAF has been designed to complement other quality assurance frameworks and evaluation systems. It is envisaged that use of the Limerick QAF will benefit services by:

- **Developing a shared understanding of what constitutes a quality service delivery, through the provision of an explicit language for quality which has been designed to enhance interagency work.**
- **Providing a benchmark for your organisation to assess the quality of service provision and service response.**
- **Supporting your organisation to identify areas of improvement and inform planning.**
- **Supporting individual staff members to review their work and identify areas for professional development.**

# Processes that support quality

Using a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is one of the ways organisations can work to enhance the quality of their service delivery. However, the organisations will have to undertake a number of processes in order to promote and support quality. This section will provide a brief overview of some of the key processes and factors which organisations need to attend to, in addition to using a QAF, in order to strive to deliver high quality services which make a real impact for children and families.

## Legislative and policy context

In Ireland, any organisation providing services for children and their families work within the legislative and policy context, which can support quality and often identifies standards with which they must comply. Some of the legislation relates to statutory bodies (such as the Freedom of Information Act, 1997), while other legislation relates to specific types of providers, such as the Child Care Act, 1991, which specifies standards for preschool delivery. Policy documents can also be important. For instance, the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (which is soon to be placed on a statutory footing) currently provides a roadmap for identifying and responding to child protection and welfare concerns (Dept. Children & Youth Affairs, 2011). It is important for individual organisations to identify the legislation and policies that are relevant to their service provision.

## National quality standards

There are agreed standards within the different sectors of children's services. There are national quality standards for youth work (National Quality Standards Framework for Youth Work), for social care and health care (Health Information and Quality Assurance standards), for early years (Síolta) and for schools (Whole School Evaluation) (Office of the Minister for Children & Youth Affairs, 2010; HIQA, n.d.; CECDE, 2006; Dept. Education & Skills, 2013). As outlined on page 6, this QAF seeks to promote a shared understanding of quality in Limerick across the different sectors working with children and their families.

## Partnerships with children and their families

Developing meaningful partnerships with children and their families is a key aspect of quality service delivery. Partnership is a reciprocal and mutual way of working together that combines the expertise, skills and knowledge of the children and their families with the expertise, qualities, skills and knowledge of the staff working in organisations. Ghate and Hazel (2002) found that parents want services that allow them to feel in control and meet their self-defined needs. Organisations and families can work as collaborative partners in the identification of needs or problems, in planning and in service delivery. Organisations can establish ways of working which foster partnerships through developing processes which promote respect, participation, trust, and open and honest communication. Providing children and their families with opportunities to shape service delivery is linked to improved quality (Williams, Rutter, & Gray, 2012).

Quality and the achievement of positive **outcomes** are linked to a number of organisational factors. Key processes and factors include: governance structures, strategic planning, financial planning, human resource management, use of information and knowledge, evaluation of service/programme delivery, learning culture and change management. Each of these aforementioned processes and factors will be outlined below. It is worth noting that each of the factors and processes is inextricably linked to organisational leadership and management, as managers and leaders play a key role in driving and supporting organisations to engage in activities and processes which support quality.

## Governance

Governance is associated with quality, as it ensures that organisations have clear lines of accountability (HIQA, 2012). Governance refers to how organisations are run, directed and controlled. Governance relates to financial management, managing risk, identifying goals and objectives, and developing clear lines of accountability. Within Ireland, there is no legislation relating to the governance of voluntary and community organisations; the Charities Act 2009 is currently not enacted. There is a Governance Code that voluntary and community organisations in Ireland can sign up to (Dept. Education & Skills, 2012). In addition, some organisations sign up the U.K. Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP), which obliges organisations to comply with specific requirements (Charity Commission, n.d.). Organisations can also provide transparent information through annual reports. Within the Irish context, there is growing recognition of the importance of organisations having strong governance structures to ensure decisions about service delivery and use of resources are made in the best interest of the children and families accessing the service (McGauran et al, 2005; HIQA, 2012).

## Strategic planning

Strategic planning is a method of identifying and articulating an organisation's vision and value statement, its goals and objectives, as well as actions and strategies to achieve those goals and objectives (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Within the context of children's services, strategic planning involves identifying the needs of children and their families, and mapping services to meet those needs (Godfrey, 2003). Identifying target **outcomes** (the intended changes in behaviours, skills and conditions) is particularly important to help ensure everyone is clear about what will be achieved as a result of the activities delivered. Organisations can develop **logic models** to describe the theory of change (that is, how change will be achieved). In addition, strategic plans need to specify how the organisation's services will operate in accordance with the policies and legislation governing children's services in Ireland. A key feature of the strategic planning process is assessment of the internal and external environment to identify risks and opportunities. The aforementioned is relevant for children's services in Ireland that operate in an ever-changing environment, where planning for sustainability and identifying risks to funding, or changes in policy priorities, is vital. Strategic planning is essential to help individual organisations to manage change in a proactive way and to create a shared organisational understanding of what needs to be achieved to support the attainment of **outcomes** (SCIE, 2010; Bryson, 2011).

