

Plenary Presentation: Child Welfare and Protection Reform in the UK – Messages From Our Experience

This paper will present an overview of recent key developments and reforms in child welfare and protection across the UK. It will draw out the learning from our experiences and set out both the positive and negative messages for consideration in other jurisdictions.

Two major policy initiatives have emerged in the UK - *Every Child Matters* in England and Wales, and *Getting it Right for Every Child* in Scotland. These policy initiatives are both underpinned by an increased emphasis upon the roles of the ‘universal’ services of Education and Health for the promotion of children’s welfare and their protection from harm. These developments have been coupled with an increased focus on the *needs of* children as opposed to the pre-existing focus on the *risks to* children. These changes pose challenges for social work services as well as for all professionals whose roles bring them into contact with children. It will be argued that the focus on children’s needs is welcome and that it is important for all professionals to be alert to children’s welfare. At the same time, the range of concerns about the developments will also be explored, including the potential for risks to be overlooked, for professional roles and responsibilities to be unclear and for overwhelming pressure on scarce resources.