

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes: frequently asked questions

What is the Centre?

The Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO) is a collaborative centre, which gathers and shares the best knowledge available of 'what works' to contribute to a step-change in outcomes for children and young people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

It will seek to do this by identifying, coordinating and communicating 'what works' knowledge about systems and practices that have improved outcomes in services for children and young people. The Centre will share this knowledge with the children's sector and offer tailored support to Local Authorities and their Children's Trust partners, to help them improve outcomes for their priorities in their local context. It will do this across eight themes where greater progress is needed:

- Early Years
- Disability
- Vulnerable Children (particularly children in care)
- Child Poverty
- Safeguarding
- Schools and Communities
- Youth
- Parents, Carers and Families.

The Centre is also engaging in conducting primary research into sleep problems among children.

C4EO is an independent DCSF-sponsored consortium, which was launched in July 2008. It has been developed for the children's sector, from the children's sector and works with a consortium of four core partners, drawn from across the sector, who deliver key elements of C4EO's programme. These are: National Children's Bureau, National Foundation for Educational Research, Research in Practice and the Social Care Institute for Excellence. It is neither a regulator nor a field force.

Why has the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes been established?

The Centre was established to fulfil a need identified by the Social Exclusion Task Force – to disseminate evidence of ‘what works’ to improve outcomes in services, particularly where outcomes for some children (e.g. those in care) are poorer than others.

The Centre was announced in the Children’s Plan and supports the transformation agenda for children’s services as outlined in the Plan. The Centre will do this by reviewing the ‘evidence base for what works, and will work with local areas to apply this to their context’.¹

What is the Centre’s work programme?

C4EO aims to help achieve the outcomes for children and young people defined in Every Child Matters: to be healthy; to stay safe; to enjoy and achieve; to make a positive contribution; and to achieve economic well-being.

C4EO will focus on eight themes, reflecting areas where greater progress is needed in improving outcomes. These themes are:

- Early Years
- Disability
- Vulnerable Children (particularly children in care)
- Child Poverty
- Safeguarding
- Schools and Communities
- Youth
- Parents, Carers and Families.

For each theme, C4EO will explore three priorities, except for Child Poverty and Safeguarding, which will have one each. Theme leads will coordinate their findings so that all themes share knowledge and advice, and cross-cutting issues can be highlighted.

The Centre is also undertaking additional work, which includes supporting local and national government to tackle child poverty and conducting primary disability research into sleep problems among children.

Who is involved in C4EO?

The Centre is led by Christine Davies CBE, former Director of Children’s Services in Telford & Wrekin Council and Programme Director of the Local Government Association’s ‘Narrowing the Gap’ (NtG) programme.

C4EO draws on the expertise of a consortium of core partners who are leading on key elements of the Centre’s programme. These are:

¹ DCSF, *The Children’s Plan, Building Brighter Futures*, December 2007, para 7.22.

- National Children's Bureau (NCB) – theme lead for Early Years, manages the Children and Young People's Network and leads the evaluation of the Centre
- National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) – leads on conducting knowledge reviews, gathering the evidence and research, and is theme lead for Schools and Communities
- Research in Practice (RiP) – leads on Capacity Building and is theme lead for Disability
- Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) – leads on Dissemination and is theme lead for the Vulnerable Children (particularly children in care) and Safeguarding themes.

C4EO is also supported by a number of strategic partners who are also working with the Centre to deliver key elements of the work programme. These are:

- Improvement and Development Agency – lead on accreditation and support for Sector Specialists
- Family and Parenting Institute – theme lead on Parents, Carers and Families and manages the Parents' and Carers' Panel on C4EO's behalf
- National Youth Agency – theme lead for Youth
- Institute of Education – supporting NFER with knowledge management.

In addition, C4EO has agreements with a range of delivery partners to provide specialist expertise. These include Contact a Family; Making Research Count; Matrix Knowledge Group; Action for Children; the National Health Service Institute for Innovation and Improvement; Mencap; and the Social Policy Research Unit at the University of York.

There is also ongoing cooperation with the Children's Services Network, Association of Directors of Children's Services, the Local Government Association, the NHS Confederation, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), Ofsted and the regional Government Offices.

How does C4EO operate?

C4EO's central team is based at NCB. Legal responsibility for C4EO is held by NCB, a registered charity, which is accountable to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

The senior management team is headed by Director Christine Davies and includes Heather Rushton, Assistant Director – Programme and Performance Management; Sue Rowley, Assistant Director – Locality Working; and Helen Goody, Assistant Director – Theme Coordination.

