Well established processes, enablers and (many) barriers to inter-agency working in the early years

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The scale ranges from low to high, with low indicating no interaction at all and high indicating the collaboration level.

Source: level of collaboration scale
Figure 2. Stages of collaboration development.

Enablers

- Clarity of purpose/clear recognition of need for partnership working
- Commitment to joint working at all levels, from senior managers to front-line practitioners
- Strong leadership/management
- Strong personal relationships/trust between partners
- Understanding/clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Good communication
- Opportunities for joint/inter-professional training
- Assessment of children’s needs
- Clear procedures for information sharing, including databases
- Secondments between services, or services co-located in one building.
- Sensitivity to the local context and culture
Barriers

Contextual barriers/political climate
• Changes in political direction.
• Financial uncertainty.
• Agency reorganisation.
• A climate of constant organisational change.
• Local needs at odds with national priorities.
• Agency boundaries not co-terminous.
• Costs of networking in rural areas.

Organisational challenges
• Different agency policies, procedures and systems.
• Agencies have different remits and do not collect the same data.
• Professional, technical and ethical obstacles to information sharing.
Cultural/professional obstacles
• Different professional beliefs.
• Professional stereotyping.
• Differing levels of qualification and experience, leading to conflicting views.

Commitment obstacles
• Lack of explicit commitment to interagency working.
• Differing levels of ‘buy-in’; some agencies reluctant to engage.
• Where managers do not experience interagency working as part of core work, it is vulnerable to changes in work priorities.

From: Statham, J. (2011) A review of international evidence on interagency working, to inform the development of Children’s Services Committees in Ireland. Dept. of Children & Youth Affairs, Dublin
MORE Commonly recognised barriers to interagency work

- Previous ‘history’ of conflict between individuals and organizations.
- Competitive relationships between services.
- Bureaucratic need to follow agency procedures may lead to stifled creative planning.
- Accountability issues — lack of clarity about who takes responsibility in each agency dysfunction at both operational and strategic levels for multi-agency working to be effective.
- Professionals and disciplines insisting on undertaking particular parts of assessments and therapeutic work.
- Interdisciplinary power struggles.
- Lack of a ‘common language’.

An encouraging story, it can work

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