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**Ymateb i Ymgynghoriad / Consultation Response**

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<b>Pwnc / Subject:</b>	<b>Draft Multi-Agency Practice Strategy</b>

**Background information about Estyn**

Estyn is the Office of His Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales. As a Crown body, we are independent of the Welsh Government.

Our principal aim is to raise the standards and quality education and training in Wales. This is primarily set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000<sup>1</sup> and the Education Act 2005. In exercising its functions, we must give regard to the:

- Quality of education and training in Wales;
- Extent to which education and training meets the needs of learners;
- Educational standards achieved by those receiving education and training in Wales;
- Quality of leadership and management of those education and training providers, including whether the financial resources made available to those providing education and training are managed efficiently and used in a way which provides value for money;
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners; and,
- Contribution made to the well-being of learners.

Our remit includes (but is not exclusive to) nurseries and non-maintained settings, primary, secondary, special and all age schools, independent schools, pupil referrals units, further education, adult community learning, local government education services, work-based learning, and initial teacher training.

We may give advice to the Welsh Parliament on any matter connected to education and training in Wales. To achieve excellence for learners, we have set three strategic objectives:

- Provide accountability to service users on the quality and standards of education and training in Wales;
- Inform the development of national policy by the Welsh Government;
- Build capacity for improvement of the education and training system in Wales.

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<sup>1</sup> This act to be replaced by the Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 when the quality provisions are commenced.

This response is not confidential.

## Response

### Introduction

The National Multi-Agency Practice Strategy (referred to hereafter as the Strategy) for children aims to improve support for children, young people, families, and communities, with a focus on keeping families together and enhancing early help services.

We agree that the key proposals outlined in the draft Strategy have the potential to lead to better outcomes for children and promote a child-first, relationship-based multi-agency approach, leveraging existing good practice models. The programme intention to move from short term initiatives to developing and embedding evidence-based practices into nationally offered services will further strengthen the work in this area.

We agree that processes for measuring impact should be co-constructed with stakeholders and support the formation of an oversight group within Welsh Government. We agree that this group should focus on outcomes such as care quality, service access, and reducing inequalities, with involvement from Care Inspectorate Wales. We would appreciate further discussion in relation to joint inspection arrangements as the Strategy develops, to build on and strengthen the current Joint Inspections of Child Protection Arrangements (JICPA).

We support the extensive work has already taken place to ensure that the principles of the framework reflect a consensus and shared vision. It is our view that the development and implementation of a national framework could promote a shared understanding of professional and public expectations and that this could be achieved through well-defined national standards.

## Consultation questions

### QUESTION 1.

#### **What difference can the National Practice Framework make for children, young people, their families and their communities?**

The framework could improve the support provided to families, for example, through a national, multi-agency, universal and targeted offer which focuses effectively on keeping families together, and children remaining in their communities. It is useful to refer to the beneficial teamwork between professionals, for example, between social workers, midwives and police officers to ensure a newborn baby at risk is protected through a single unified process. The role of the nominated point of contact will be vital in ensuring how this will be defined and achieved. It will be important for all services and the public to understand the steps that will be taken in these circumstances.

We support the rights of the child approach which permeates this Strategy. Ensuring this rights-based approach continues to be at the forefront of the work in this area could be further strengthened by the implementation of a Children's Rights Impact Assessment.

We support the aim to strengthen the 'edge of care' offer, as this could support children and young people to remain with their families and reinvest monies into family support. Further, it could support family justice reform and strengthen the connection to early help services.

It is our view that measures to improve the care system will be welcomed by services and the public across Wales. We agree with the proposals to improve the status of the voice of the child, strengthen the corporate parenting system, increase placements closer to home and develop a not-for-profit care system. Further, improving the consistency of service across Wales and the quality of practice and decision-making will be important steps as well as creating more advocacy for children, parents and carers involved in the process.

