



## Overview

In the course of delivering services to children and families, professionals work together with other professionals from their own, or other, organisations. There are different types and levels of interagency working. Below is how Frost categorised interagency work, from level 1 (which represents a small degree of co-working) to level 4 (which involves a high degree of partnership between organisations):

- “Level 1**  
**COOPERATION:** *Services work together toward consistent goals and complementary services, while maintaining their independence.*
- Level 2**  
**COLLABORATION:** *Services address issues of overlap, duplication and gaps in service provision and work towards common outcomes.*
- Level 3**  
**COORDINATION:** *Services work together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals.*
- Level 4**  
**INTEGRATION:** *Different services become one organisation in order to enhance service delivery.”*

(Frost, 2005, p13)

*‘Effective interagency working, therefore, acts to create the permitting circumstances for better functioning of frontline services and frontline staff’.*

Statham, 2011  
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## Current Thinking

Research into interagency work shows it contributes positively to changing the service delivery process, to the experiences of families using services and to professional practice.

Good interagency work can potentially improve difficult interagency relationships; however, interagency work cannot change the poor performance of an agency that does not deliver quality, evidence-based services.

To date, research suggests interagency work does not directly impact on outcomes for children and families, but provides an environment which supports the achievement of outcomes.

(Statham, 2011)

### BENEFITS

- **Faster access** to services
- **Reduced anxiety** for workers
- Increased **quality of case monitoring** and relapse support
- Ensuring agency **demands on a family** are not competing or overwhelming
- **Consistency of message** from all involved
- Better **decision-making**
- Improved ability to provide needed and timely **resources**
- More effective **use of limited resources**
- Development of **new policy and practice**
- **Reduction in duplication** of service

(Children Acts Advisory Board [CAAB], 2009)

### OBSTACLES

- Failure to prioritise the **time** to develop interagency working
- Agreeing **policies, procedures** and **protocols**: involves being open to new ideas and best practice systems of other agencies
- Changing **attitudes** and **beliefs**
- Lack of **collaborative skills**: for example, communication and interpersonal skills
- **Conflict**: at an agency or individual level
- **Collaboration fatigue**, which is when individuals or organisations become exhausted by multiple interagency initiatives and tend to devalue or opt out of new interagency initiatives

(Atkinson et al , 2002)



## Key People

**Prof. June Statham**  
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## Further Reading

*For a comprehensive review of research on interagency working see:*

Statham, J. (2011) **A review of international evidence on interagency working, to inform the development of Children's Services Committees in Ireland** or CAAB (2009) **Guidance to Support Effective Interagency Working across Irish Children's Services**, Dublin: Children Acts Advisory Board.

*For information on establishing effective multiagency partnerships see* Cheminais, R. (2009) **Effective Multi-Agency Partnerships** Sage Publication or Atkinson et al (2002) **Multi-agency working: a detailed study** from [www.nfer.ac.uk](http://www.nfer.ac.uk) or Frost, N. (2005) **Professionalism, partnership and joined-up thinking: A research review of front-line working with children and families**. Dartington: Research in Practice.

## Effective Interagency Work

Statham's (2011) review of international evidence found that, although our understanding of interagency work is still evolving, it can be facilitated by a number of factors:

- **Clarity of purpose** about what the work hopes to achieve and **clarity of roles** which helps to identify what each agency is responsible for
- **Whole-agency commitment** to joint working, from frontline staff to senior managers
- **Leadership** from managers and from other staff within the organisation
- Development of **relationships based on trust and openness**
- **Good communication** between organisations, using both formal and informal methods
- Clear **procedures** for information sharing
- **Opportunities for staff at all levels to develop relationships**, such as training events

### Definition

Interagency working is defined as more than one agency working together in a planned, coordinated and formal way, towards shared and agreed goals.

## Practice Tips

To develop effective interagency work, care needs to be taken to establish structures which are purposeful and sustainable, as well as ways of communicating which facilitate open, solution-focused exchanges. The following can be useful when starting new interagency work, or to enhance current interagency work:

- Identify the underlying rationale for working with other organisations on a particular issue and identify target outcomes. This process should include a review of evidence on the best ways to achieve target outcomes.
- Secure commitment from managers and staff.
- Share information on agency remits, key policies and procedures.
- Agree and document a plan about how organisations will work together, including specifics around activities, timeframes, roles and responsibilities.
- Identify how information will be communicated and what type of information will be shared.
- Take time to develop ways of communicating that are open, honest and solution-focused.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of interagency work and reflect on experiences at regular intervals. In addition, if particular difficulties in interagency work emerge, review them and agree how challenges can be addressed.
- If problems occur, seek to work together to solve problems. Be aware that agencies can have different agendas and internal pressures which impact on work.
- Interagency work is supported by agency working on shared tasks. It can be helpful to consider creative ways to develop relationships and share learning such as Communities of Practice.