



Centre for excellence
for Children's Care and Protection

Children's Services Reform Research Study:

Learning and Implications for Getting It Right For Every Child

Dr Alex McTier

30 January 2025

Second in a series of webinars to take a further look at what the Children's Services Reform Research findings mean if Scotland is to achieve impactful, meaningful change and how these themes have been developing.

building brighter futures

www.celcis.org

Children's Services Reform Research

Aim: To gather evidence to inform decision-making about the delivery of children's services in light of the proposed introduction of the National Care Service

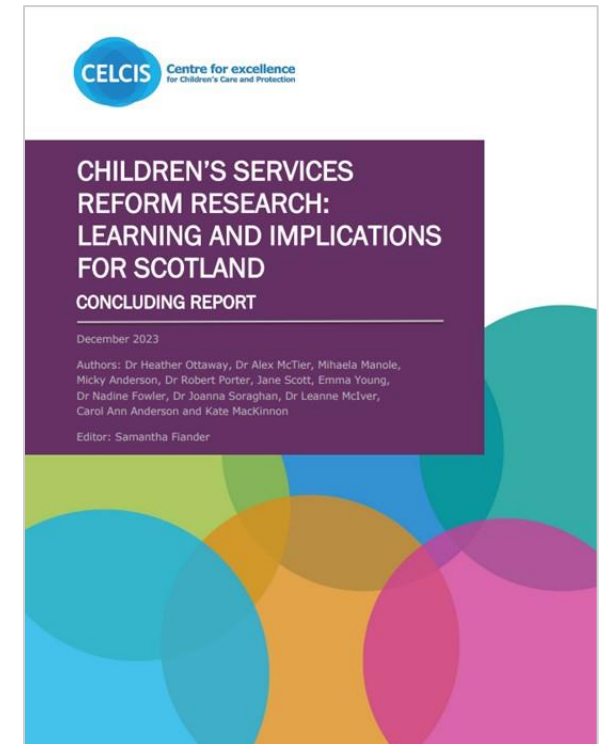
Research question: What is needed to ensure that children, young people and families get the help they need, when they need it?

Strand 1:
Rapid evidence review

Strand 2:
Case studies of
transformational reform
programmes

Strand 3:
Mapping integration and
outcomes in Scotland: A
statistical analysis

Strand 4:
Scotland's children's services
landscape: The views and
experiences of the children's
services workforce



Why the focus on GIRFEC?

- GIRFEC, now in its 20th year, provides a *"unifying practice framework, shared language and an approach to working together"* (Scottish Government, 2021)
- Our research found that Scotland's children's services workforce still find GIRFEC's principles, values and practices as highly relevant
- However, there are inconsistencies in its implementation, meaning that the experiences of children and families differ across Scotland (Scottish Government, 2021)

Why the focus on GIRFEC?

- GIRFEC still highly relevant but what does the research tell us about its implementation?
- We have considered this under the headings of:
 - GIRFEC principles and values
 - National Practice Model
 - Lead Professional
 - Information sharing
 - Child's plan
- We conclude by considering 'what is needed' as GIRFEC turns 20

GIRFEC principles and values – what we found

- GIRFEC is fully in step with approaches of the international case studies, such as its focus on early help, multi-agency working, children's voice and participation
- Scotland's workforce shared that GIRFEC:
 - Should be the core foundation for children's services policy, legislation and practice
 - Is an approach for all children, young people and families, helping to ensure they receive the right support when they need it
- Supportive, empowering and non-judgemental relationships found to be critical

GIRFEC principles and values – what we found

- Local multi-agency teams and/or co-located services in communities were found to facilitate multi-agency working, but...
- ...multi-agency working can be challenging, including:
 - Lack of understanding between different practitioners and services
 - Differing levels of respect and esteem between practitioners
 - Siloed or insular ways of working
 - Lack of shared or integrated IT/data systems

GIRFEC principles and values – what we found

- Wider, contextual factors also found to impact on GIRFEC implementation, including:
 - Needs of children, young people and families becoming more complex
 - Services struggling due to pressures on budgets and workforce recruitment and retention challenges
 - Other policy and legislative developments impacting on ability to maintain focus on GIRFEC

National Practice Model – what we found

- Workforce was supportive of having national tools and resources (such as the National Practice Model) to make clear what is expected of them, and to support more consistent practice across Scotland
- The importance of national resources was also a common theme from the international case studies, such as:
 - National guidance, standards, models and tools
 - Integrated IT systems
 - National data information system and children's outcomes indicators
 - National workforce planning

Lead Professional – what we found

- A single key worker for a child, young person or family found to help bring different services together and facilitate timely access to the support they need, but...
- ...hierarchies and power imbalances between services and practitioners were reported, impacting on the sharing of information, attendance at meetings, and delivery of agreed actions
- Workforce wellbeing is a further factor. The workforce was found to be exhausted and in crisis with recruitment, retention, sickness and absence challenges widely reported

Lead Professional – what we found

- The implications of the workforce crisis for practitioners are:
 - Greater workloads
 - Less time and space available for case reflection, supervision and training
 - Less time for the 'unseen' but important work of building relationships and networks with other multi-agency services and practitioners
- For children, young people and families, workforce instability impacts on the quality and longevity of their relationships with practitioners

Information sharing – what we found

- Multiple IT/management information systems operate across Scotland's children's services
- These systems are not integrated with each other, making it difficult for practitioners to:
 - Get timely access to multi-agency information about a child, young person or family
 - Develop multi-agency chronologies, assessments and child's plans
- Long waiting lists mean practitioners can struggle to have a full understanding children's health, disability or additional support needs

Child's plan – what we found

- The child's plan process should lead to the right help at the right time, but this is compromised by longstanding gaps, weaknesses and/or waiting lists in:
 - Early help and wraparound family support
 - Specialist health and disability services
 - Children's transitions to adult services
- These longstanding challenges are further impacted by the workforce crisis and budgetary pressures on public spending, particularly on third sector services

Child's plan – what we found

- The workforce was found to be widely committed to listening to, involving and empowering children, young people and families
- However, concerns were expressed about the progress in embedding children's rights, with specific challenges raised about hearing and responding to the voices of disabled children
- Other issues raised were:
 - Practitioner views given more weight
 - Some parents feeling judged and blamed for their circumstances
 - Inaccessible, professionalised language reinforcing power imbalances

GIRFEC at 20 – what is needed to (re)energise it?

- Make clear how GIRFEC works with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), The Promise and other policy and legislative developments
- Invest in the workforce so that they have manageable workloads, feel trusted and valued
- Establish a learning culture where leaders listen to what is working well and what is not
- Challenge organisational and professional hierarchies and build a shared vision and culture across services

GIRFEC at 20 – what is needed to (re)energise it?

- Give practitioners time to engage in multi-agency GIRFEC training and forums to build understanding of others' roles, services and ways of working
- Pool resources to fund services and roles that facilitate multi-agency working (for example, co-located service hubs, integrated IT and data systems, and multi-agency practice guidance and tools)
- Create seamless pathways between different services, regularly reviewing the boundaries, thresholds and pathways between them