The Assessment Framework and the Integrated Children’s System

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The Assessment Framework and the Integrated Children’s System

- The background to the Assessment Framework
- Key findings from Assessment Framework Research
- The Development of the Integrated Children’s System
- The Integrated Children’s System - demonstration
- Preliminary findings and ethical considerations
Background to The Assessment Framework: findings from research and Social Services Inspections

- Social services assessments of children in need focused primarily on issues of abuse and neglect.
- Assessments of children in need showed much variation.
- Practice differed within social work teams and between departments.
- The child was not the focus of some assessments.
- Systematic approaches to gathering and recording information could improve outcomes for children, but not used consistently.
Key features of the Assessment Framework

- Consistent approach relevant to all type of assessment involving children in need
- Clear mandatory timescales
- A conceptual framework
- Integrated approach concerned with safeguarding and promoting child’s health and development to ensure optimal outcomes
- Inter agency approach to assessment and the provision of services
- Common language
- Exercising the use of professional judgement is critical to the decision making process
Principles underpinning the Assessment Framework

- child centred and rooted in child development
- ecological in approach
- ensures equality of opportunity
- involves working with children and families
- builds on strengths as well as identifies difficulties
- inter-agency in approach
- a continuing process, not a single event
- carried out in parallel with other action
- grounded in evidence based knowledge
Assessment Framework: aims of the research

- This was a two year study to explore:
  - the implementation of the Assessment; Framework and the accompanying records;
  - the experiences of children and their families;
  - its impact on professional practice;
  - the costs of assessment.
24 councils in England participated in the study

Postal questionnaires: 88 social work managers; 215 practitioners; and 153 other professionals

A case study of 52 families: interviews with parents, children >10 years, social workers and relevant professionals

A study of 2,248 referrals, 866 initial assessments, and 68 core assessments

A time record completed by social workers
Assessment Framework: Case file study - main reason for referral

- Child protection concerns accounted for 30%
- Issues affecting parenting capacity accounted for 17%
- Other concerns about parenting accounted for 15%
- Only 10% of referrals were made because of concerns about financial or housing problems
Assessment Framework: Referrals that progressed to an initial assessment (n=866, i.e. 39%)

- Less than half (47%) of child protection referrals progressed to an initial assessment.
- 55% of referrals relating to issues that affect parenting capacity (substance misuse, domestic violence, mental illness) progressed to an initial assessment.
- 14% of referrals relating to financial problems and 30% of referrals relating to housing problems progressed to an initial assessment.
Assessment Framework: Issues identified by the Initial Assessment

- The initial assessment provided a clear picture of the child’s needs and circumstances
- 27% of cases children were living with families where there was domestic violence, parental substance misuse and/or parental mental illness
- Half the cases the child had developmental needs
- In a third of cases there were difficulties in parenting capacity
- In 37% difficulties in relation to family and environmental factors
Assessment Framework: Decision recorded on the Initial Assessment

The decision to take more than one action may be recorded

- 29% the provision of services
- 25% referral to another agency
- 5.5% a strategy discussion or immediate legal action
- 9% core assessment
- 45% no further action
The impact of the Assessment Framework on social work practice

- Social work managers and practitioners reported that their workloads had increased
- Increased workloads related to:
  - lack of sufficient staff
  - lack of or out of date IT systems
  - unfamiliarity with the Assessment Framework and the records
  - having to see and record information on individual children - not families
The impact on the quality of assessments

- Two-thirds of managers and over half the social workers reported an improvement in the quality of assessments.

- Managers found the assessment records improved the quality of social workers’ record keeping which gave them greater confidence in their own decision making and planning for children in need.
The impact of the Assessment Framework on the work of professionals other than social workers

- More likely to carry out assessments in line with the Assessment Framework
- Improved their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of social services
  - (48% clarified, 42% no change, 10% more confused)
- Increased communication with social services
  - (33% improved, 57% no change, 10% decreased)
- Improved collaboration in assessments of children
  - (32% improved, 64% no change, 4% discouraged)
Views of other professionals

- Professionals reported the Assessment Framework improved collaboration in the assessment of children in need because it provided:
  - a more structured way to record information about vulnerable children and families;
  - a more holistic picture of the child’s needs and circumstances;
  - increased clarity in the roles and responsibilities of individual agencies;
  - greater willingness to share information.
Views of other professionals - continued

- Professionals reported collaborative work was hampered by:
  - a lack of agreements over definitions, including the criteria to define a child in need;
  - a failure to communicate the outcome of referrals and assessments;
  - inappropriate use of the assessment records;
  - restricted resources and increased paperwork;
  - teething difficulties in the introduction of a new assessment system.
The impact of the Assessment Framework on family involvement - professionals’ views

- Three quarters of social work managers and 42% of practitioners reported that family involvement in the assessment process had increased.