## Financial planning

Strategic planning is closely related to financial planning. Financial planning allows for the best use of resources, identifying gaps in funding, supporting long-term sustainability and being compliant with legal obligations (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Within children's services, the current focus on reducing expenditure and being efficient needs to be considered in the context of meeting the needs of children and their families. Organisations need to engage in sound financial planning to ensure resources are available to deliver high quality services (Bean & Hussey, 2011).

## Human resource management

Human resource management (HRM) is linked to quality, as it supports organisations to recruit and retain good staff with the knowledge, skills and **competencies** to carry out the tasks required (Beardwell, Holden, & Claydon, 2004). There is a growing recognition of the value of organisations having clear expectations for each staff member, in terms of their roles and responsibilities (Whiddett & Hollyforde, 2003). Organisations can develop staff **competencies** by detailing the set of behavioural indicators that staff in particular roles are expected to demonstrate. Establishing staff **competencies** allows organisations to create a shared understanding of what behaviours staff are required to exhibit, and provides managers with behavioural examples of what they should see when a person is using their skills and abilities (Whiddett & Hollyforde, 2003). HRM also provides the mechanisms (such as policies and procedures) to facilitate management and staff to carry out their key functions. Examples of topics covered in HRM policies include probation periods, supervision and appraisal. Supervision and systems for managing workloads are particularly connected to quality in children's and family services (SCIE, 2010). Our Duty to Care and subsequent policy documents identify that organisations working with children and their families have a responsibility to ensure that all staff are vetted to check that they have no criminal record that would make them unsuitable for work with young people (Dept. Health & Children, 2002). Organisations need to put in place a robust HRM in order to ensure their services are delivered by competent staff who are supported to carry out their functions (Morley, Foley, & Tiernan, 2011).

## Information and knowledge

Organisations can enhance the quality of their delivery through the use of information and knowledge. Using research to inform service delivery involves carefully considering: what the needs of children and their families are; what the target **outcomes** are; how robust the research is; whether the research is relevant to the context and needs of the children and families the organisations are working with; and whether the organisations have the resources and staff skills to deliver the service in the way research indicates is most effective (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012). The use of **evidence-based** or **evidence-informed** programmes has been gaining momentum over the last 10 years in Ireland. **Evidence-based** practice involves using programmes that have been shown by independent research to achieve positive **outcomes** for the children or parents who take part in the programme (Maynard, 2010). **Evidence-informed** refers to practices or programmes that are based on both the best available evidence (for example, systematic reviews) and

practitioner expertise. Organisations can ensure decisions concerning service delivery are sound by focusing on the needs and experiences of the children and families, as well as using evidence. There has been a growing move towards using **logic models** to describe how changes will be achieved. **Logic models** are developed using research about what activities or practice will contribute to the achievement of specific, targeted **outcomes**.

## Evaluations of service or programme delivery

Evaluations of service or programme delivery provide us with important information about what is beneficial for children and their families (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Organisations can use service evaluations to identify whether target **outcomes** have been achieved, or to examine the process of implementing services, or both. Quantitative research can be used to identify the impact of the service on those receiving it by using standardised questionnaires or measurement instruments. Qualitative research can be used to gain an understanding of the impact of services on children and their families and stakeholders' experiences of the service and the implementation process. Qualitative methods include interviews, focus groups and observations of service delivery. Carrying out service evaluations normally requires organisations to seek expert advice or commission researchers to ensure the evaluation is thorough and accurate. Organisations also need to work on how to use the information from the evaluation to shape future service delivery.

## Organisational culture

Organisational culture is linked to quality, as it defines "*the way things are done around here*" (Chatterjee, 2009, p. 277). It also directly affects productivity and performance. For children's services, organisational culture impacts on how staff work and how they interact with children and their families, as well as with other agencies. In addition, organisational culture impacts on how committed staff are to the objectives the organisation is working toward (O'Donnell & Boyle, 2008). An organisational culture that supports and promotes learning and continuous improvement is closely linked to delivering high quality services (Hafford-Letchfield, 2010). Organisations can support learning and improvement by providing opportunities for staff to learn about new research and current thinking through training and access to books, journal articles, online resources and conferences. However, in order for organisations to develop a learning culture, the organisations have to develop an environment where staff can identify mistakes or challenges and explore different ways of working (Gill, 2010). For organisations working with children and their families, this will involve being open to, and providing, opportunities to examine current approaches to work, to explore alternative ways of working and to act on learning by changing work practices. Organisations can use different strategies to examine their work, such as **reflective practice**, feedback from stakeholders and formal evaluations. Within the context of reduced resources, providing learning opportunities can be challenging for organisations. However, learning can strengthen staff skills and **competencies**, both of which are directly related to quality delivery (SCIE, 2010).

## Managing ongoing change

Managing ongoing change is a significant feature of delivering services to children and their families. Organisations are required to adapt to changes (such as service users' needs) in the policy context, in access to resources, in funder requirements and in a social context. In order for organisations to maintain and improve quality during change, change needs to be managed effectively. O'Donnell and Boyle (2008) identify that how organisations manage change directly impacts on how the change is experienced by stakeholders and whether the change is successful. Key features of supporting change include: creating a shared understanding of the reason for the change; having leaders who create a shared vision of what change will look like and who will benefit from it; providing **meaningful** opportunities for staff to take a role in the change; and reviewing how the change went.