We appreciate the challenges in enhancing services for children with complex needs and believe that parents and carers would welcome improvements in multi-agency commissioning, funding of support and developing a greater range of provision.

## **QUESTION 2.**

**Which changes would you like to see to the draft, including the need for longer standards with more explanation and referencing without losing impact?**

We believe that services and the wider public will welcome the fact that the Strategy is underpinned by a belief in children's rights, social justice and the importance of local service delivery. However, it may be beneficial to strengthen the clarity around the importance of local service delivery, in particular how this will work in practice, so that the wider public understands clearly how to access support.

We consider that services and the public across Wales will welcome the concise, direct and uncluttered standards. The clear and succinct messages contained within the narrative of each of the five standards are further reinforced within the multi-agency 'must-do' statements. However, we continue to feel that children and young people and adults with complex needs may also benefit from a more easily accessible version of the standards, which contains useful visuals and takes account of a total communication approach. We believe this accessible version would be a helpful addition to the planned additional guidance materials.

## **QUESTION 3.**

**How can child first, relationship-based multi-agency practice be strengthened?**

We note the key principle that the framework will be compatible with existing practice models currently in use across Wales. For example, Wales Safeguarding Procedures. Building upon these well-established practices can support a child first, relationship-based model without imposing unnecessary changes to local or regional bodies or national agencies who have their own practice models.

It is our experience that improving multi-agency working across services in local government, regional boards and the health service could further strengthen the child first, relationship-based practice and ensure that successful and purposeful collaboration is at every step of the child or young person's journey in Wales. This multi-agency working has the potential to be further strengthened through high-quality assessments and interventions delivered by an informed workforce that place the child or young person at the heart of all decision-making.

## **QUESTION 4.**

**How can implementation of the Standards be supported?**

We are aware that there are many mechanisms and systems already in existence across local government that could support the implementation of the standards. Good examples include the regional partnership and safeguarding boards. There are many useful examples of local authorities collaborating successfully with key partners to implement significant change and ensure the optimum outcomes for children and young people such as through transformation governance structures, working parties and stakeholder focus groups. We have seen positive impact on child first, relationship-based multi-agency services where services are co-located in hubs.

We appreciate the plan for the additional guidance and training materials, including a set of practice notes and videos for professionals working for children's services and other agencies. We value this addition to further support the work on missing children and young people and sharing of information. We also appreciate that the phased approach of this Strategy will be beneficial to practitioners to allow them to adapt to, and ultimately embrace these new ways of working, as will the production learning materials to support multi-agency practice.

We note the reference to the need for a well-understood and coherent change management to ensure that the National Standards are effectively implemented by more than one agency simultaneously. However, whilst the first draft document noted that 'delays, waiting lists and insufficient professional time to meet the care and support needs of all children, young people and their families is a likely scenario for some years to come, especially with rising demand', this is not referenced within the new Strategy. We remain concerned that as previously referenced, many children's services professionals work more hours than they are paid and that workers also need protecting from some of the known consequences of over-work, such as cumulative stress and secondary trauma. We would value the consideration of these aspects within the carefully planned sequence of robust change management.

We would value a more explicit reference to the leadership, or comprehensive collaborative agreement between partners, needed to implement this new approach. This has the potential to strengthen the lines of accountability and ensure clarity of responsibility for taking the Strategy forward

## QUESTION 5.

**Which metrics and processes should be developed to measure the impact and outcomes of the National Practice Framework for children, young people and their families?**

We appreciate that the metrics will be measured through existing mechanisms and linked to the key outcomes identified. It will be important for any measures and evaluations of the framework to be co-constructed with children and young people, especially those who have experienced care. This could include, for example, looking at the quality of care, access to services, quality of support, outcomes of assessment and interventions and reducing inequalities. The outcomes of these measures could be used to inform, for example, finance and use of resources, influencing commissioning, supporting quality improvement work, helping with quality assurance work and monitoring and shaping future services.