- A perceived increase was attributed to:
  - a more transparent and accountable relationship
  - a more focused approach to assessment
  - increased consultation with the family
  - recording the views of family members
  - discussing issues where parents and professionals disagree
The impact on families of earlier child protection enquiries

- Parents saw the enquiry as a confrontation
- Parents did not understand what was happening to them
- Parents felt alienated and disempowered by the process
- The enquiry frequently destroyed the ability of social workers to work co-operatively with families
Parents’ views of assessments today - n=50

- Professionals discussed their concerns before referring (66.6%)
- Social workers explained why they would be carrying out an assessment and what it would entail (80%)
- Social workers asked before making contact with other professionals (75%)
- Parents felt consulted throughout the assessment process (75%)
- Parents felt involved in any discussion about what actions might be taken (75%)
- Parents knew their views had been recorded (75%)
The contrasting experiences of one family before and after the Assessment Framework

- No one told me anything they just came in and laid down the law (views of assessment prior to implementation)

- Sue (social worker) explained about the assessment. I was given a copy of the assessment to look through...our whole lives have changed. Social services, I can’t fault them. Plans have happened. The best social services in the country (the same family talking about assessments after implementation of the Assessment Framework)
The Integrated Children’s System

The Integrated Children’s System is a framework for assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing.
Integrated Children’s System
background: The English policy context

- A commitment to high quality services, offered at an early point, to improve the life chance of children
- A focus on early identification, referral and tracking of vulnerable children and young people
- An increasing focus on outcomes for children
- Increasing inter-agency collaboration and information sharing
- An increasing focus on performance management
The Integrated Children’s System: Development

- Based on a range of research and accumulated experience of policy and practice
  - Regional and national consultation events on the exemplars for the Integrated Children’s System (2001-2002)
Integrated Children’s system: Based on findings from research

- Practitioners good at completing information, planning and review records, but assessment materials often not completed or completed inappropriately.
- Practitioners and managers reported that structured materials did support their practice but they were often incomplete or missing.
- Little evidence of materials being used systematically.
- Difficult to locate information on files.
- Quality of analysis and its relation to planning was often poor.
- Little information about services planned or provided recorded within materials.
Integrated Children’s system: messages from consultation

- Practitioners often feel overloaded at particular points i.e. when more than one child becomes looked after.
- Duplication and repetition of information.
- Progress of ALL children should be reviewed and not just those looked after.
- Different conceptual frameworks for different parts of children’s services, but often the same children and families.
Integrated Children’s system: messages from consultation

- Materials did not gather information necessary for strategic planning
- Confusion about the purpose of the Assessment and Action Record
  - tool for direct work or professional record
- Core Assessment not suitable for all practice contexts
  - too complex for short-term family support cases
- For children and young people the type of materials was less important than the way they were used
Aims of the Integrated Children’s System

- The aim of the Integrated Children’s System is to provide a more structured approach to the assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing for all children in need.
- The Integrated Children’s System builds on previous frameworks and materials for practice.
- The Integrated Children’s System is based on the conceptual framework of the Assessment Framework.
- The Integrated Children’s System must be implemented through IT.
The Integrated Children’s System: who does it apply to:

- Applies to all children in contact with social work services
  - Children in need at home including child protection
  - Children looked after
  - Permanency options including adoption
  - Care leavers
The Integrated Children’s System: the focus

- Is focused on outcomes for children and provides a mechanism for monitoring progress.

- Rooted in an understanding of children’s developmental needs at different ages and stages of their lives, and what influences their development.
The Integrated Children’s System: how will it support practice?

- Provides a common language to describe children’s developmental needs and circumstances which can be used by all professionals and other people concerned with children’s wellbeing
- Facilitates sharing of information across departments and agencies
- Gathers the information necessary to plan for children at both individual and strategic levels
The Integrated Children’s System: the exemplars

- Are linked to key practice processes
- Reflect the complexity of children’s circumstances by gathering more information for children with more complex needs
- Facilitate systematic information gathering, collation and analysis at each stage
- Build a picture of a child and their needs within the context of their family and environment
- Assessments of progress linked more closely to reviews and all children to be reviewed regularly
The Integrated Children’s System: the exemplars

- The exemplars have been designed to support the process of assessment, planning, intervention and reviewing.

- There are four types of record:
  - Information records
  - Assessment records
  - Plans
  - Review
The Integrated Children’s System: the exemplars

- Support the development of plans which include clear objectives and measurable outcomes for children
- Provide accurate information on the costs of services delivered
- Records designed to allow the transfer of information - including single data entry
- Replace the current Looking After Children and Assessment materials with a coherent set of records
The Integrated Children’s System: A case example

- 10 year-old Jackie Cormack lives with her mother, Wendy Cormack, who has mental health problems. As a result of her mother’s illness Jackie has missed most of the previous term of school. Following a Core Assessment a Child’s Plan was drawn up on the 7th January.