As is evident from this brief summary, achieving and maintaining quality is a complex process, which requires organisations to undertake multiple activities and to be continually open to examining and changing how they work in order to deliver high quality services which meet the needs of children and their families. Using the Limerick QAF will provide organisations with an opportunity to examine what they currently have in place to support quality and inform future work on quality.

# About the Limerick QAF

The Limerick QAF focuses on five areas of quality which have been identified through a literature review, consultation days with people working in Limerick and working with the Programme Innovation and Development Fund (PIDF) Sub-group. The Limerick QAF consists of five standards, each of which identifies an area of quality.

The five standards are:

1. **Organisations are responsive to needs and achieve positive outcomes**
2. **Organisations are committed to providing child-centred services**
3. **Organisations promote quality relationships with families**
4. **Organisations establish clear governance structures and support ongoing organisational and workforce development**
5. **Children and their families experience an integrated and accessible service**

The standards are interdependent, with each standard focusing on a key area of quality related to services for children and their families. Achieving positive **outcomes** for children and families is an overarching focus on delivering quality services. To this end, Standard 1 focuses on the area of addressing the needs of children and families and achieving **outcomes**. All five standards have been developed to focus on both organisational structures and processes. 'Structures' relates to the organisational resources, policies and procedures that are in place to support quality. 'Processes' focuses on the practices and ways of working that are in place and how these are experienced by children, families, staff and other stakeholders. The standards will help organisations to review progress in meeting needs and achieving **outcomes**, as well as providing a framework to examine their organisational structures and processes so that they can effectively support quality.

Each standard has an accompanying statement, which provides an overview of the quality area and identifies core values related to the area of quality. This supports organisations to get a better sense of the focus of the standard and the ideals which underpin it.

Each standard also has a set of indicators, which are specific and measurable elements of the quality area. Organisations can use the indicators, and associated indicator questions, to help assess its progress.

## Progress scale

The progress scale is a tool organisations can use to assess the extent to which they are advancing a particular standard. Each indicator explicitly states a particular aspect of quality. The indicator questions section provides the organisation with questions to review the types of practices, policies and procedures which are in place in relation to each indicator. Organisations self-assess how they are advancing by determining the extent to which a particular area of quality is in place by choosing one of the following points on the scale based on the evidence:

1. **New idea and/or not commenced:** The organisation is not familiar with, or has not started to develop its approach to, the aspect of quality.
2. **Initial stages of development:** The organisation has started to plan and develop practices, policies and procedures in relation to the aspect of quality.
3. **In place:** The organisation has developed practices, policies and procedures in relation to the aspect of quality.
4. **In place and under review:** The organisation has developed practices, policies and procedures as related to the indicator and is currently reviewing what is in place to ensure they are adequate.
5. **In place and demonstrating excellence:** The organisation has developed practices, policies and procedures related to the indicator and has reviewed them to ensure they demonstrate effectiveness and are in line with **best practice**. A key aspect of demonstrating excellence is having continual assessment and improvement processes in place.

# Using the Limerick QAF

Achieving quality is not an event; it is an ongoing process of striving for improvements in service delivery. Key aspects of quality include: designing and delivering services that meet the needs of children and families and achieving positive **outcomes** through effective, accessible and inclusive services. Continuously working on quality involves engaging in the following steps (as depicted in *Figure 1* below): a) reviewing current situation; b) assessing progress; c) developing action plan.

Figure 1: Process for working on quality



### Step a)

Review current situation: using the standard, indicators and associated indicator questions, your organisation can review the organisational structures, processes and **outcomes**.

The indicator questions are designed to be particularly useful during this self-assessment process in prompting exploration of the current situation in relation to quality, and in identifying the types of evidence that can be used. It should be noted that the indicator questions are not an exhaustive list, but rather a sample of the type of things an organisation should be considering. Your organisation may need to amend indicator questions to reflect the context and nature of your work.

During the review of the current situation, your organisation should seek to use different sources of evidence, such as documents, policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, service user data, evaluation data and feedback from different stakeholders (including staff, children and their families).

Summarising the evidence allows your organisation not only to assess the current situation, but can be used as a benchmark to assess future progress.

### Step b)

Assess progress: once evidence has been collected, an assessment will need to be made on the degree of progress achieved. Your organisation should seek to identify both achievements and areas for improvement. Using the indicator questions, your organisation should seek to identify where you are on the progress scale.

Summarising progress allows your organisation to identify key progress and key areas for development related to the particular standard.

### Step c)

Develop action plan: using the summary of progress, your organisation can identify future actions you wish to proceed with. You may choose to prioritise particular actions, or actions related to particular standards, depending on your strategic focus and available resources. Your organisation should then develop action plans, identifying key tasks and timelines as well as roles and responsibilities.