In addition to the senior management team, there are four function leads who are hosted by core partner organisations. Each lead takes charge of one of C4EO's key functions:

- capacity building – led by Dez Holmes, Research in Practice
- evaluation – led by Jane Lewis, Director of Research, Evidence and Evaluation, NCB
- knowledge management – led by Sheila Stoney, Assistant Director and Head of Research, Evaluation and Information, NFER
- outputs and dissemination – led by Amanda Edwards, Deputy Chief Executive, SCIE.

C4EO's Director is advised by a Programme Board, which meets quarterly. The Board includes the organisation's core and strategic partners, together with representatives from key stakeholders including the Association of Directors of Children's Services, DCSF, the Local Government Association, Ofsted, NHS Confederation and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE).

To ensure that its work fully reflects the needs and views of service users, C4EO has mechanisms in place to capture the views of children, young people, parents and carers. These are:

- the Children and Young People's Network, managed by NCB
- the Parents' and Carers' Panel, managed by the Family and Parenting Institute.

How were the themes selected?

The themes were selected by the DCSF, in consultation with the children's sector, as areas where greater progress was needed in order to realise aims set out in Every Child Matters (for every child to be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being). The priorities were set by C4EO in consultation with its partners, the children's sector and DCSF.

What are the vision and values of the Centre?

We will create a world-class collaborative centre (C4EO), which gathers and shares the best knowledge available of 'what works' to contribute to a step-change in outcomes for children and young people, especially those who are most vulnerable.

Our overriding value is knowledge (evidence): we will search for it; we will analyse and disseminate it; we will seek to embed and evaluate it. We believe that knowledge will inform the improvement of services and outcomes for children, young people and their families. This core value, and our behaviour, will reflect our commitment to:

- openness
- fairness
- engagement
- accessibility
- credibility
- accountability
- learning.

What specific services will C4EO provide?

A wide menu of different services will be available, enabling Local Authorities and their partners to access best practice, build capacity and achieve culture change. These will include:

- knowledge reviews and interactive web-based 'progress maps' for the three priorities in each of the seven themes, which provide accessible up-to-date evidence of current and

- emerging best practice, data and examples of locally effective practice
- regional knowledge workshops and other events to support participants in understanding what works and achieving change
- online communities for sharing experience and expertise on specific themes and issues
- a 'quid pro quo' brokering service, enabling Children's Trusts to swap professionals (Sector Specialists) in theme and priority areas, where they excel, for those who can improve a weaker aspect of their services, across each of the country's nine Government Office regions
- regular information about C4EO's activities, including e-newsletters and annual reports
- tailored outputs for different audiences (e.g. DVDs, leaflets)
- web-based resources and tools to support the progress maps and other work.

How will we know what impact C4EO is having?

Evaluation will focus on understanding how C4EO has had an impact on improving outcomes for children, young people and families. The process will be in four phases: assessing the quality of C4EO's initial activities; whether mechanisms for improved outcomes are in place; whether those mechanisms are operating effectively; and finally, whether improved outcomes have been achieved.

Information will be gathered through a number of routes, including an annual survey with Directors of Children's Services, an analysis of local materials and interviews with informants in Children's Trusts, as well as studies of C4EO's influence on the wider political and professional debate.

A cost-benefit analysis will also be carried out, using two exemplars, to compare C4EO's costs with its estimated effects and the longer-term value of improved outcomes.

Who will be the main users of C4EO's services?

C4EO's main users will be Local Authorities and their partners in local Children's Trusts: for example, Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Directors of Children's Services and council members with responsibility for children and families, along with schools, health, police, voluntary and private sectors and others. In line with the holistic nature of the Every Child Matters agenda, C4EO will also engage with a wide range of stakeholders across the children's sector at regional and local levels.

Will stakeholders – including children, young people and their families – have a say in what C4EO does?

Its stakeholders are key to the success and authority of C4EO. A Programme Board has been established to advise C4EO's management team, with national, regional and local representation. This Board will in turn, be advised by two panels whose views will have a direct influence on what C4EO does. These panels are:

- the Children and Young People's Network, managed by NCB
- the Parents' and Carers' Panel, managed by the Family and Parenting Institute.

How do you see the Children and Young People's and the Parents' and Carers' Panels working within C4EO?

The engagement of both children and young people and parents and carers in the development of the Centre's work needs to be done in a meaningful way, and avoid tokenism. As is the case for all the other work of C4EO, it must be an exemplar of good practice. NCB and the Family and Parenting Institute are national experts in this field and are leading this work.

There are already many organisations and initiatives that are concerned with improving children's services. What makes C4EO different and how does it fit?