- The Education section of the Plan included the following:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child/young person’s identified developmental needs &amp; strengths</th>
<th>How will these needs be responded to: actions undertaken &amp;/or services to be provided</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; length of service: e.g. hours per week</th>
<th>Person/agency responsible</th>
<th>Date services to commence/commenced</th>
<th>Planned outcome: progress to be achieved by next review or other specified date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Jackie is not reaching her educational potential: She does not have a consistent pattern of attendance; Jackie is behind in most subjects, particularly reading and writing.</td>
<td>Jackie to be accompanied to school. Jackie to be provided with extra support in class. Jackie to be provided with extra tuition in reading.</td>
<td>Each school day Two hours a day three days a week (Mon, Wed and Fri). Each Thursday after school for one hour.</td>
<td>Ms Cormack Mr Marnock, SENCO Tutor to be arranged by Mr Marnock SENCO</td>
<td>7th January 10th January 19th January</td>
<td>Jackie will have above 90 percent attendance. Jackie will have caught up with her peers by the end of Summer term. (20th July)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Integrated Children’s System: A case example

- On the 17th January Jackie’s mother was admitted to hospital. In the absence of any relatives and friends Jackie was accommodated.

- As a looked after child a Care Plan must be now be drawn up for Jackie. However, Jackie already has a Child’s Plan, based upon a recent assessment of her needs. Many of these needs will not have changed as a result of her accommodation. Therefore, to develop the Care Plan for Jackie the practitioner reviews and updates her existing Child’s Plan.

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<td>Mr White (foster carer) Mr Marnock, SENCO Tutor to be arranged by Mr Marnock SENCO Funding: Sue Williams Social Worker. Transport home provided by social services</td>
<td>20th January 10th January 19th January 20th January</td>
<td>Jackie will have above 90 percent attendance. Jackie will have caught up with her peers by the end of Summer term. (20th July)</td>
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The Integrated Children’s System: the research

- Two year pilot to evaluate the impact of the Integrated Children’s System on social work practice, inter-agency co-operation, collaboration and information sharing

- The research is being done by Royal Holloway - University of London; Loughborough University; Open University; and Cardiff University
The Integrated Children’s System Research: early messages

- All aspects of implementation must have a multi-agency focus;
- Implementation needs to be based in reality;
- Implementation requires a wide focus;
- Implementation involves attitudinal change for some staff
  - IT
  - Practice
The Integrated Children’s System Research: early messages

- Commissioning IT systems can be a tricky business
- The Integrated Children’s System and IT must remain separate in the minds of practitioners
- System welcomed in principle by most practitioners
The Integrated Children’s System Research: early messages

- Training needs to be planned to ensure staff at different levels and from different agencies get the right amount and mix of training
  - Champions are an effective way of developing a training pool and supporting staff in the workplace;
  - training manuals and practice guides can be developed to support staff - particularly those joining the agency post implementation;
  - incorporate training on the Integrated Children’s System into existing training courses
The Integrated Children’s System
Research: early messages

- Implementation has taken longer than anticipated
- The Integrated Children’s System has presented technical challenges for authorities and practice challenges for practitioners
- The Integrated Children’s System highlights areas of strong and weak practice
- The Integrated Children’s System is not a solution for all practice issues
- Implementation has provided a catalyst for change
The policy context to improving information sharing

- The Children Bill 2004
- Green Paper: *Every Child Matters and Next Steps*
- Government response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry report: *Keeping Children Safe*
- National Service Framework for Children
Information Sharing: messages from practitioners

- There is enthusiasm about working more closely with staff in other agencies.

- Practitioners are anxious about information sharing because they are uncertain about, and lack clarity over, what information they can share safely and who can give consent.

- Increased clarity about sharing information with colleagues was welcomed.
Information Sharing: messages from children and young people

- Majority of young people accept that sometimes agencies need to share information about them to ensure they get the services they need
  - It can be helpful for professionals to share information and it can bring young people more help
  - It can save the young person having to tell the same distressing story to several different professionals
- Young people wanted the information about them to be accurate, kept safe and used properly
Information Sharing: messages from children and young people

- Young people wanted to be asked and kept informed as to what information is being shared and with whom.
- They feared information falling into the hands of ‘bad people’ and used against them.
- Feared it would affect how others perceive them.
  - Young people should make the decision except in the most serious of cases.
  - Need clear rules for passing on information and punishment for those who break the rules. There should be a lead worker who judges when others need to be given information.