# Getting started

Before organisations get started with using the Limerick QAF, it can be useful to:

- **Consider the context:** What is currently happening in your organisation? What are the current demands on the workforce? Information on your organisation's context can inform how the QAF is introduced and used (for example, it may be necessary in times of change to focus on one standard of the QAF at a time).
- **Identify potential benefits:** Given your organisational context, what are the potential benefits of using the Limerick QAF? It is important that different stakeholders (such as senior managers, staff, children and their families) be supported to identify potential benefits.
- **Involve others:** Who does your organisation need to involve in the QAF process? How can different stakeholders be involved in the process? Involving people with different perspectives in the QAF process supports the organisation to develop a holistic perspective of quality.
- **Align the QAF with organisational plans:** How can using the QAF inform organisational plans? Timing the use of the QAF to fit in with organisational planning can help to maximise its relevance and usefulness.
- **Manage the process:** Who will take responsibility for managing the process? How will information on using the QAF be shared? Managing the process will involve planning and overseeing the process, agreeing roles and responsibilities, timelines and how and when information will be shared with key stakeholders.



# The Limerick QAF standards

**Standard 1:  
Organisations are responsive to needs and achieve positive outcomes**

*Organisations work in partnership with children and their families to identify needs, and to facilitate development and change. Organisations avoid making assumptions about children and families; they actively seek to understand the needs of children and families in order to plan and review the types of services offered. Organisations believe that all children and families have the potential to develop; they nurture and support children and families to meet the demands and challenges they face. The progress of work is tracked by organisations to ensure their service is supporting children and families to achieve positive outcomes.*



**Standard 2:  
Organisations are committed to providing child-centred services**

*Organisations place children's needs, rights and safety at the core of all service delivery. Every child is recognised as being unique, with their own interests, culture, learning styles and preferences with the potential to grow and develop. Children play an active role in their own development and are provided with opportunities to develop their skills and capabilities. Organisations have high expectations for all children they work with.*



**Standard 3:  
Organisations promote quality relationships with families**

*The nature of relationships between services and children and their families is positive, supportive and purposeful. Organisations value each child, their individuality and family by respecting them, and staff actively nurture positive partnership relationships with families. Organisations recognise the primacy of the family and the role of parents as primary educators and carers.*



**Standard 4:  
Organisations establish clear governance structures and support ongoing organisational and workforce development**

*A competent and capable workforce is a key component of ensuring organisations are responsive to the needs of children and families, and that they achieve outcomes. Organisations establish strong governance and management structures to ensure accountability and effective decision making, both of which enable staff to work effectively. Organisations value their staff and managers; they pay attention to staff qualifications and to the continued professional development of all staff and managers to ensure they have the competencies to carry out their role effectively within the organisation.*



**Standard 5:  
Children and their families experience an integrated and accessible service**

*Organisations are committed to working effectively with other organisations to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. Effective interagency work has been demonstrated to contribute positively: to changing the service delivery process, to the experiences of families using services, to professional practice, and to providing an environment which supports the achievement of outcomes. The processes and systems which support interagency functioning are effective and efficient.*



# Standard 1: Organisations are responsive to needs and achieve positive outcomes

1.1 Organisations monitor the changing needs of children and their families

a) Are needs analyses used to inform your organisation's service plans?

b) Are processes developed to collect and utilise the information about the needs of children and their families during the referral/enrolment stage?

c) Are individual assessments conducted to identify needs?

1.2 Organisations have ongoing reviews of service provision to ensure that it is maximising the benefits from resources

a) Are service activities and outputs monitored?

b) Are strategic plans developed to manage resources?

c) Are processes in place to maximise resources?

1.3 Organisations use evidence of what works to meet children's needs

a) Is research and evidence used to inform which activities/services are used?

b) Are processes in place to ensure that the children and families access the appropriate services to meet their needs?

c) Are practices and processes developed to ensure inclusivity?

1.4 Organisations have plans with specific objectives against which they assess their service provision

a) Are service plans developed to identify specific objectives and actions?

b) Are stakeholders engaged in the development of your organisation's strategic plan?

1.5 Organisations monitor achieved outcomes from the perspective of children and families and use standardised outcomes measures

a) Are outcomes monitored by collecting and reviewing feedback from children and their families?

b) Are there procedures in place to utilise feedback from children and their families?

c) Has the service/programme been evaluated by an independent researcher?

1.6 Organisations make provision to sustain positive outcomes and address new needs

a) Are follow-up activities and supports provided and are they based on best practice around what sustains positive outcomes?

b) Are outcomes monitored to ensure positive outcomes are sustained after follow-up activities are provided?

c) Is there a process in place to identify new needs during follow-up activities?

*Organisations work in partnership with children and their families to identify needs, and to facilitate development and change. Organisations avoid making assumptions about children and families; they actively seek to understand the needs of children and families in order to plan and review the types of services offered. Organisations believe that all children and families have the potential to develop; they nurture and support children and families to meet the demands and challenges they face. The progress of work is tracked by organisations to ensure their service is supporting children and families to achieve positive outcomes.*

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d) Are review processes used to monitor any changes in the identified needs?

e) Are procedures in place for staff to record and assess their ongoing observations on the needs of the children?

d) Are standardised tools or instruments used to assess outcomes?

e) Are standardised measures used to monitor outcomes pre- and post-intervention?

f) Does the outcomes evaluation use a comparison group?