C4EO is unique in that it will collate the knowledge and expertise of many of the sector's most trusted organisations to provide a single, comprehensive, regularly updated picture of current effective practice on its priority issues. It will also link with a range of existing bodies, including the nine Government Office regions, DCSF and other government departments, to help coordinate policy initiatives and reduce duplication.

Because its Director and the core and strategic partners have strong connections throughout the children's sector, C4EO will be able to identify and work with a wide range of existing networks to disseminate knowledge and support stakeholders. C4EO is also well placed to identify gaps where new research or networks are needed in order to facilitate change.

Given that it is funded by the government, will C4EO act as a watchdog for children's services, reporting on poor practice?

C4EO is neither a regulator nor a new field force. Instead, it will work by invitation with Local Authorities and their partners and others to identify challenges and find effective local solutions. Its focus will be on building the capacity of the sector to improve outcomes through systems and strategic change. What is more, because C4EO aims to gather and share evidence of what works from across the sector, it will provide opportunities for service providers to showcase their own successes as well as benefiting from the achievements of others.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is funding C4EO for three years, from 2008 to 2011. What will happen after this funding ends?

Through its programme, C4EO aims to transform the way in which existing national agencies work together to support improvement, building on existing levels of cooperation; and it is hoped that this momentum will be maintained if funding ends in 2011. Furthermore, because the core partners are already established players within the sector, the expertise developed through C4EO's work will remain accessible to stakeholders in different ways via these organisations.

How will C4EO show impact in the three years for which it is set up?

The work programme will be measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These are reported to DCSF and the Programme Board on a quarterly basis. It must be remembered that

C4EO is not a frontline delivery agent and direct impact on outcome improvement can only be by association with the work that Local Authorities and their Children's Trust partners undertake. C4EO will, however, be able to collect evidence of:

- Children's Trusts using the knowledge to identify clearly evidenced local solutions to challenges they face
- how Children's Trusts are changing systems to work more effectively
- improved service delivery, staff competencies, integration and effective programmes of work.

Where does C4EO strategically place itself in the crowded marketplace?

C4EO places itself as a resource and partner for, and to, the children's sector. It is neither a regulator nor one of the 49 field forces, but seeks to work with the sector by gathering the evidence of 'what works', sharing this with the sector and supporting the sector, where invited, to help improve outcomes for children and their families.

How are non-local authority partner agencies (e.g. health) and the voluntary sector being involved in the Centre?

Partners from across health, criminal justice and education, as well as social care, are being encouraged to submit evidence to C4EO's knowledge reviews and also to participate as Sector Specialists. The Centre's Programme Board, which oversees its strategic direction, has a number of national representative organisations drawn from across the children's sector including Ofsted, NHS Confederation as well as the Association of Directors of Children's Services and the Local Government Association.

What is Narrowing the Gap and how does it link to C4EO?

Narrowing the Gap (NtG) is a two-year programme hosted by the Local Government Association, supported by the Improvement and Development Agency and funded by the DCSF. It started in June 2007 and aims to 'narrow the gap' in outcomes between vulnerable children and others, against a context of improving outcomes for all.

The NtG programme focuses on five key lines of enquiry:

- how to create and sustain the right links between schools, children's centres and children's services
- how to engage and support parents and carers in helping their children to succeed
- how to use the new systems and process brought into being by Every Child Matters to orientate services more towards prevention and early intervention
- how to strengthen and align local leadership and governance arrangements – professional and political
- how to strengthen systems for developing local leaders to deliver improved services based on the understanding of what works.

The NtG programme is overseen by the C4EO Programme Board, under the direction of Christine Davies, and is supported by C4EO's core and strategic partners. Day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that NtG's agreed work is delivered to its conclusion will be undertaken by Dame Gillian Pugh and Jane Held, working with the existing C4EO team and reporting to the Director.

The oversight function of the previous NtG Programme Board has been subsumed within the C4EO Programme Board, because the core membership and strategic partners, DCSF and stakeholder representation are the same.

This will ensure a sustained focus on outcomes for vulnerable groups of children and young people beyond the two-year life of the NtG programme. At the same time, the rigorous project methodology and early findings of NtG provide firm foundations for C4EO's work.

In addition, local areas will find the integration of the programmes helpful in rationalising the inputs and support they receive.

See the document 'Narrowing the Gap – Frequently Asked Questions' for more information. This can be obtained from

<http://www.c4eo.org.uk/narrowingthegap/default.aspx?themeid=9&accesstypeid=1>

Further information

Please visit www.C4EO.org.uk

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