



Department
for Education



Department
of Health

Dear Jean

It is with great pleasure that we are publishing your report today on information sharing in the foundation years.

When our predecessors invited you to set up a ‘task and finish’ group, you were asked to identify on-going barriers in sharing information at a local level and particularly with respect to health and children’s centres.

Your group’s report is an excellent analysis of where those barriers still exist. We agree that some of the biggest barriers to information sharing arise through local professional culture and practice, rather than Government regulation. There is a need to break down these barriers, which are often perceived rather than real. As with Dame Fiona Caldicott’s review of Information Governance, there is a clear message that cultural change is needed, if we are to improve the way information is shared.

You identify examples of best practice that show very clearly how it is possible for professionals to work together to overcome those cultural barriers to sharing information. We are particularly pleased that 4Children, the Department for Education’s strategic partner for the early years, has agreed to share these and further examples of good practice. They can be found at the following link www.foundationyears.org.uk/information-sharing.

We commend your report and its analysis to everyone working with young children and their families. You set out clearly the key issues as you see them: guidance and information; trust and different professional cultures; strategic leadership to champion information sharing locally; weak operational management; IT systems; awareness of the valuable role of children’s centres; training and CPD; cross-border working, as well as specific challenges where families have particular needs.

You also set out under a number of themes ways in which we can all, locally and nationally, work to overcome barriers where they still exist:

A single birth to five programme

It is right to expect coherence and consistency nationally if integration is to work locally. Since your group met we have continued to promote integrated working. The reforms to health services such as the creation of Health and Wellbeing Boards and the planned transfer of responsibility for public health for 0-5 year olds to local authorities from April 2015 promote integrated working and joint commissioning of services.

Another example of cross-working between health and education is our work to develop a single integrated review of children's development at age 2, bringing together the statutory EYFS progress check with the Healthy Child Programme health and development review. We know that many areas have already under their own initiative linked these processes and the early signs from the pilots are positive that there is good practice that can be shared more widely.

We agree that the key to information sharing is working together within a shared outcomes framework. Services for all children, as you say, should increasingly be commissioned jointly, based where appropriate on joint assessment of needs. You highlight our draft SEN provisions. Our draft legislation recognises that children with SEN are an important group that require specific attention from commissioners. Widening out the joint commissioning duty to cover all children would reverse that intent. The Bill, however, is enabling: there is nothing to stop partners applying joint commissioning principles more generally to the needs of all children.

Data and IT

We agree that systems need to help professionals to work together and share information. Our revised statutory guidance for children's centres is clear that health services and local authorities should share information, such as live birth data, effectively with children's centres on a regular basis. The Department of Health will liaise with NHS England and partners, including the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC), to explore the practical issues involved in providing regular and timely updates of bulk data on live births to local authorities.

We have considered the arguments for linking health, social care and schools data and are undertaking further work to consider all pragmatic solutions, including due consideration of civil liberties and privacy issues. It is important any solution is proportionate to the problem we are trying to solve. We will want to see how that work progresses. More broadly, our Departments are committed to the development of common and open standards to enable greater

sharing of data across systems and are exploring how to improve current systems.

Published guidance

It is essential that national guidance is clear and consistent about how information can be safely shared. We are reinforcing the importance of this across a range of guidance, such as *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the forthcoming draft SEN Code of Practice. We will consider how we can further strengthen guidance on information sharing, for example when reviewing the midwifery and health visiting pathways.

We urge local practitioners to look at the HM Government document *Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers* [<http://tinyurl.com/oe3a9qa>] which remains invaluable as a tool to help professionals work through how information can be shared and shared appropriately.

Occupational standards and training

We agree that information sharing good practice should be embedded across professional standards and training. You make some specific and helpful suggestions. The National College for Teaching and Leadership is now considering the findings of the research into outreach and family support as part of their review of the National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL). That leadership programme already has significant content and materials on integrated and multi-agency working including information sharing.

The Teachers' Standards (Early Years) and Early Years Educator criteria, published this summer, include information sharing and security and confidentiality of information. The training and assessment for those becoming an Early Years Teacher or Early Years Educator will also include these areas.

We agree that an e-learning module on information sharing in the foundation years would be helpful and we will work with early years and health organisations to explore how this can be achieved.

Regulation

Regulation can be a powerful driver of improvement and it is important that it challenges local agencies on information sharing. Ofsted's new Children's Centres inspection framework is explicit about what good and outstanding

providers need to do around information sharing. Ofsted will also consider this as they publish later this year their new Early Years inspection framework and consult on revised inspection arrangements for childminders.

Local commissioning and service provision

We strongly urge local agencies to consider the good practice you have identified and, again, thank 4Children for hosting this on their website.

Lastly, we would like to extend our gratitude to you personally for having led this work and to all the members of your 'task and finish' group, listed overleaf, who volunteered their valuable time to help us tackle this important issue.



Elizabeth Truss
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Education and Childcare



Dan Poulter
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
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Information sharing task and finish group

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