## Standard 2: Organisations are committed to providing child-centred services

2.1 The safety and welfare of children are of paramount importance and all staff act in accordance with national child protection guidelines

a) Are staff and volunteers working with children provided with child protection training?

b) Are staff provided with ongoing support and opportunities to reflect on their child protection practice?

c) Are the child protection policy and procedures reviewed regularly to ensure they are in line with current legislation and Children First Guidance?

2.2 Organisations provide physically and emotionally safe environments which are inviting and accessible for children and their families

a) Are procedures and audits put in place to ensure your organisation is compliant with health and safety legislation and best practice?

b) Is the environment arranged in a way which meets the needs and interests of the children attending and which is developmentally-appropriate?

c) Are policies and practices in place to ensure a warm, emotionally safe atmosphere is created for participants?

2.3 Organisations provide supportive opportunities for children to share their views and feelings on matters affecting them

a) Are children and their families provided with opportunities to identify their needs throughout their engagement with the service?

b) Are processes established to ensure children have a voice?

c) Are procedures in place to record children's feedback and allow for relevant staff to access it?

2.4 Children's interests, views, culture, family context and developmental stages are taken into account when working with children to plan activities and set target outcomes

a) Are all significant people in children's lives engaged with to gain a holistic view of the child and his or her needs?

b) Are children provided with developmentally-appropriate opportunities to share information about their needs, culture, interests and the context in which they live?

c) Are children's individual holistic needs and views reflected in work plans?

2.5 Organisations provide equal or equivalent opportunities for all children accessing their service

a) Are target outcomes identified for each child that are both realistic and seek to achieve the best possible outcomes for the child?

b) Are all children provided with access and opportunities to take part in service activities?

*Organisations place children’s needs, rights and safety at the core of all service delivery. Every child is recognised as being unique, with their own interests, culture, learning styles and preferences with the potential to grow and develop. Children play an active role in their own development and are provided with opportunities to develop their skills and capabilities. Organisations have high expectations for all children they work with.*

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d) Are processes and procedures established to ensure that children’s views inform/shape actions?

c) Are children’s individual holistic needs and views reflected in work plans?

d) Are staff members provided with training and learning opportunities to support their ability to understand and take account of children’s holistic needs and culture?

e) Does the service’s physical environment reflect children’s interests, views, culture, family context, development and needs?

f) Is the physical environment designed, maintained and altered to ensure it is accessible to all children?

g) Are opportunities provided for children to express and celebrate their culture and identity?

## Standard 3: Organisations promote quality relationships with families

3.1 Organisations provide clear, user-friendly information about their services, which is easily accessible and understandable to children and their families

a) Are children and their families provided with information about the role of the service and how it operates?

b) To what extent are the information leaflets developed in line with best practice on creating user-friendly material?

c) To what extent does your organisation consult with parents and children on the user-friendliness of materials used by the service?

3.2 Opportunities for meaningful engagement with families are sought at all stages of service delivery (from first point of contact with family to closure)

a) Are engagement procedures from initial contact to closure in place for children and their families?

b) Do staff regularly review with children and families how they experience service delivery?

c) Are processes in place to ensure the engagement of children and families shapes the service's future actions?

3.3 Staff support engagement of children and their families by being positive, responsive and flexible in their communication approach

a) Are systems in place to collect and review data on engagement and disengagement patterns?

b) Do staff reflect on how children and families engage or disengage with the service and do reflections shape future actions?

c) Are staff supported to use a variety of positive communication methods and interpersonal skills when engaging children and their families?

*The nature of relationships between services and children and their families is positive, supportive and purposeful. Organisations value each child, their individuality and family by respecting them, and staff actively nurture positive partnership relationships with families. Organisations recognise the primacy of the family and the role of parents as primary educators and carers.*

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d) To what extent do children and families input into the design of materials used by the service?

e) Are there processes in place to ensure children and their families understand the information they receive and can query it?

## Standard 4: Organisations establish clear governance structures and support ongoing organisational and workforce development

4.1 Organisations have the appropriate governance and management structures in place to support quality service provision

a) Are governance structures in line with legal requirements?

b) Are governance structures in line with best practice?

c) Are clear lines of accountability established within the organisation?

4.2 Organisations focus on developing the necessary leadership and management skills

a) Is training and support provided for managers on leadership and management skills on an ongoing basis?

b) Are managers provided with opportunities to develop long-term plans?

4.3 Organisations employ best practices in Human Resources

a) Are all staff employed appropriately qualified for their role?

b) Are there clear expectations of what each staff member's role and responsibilities are?

c) Are staff given clear guidance on organisational policies and procedures?

4.4 Organisations maintain a supportive culture of learning, reflection and development, both for staff and the entire organisation

a) Is there a supervision and support policy?

b) Are resources allocated to the provision of supervision and support?

c) Is supervision and support provided consistently and frequently?

4.5 Organisations enhance/augment resources and expertise by developing partnerships with other organisations

a) Are opportunities to work with other organisations sought out?

b) Are agreements with external organisations developed to deliver particular activities or meet particular needs?

*A competent and capable workforce is a key component of ensuring organisations are responsive to the needs of children and families, and that they achieve outcomes. Organisations establish strong governance and management structures to ensure accountability and effective decision making, both of which enable staff to work effectively. Organisations value their staff and managers; they pay attention to staff qualifications and to the continued professional development of all staff and managers to ensure they have the competencies to carry out their role effectively within the organisation.*

d) Are management structures clear?

d) Are there role-specific competencies?

e) Are there quality and safe recruitment processes?

d) Are staff provided with opportunities to reflect on work and identify learning?

e) Are processes in place to share learning across the organisation?

f) Are processes in place to use learning to inform future action plans?

## Standard 5: Children and their families experience an integrated and accessible service

5.1 Organisations work effectively together to offer co-ordinated services

a) Are communication and information sharing procedures for working with other organisations developed?

b) Are processes in place to work with other organisations to share risk when meeting the needs of children and their families?

c) Are children's and families' needs assessed with other organisations to address gaps in service provision?

5.2 Organisations have a clear pathway for children and their families to access their services

a) Do other organisations understand the nature and type of service offered to children and families?

b) Is information on the referral system and waiting lists provided to all relevant stakeholders?

c) Are children and their families provided with support to aid them in understanding the referral pathway?

5.3 Organisations provide ongoing opportunities to share information, approaches and best practice

a) Are informal structures utilised to share learning with other organisations?

b) Are formal structures utilised to share learning with other organisations?

*Organisations are committed to working effectively with other organisations to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. Effective interagency work has been demonstrated to contribute positively: to changing the service delivery process, to the experiences of families using services, to professional practice, and to providing an environment which supports the achievement of outcomes. The processes and systems which support interagency functioning are effective and efficient.*

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d) Are staff given opportunities to develop working relationships with other agency staff?

d) Are families supported to play an active role in the management of their referral pathway?

e) Are families provided with information on other services when their service is not appropriate or available?

f) Are families provided with support to access alternative services?

# Definitions

## Accessible services

Accessible services provide a clear and easy way for children and their families to enter into services. Accessible services work hard to remove or minimise the barriers, physical, social or cultural, that children and their families experience when seeking support from the service. Barriers experienced by children and families may include, but are not limited to, buildings being physically difficult to enter, a lack of information and/or understanding of how the service operates, complex **referral pathways**, no transport to the service location or the perception of a stigma attached with using the service.

For more information please see:

- **Access and equity guide for services working with young people, how to develop and implement your own access and equity policy** (Youth Action & Policy Association, 2002)  
<http://www.opendoors.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/access-equity-guide.pdf>
- **Making health services more accessible to young people** (Association of Young People's Health, n.d.)  
[http://www.ayph.org.uk/publications/53\\_briefingpaper2.pdf](http://www.ayph.org.uk/publications/53_briefingpaper2.pdf)
- **Section 7: developing and increasing access to health and community services** (Community Tool Box, 2013b)  
<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/improving-services/access-health-and-community-services/main>

## Best practice

Best practice is the use of research, theoretical knowledge and practice wisdom to inform service delivery. Best practice develops and changes as new knowledge becomes available and involves organisations and individuals continually reviewing how effective their services are. Best practice guidelines and standards will differ depending on the profession of staff members and the services being offered. Relevant information is available relating to most disciplines and professions.

For more information please see:

- **Working for children and families: exploring good practice** (Dept. Health & Children, 2003) [http://www.dohc.ie/publications/pdf/working\\_children\\_families.pdf?direct=1](http://www.dohc.ie/publications/pdf/working_children_families.pdf?direct=1)
- **Towards standards for quality community work: an all-Ireland statement of values, principles and work standards** (Community Workers Co-operative, n.d.) <http://mrci.ie/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Towards-Standards-for-Quality-Community-Work.pdf>
- **Outline of a critical best practice perspective on social work and social care** (Ferguson, 2003)

- **The agenda for childrens services: a policy handbook** (Office of the Minister for Children, 2007) [http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cs\\_agenda\\_handbook\\_family\\_support\\_0.pdf](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cs_agenda_handbook_family_support_0.pdf)
- **The agenda for children’s services: reflective questions for front-line service managers and practitioners** (Office of the Minister for Children, n.d.) <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/ReflectiveQuesFront-linefinal.pdf>

## Child-centred

The child-centred approach places children’s **needs** and views at the centre of practice by using these to inform service delivery and all decision making. The child-centred approach is underpinned by the belief that children’s rights should be respected, each child is unique and every child should be supported to access the service. Child-centred services seek to respond to children’s holistic **needs**, such as their age, stage of development and social circumstances.

For more information please see:

- **Principles for child-centred practice: timely, developmentally-appropriate, participatory and collaborative** (Institute of Child Protection Studies, n.d.) [http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/5614/Child\\_Centred\\_practice.pdf](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/5614/Child_Centred_practice.pdf)
- **Childhood: services and provision for children** (Moss, 2008)
- **Children’s rights in The International Encyclopedia of Ethics** (Archard, 2010) <http://www.science.uva.nl/~seop/entries/rights-children/>
- **Better Outcomes Brighter Futures** (Dept of Children & Youth Affairs, 2014) [http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/cypp\\_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf](http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf)

## Competencies

Competencies are behaviours that individuals demonstrate when effectively carrying out job-relevant tasks within their organisation. Competencies are viewed in terms of the specific role or tasks involved, and can relate to the individual or organisation. Specific information is available for different sectors, and organisations will need to consult sources relevant to their context.

For more information please see:

- **Competence in social work practice, a practical guide for students and professionals** (O’Hagan, 2007)
- **Common core of skills, knowledge & understanding and values for the “children’s workforce” in Scotland** (Scottish Government, 2012) <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0039/00395179.pdf>

- **Core competencies** (Australian Community Workers Association, 2012)  
<http://www.acwa.org.au/about/core-competencies>
- **An example of competency framework: Core competency framework** (Getting It Right For Every Child in Lanarkshire, n.d.)  
<http://www.girfecinlanarkshire.co.uk/girfec-resources/Item%2021%20Core%20competency%20framework/Item%2021%20Core%20competency%20framework.pdf>

## Evidence-based programme

An evidence-based programme is one that has consistently been shown to produce positive results by independent research studies that have been conducted to a particular degree of scientific quality.

For more information please see:

- **Evidence-based programs: an overview** (Cooney et al, 2007)  
<http://www.human.cornell.edu/outreach/upload/Evidence-based-Programs-Overview.pdf>
- **Evidence-based programs and practice, what does it all mean?** (Williams Taylor, 2007)  
[http://www.evidencebasedassociates.com/reports/research\\_review.pdf](http://www.evidencebasedassociates.com/reports/research_review.pdf)

## Evidence-informed practice

Evidence-informed practice is practice based on the integration of experience, judgement and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic reviews.

For more information please see:

- **Practice guidelines and the challenge of effective practice** (Rosen & Proctor, 2003)  
<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/fswrstudy/study/articles/Proctor.pdf>
- **Social service organizations in the era of evidence-based practice: the learning organization as a guiding framework for bridging science to service** (Maynard, 2010)

## Family context

Family context relates to structure, beliefs, rituals, parenting styles, resources, roles and responsibilities of different family members, along with individual characteristics of family members.

For more information please see:

- **Households and Family Structures in Ireland** (Watson, 2011)  
<http://www.esri.ie/UserFiles/publications/EC006.pdf>
- **Diversity, Civil Society and Social Change in Ireland** (Feldman, Ladislav Ndakengerwa, Nolan, & Frese, 2005)  
[http://www.ucd.ie/mcri/report\\_compiled.pdf](http://www.ucd.ie/mcri/report_compiled.pdf)

- **LGBT Parents in Ireland** (Pillinger & Fagan, 2013) [http://www.glen.ie/attachments/LGBT\\_Parents\\_in\\_Ireland.PDF](http://www.glen.ie/attachments/LGBT_Parents_in_Ireland.PDF)

## Integrated service delivery

Integrated service delivery involves different organisations working together to meet the **needs** of children and families. Organisations work together to identify **needs**, share information, plan service delivery and develop clear **referral pathways** for families. Integrated service delivery involves the sharing of roles, responsibilities and risk across multiple organisations. It provides a cohesive support system for children and families.

For more information please see:

- **Guidance for the implementation of an area based approach to prevention, partnership and family support** (Child & Family Agency, 2013) [http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cfa\\_guidance\\_on\\_prevention\\_partnership\\_and\\_family\\_support\\_0.pdf](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cfa_guidance_on_prevention_partnership_and_family_support_0.pdf)
- **Integrated services and housing consultation, from the OECD Social Policy Division** (Richardson & Patana, 2012) [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Richardson\\_Patana%20INTEGRATING%20SERVICE%20DELIVERY%20WHY%20FOR%20WHO%20AND%20HOW.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/Richardson_Patana%20INTEGRATING%20SERVICE%20DELIVERY%20WHY%20FOR%20WHO%20AND%20HOW.pdf)
- **Developing multiprofessional teamwork for intergrated children's services** (Anning, Cottrell, Frost, Green, & Robinson, 2006)

## Logic models/ logical framework

Logic models seek to explain how services or organisations will support children and families to make changes. Logic models describe how specific **outcomes** will be achieved to address needs by delivering particular activities. A logic model is developed using research about what activities or practice will contribute to the achievement of the target **outcomes**. Logic models are usually described using a table or diagram. In addition to identifying **needs**, **outcomes** and activities, logic models can include details of inputs (the resources required to carry out the activity) and outputs (the products, such as the number of hours of support provided).

For more information please see:

- **Section 1: developing a logic model or theory of change** (Community Tool Box, 2013a) <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/overview/models-for-community-health-and-development/logic-model-development/main>
- **Logic modelling: supporting clear and achievable outcomes** (Centre for Effective Services, 2011) [http://www.effectiveservices.org/images/uploads/file/projects/P012/Workbook%20Three%2028\\_2\\_11%20v5.pdf](http://www.effectiveservices.org/images/uploads/file/projects/P012/Workbook%20Three%2028_2_11%20v5.pdf)

## Meaningful participation

Meaningful participation involves children's and families' voices being listened to and their input having an impact on actions and decisions. Meaningful participation involves supporting individuals by recognising and nurturing their capabilities and interests and providing opportunities for involvement in decisions that affect them at an individual, family or community level.

For more information please see:

- **Young voices: guidelines on how to involve children and young people in your work** (National Children's Office, Children's Rights Alliance, National Youth Council of Ireland, 2005) [http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/31267\\_Young\\_Voices\\_.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/31267_Young_Voices_.pdf)
- **Good practice guide to community participation** (Doherty, 2008) [http://www.iconnetwork.ie/download/pdf/1130586\\_report.pdf](http://www.iconnetwork.ie/download/pdf/1130586_report.pdf)
- **Promoting the participation of seldom heard young people: A review of the literature on best practice principles** (Kelleher, Seymour, & Halpenny, 2014) [http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Participation\\_of\\_Seldom\\_Heard\\_Young\\_People.pdf](http://www.dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Participation_of_Seldom_Heard_Young_People.pdf)

## Needs

Needs can be defined as what a child or adult requires for healthy development and functioning.

For more information:

- **Approaches to needs assessments in children's services** (Ward & Rose, 2002)
- **Working for children and families: exploring good practice** (Dept. Health & Children, 2003) [http://dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Working\\_for\\_Children\\_and\\_Families\\_-\\_Exploring\\_Good\\_Practice\\_.pdf](http://dcy.gov.ie/documents/publications/Working_for_Children_and_Families_-_Exploring_Good_Practice_.pdf)

## Outcomes

Outcomes are changes that children and families achieve, which can be linked to the services or activities that organisations provide. Changes can occur in a number of different ways (that is, in behaviour, skills, knowledge, conditions and level of functioning). Children and families play a vital role in any outcomes that are achieved. Outcomes should be S.M.A.R.T. (that is, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed).

For more information please see:

- **Barnardos' needs-led and outcomes-focused approach** (Greene & Stewart, 2008) **in ChildLinks** [http://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/publications/free/childlinks\\_body17.pdf](http://www.barnardos.ie/assets/files/publications/free/childlinks_body17.pdf)
- **50 key messages to accompany investing in families, supporting parents to improve outcomes for children** (Child and Family Agency, 2013) [http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cfa\\_50\\_key\\_messages\\_for\\_parenting\\_support\\_0.pdf](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/cfa_50_key_messages_for_parenting_support_0.pdf)

- **Framework for integrated planning for outcomes for children and families** (Cooperation & Working Together, 2008) [http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/framework\\_for\\_intergrated\\_families.pdf](http://www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/sites/www.childandfamilyresearch.ie/files/framework_for_intergrated_families.pdf)

## Referral pathway

Referral pathways are the entry systems organisations have for a service, which include the source of referrals they accept and their referral criteria. Self-referrals allow families or individuals (where age-appropriate) to sign-up for a service. Professional referrals require that a person working in specific professions recommend children and/or families to a service. Referral criteria relates to factors which make a child or family eligible for a service (such as having specific **needs**, being within a particular age bracket or living in the catchment area). Referral pathways will vary depending on the type of services that are being offered. Relevant information should be sought relating to the specific pathways of different disciplines or services.

For more information please see:

- **Best practice in creating an efficient referral system** (Eglinton East Kennedy Park, n.d.) <http://www.scarboroughlip.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Best-Practices-in-Creating-an-Efficient-Referral-System.pdf>

## Reflective practice

Reflection is the process of exploring and analysing one's practice before, during and after service delivery. This process involves exploring feelings and perceptions. Reflective practitioners review positive and negative events honestly in order to identify learning and improve their future practice. Reflective practice is often carried out by asking questions, exploring uncertainties and reality testing.

For more information please see:

- **Participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) – democratizing reflective practices** (Ghayea, et al., 2008) [http://keycenter.unca.edu/sites/keycenter.unca.edu/files/participator\\_and\\_appreciative\\_action\\_and\\_reflection\\_PAAR.pdf](http://keycenter.unca.edu/sites/keycenter.unca.edu/files/participator_and_appreciative_action_and_reflection_PAAR.pdf)
- **An exploration of reflective practice in a social care team** (Jude & Regan, 2010) [http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2764/1/Microsoft\\_Word\\_-\\_PLR0910013Jude\\_Regan\\_proofed.pdf](http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/2764/1/Microsoft_Word_-_PLR0910013Jude_Regan_proofed.pdf)
- **Reflective practice for social workers: a handbook for developing professional confidence** (Bruce, 2013)
- **Reflective practice and early years professionalism** (Lindon, 2012)

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