

# **OUTCOME INDICATORS IN THE EARLY YEARS**

**REPORT OF THE EARLY YEARS FRAMEWORK DATA AND  
INDICATORS GROUP**

## Contents

Background and Summary .....	3
Objectives.....	4
Approach .....	5
Defining Outcomes for Children in the Early Years .....	6
Defining Outcome Indicators .....	7
The Early Years Indicator Suite .....	8
Using the Early Years Indicators .....	8
Forward Look.....	9
Annex A.....	10

## Background and Summary

1. The Early Years Framework contributes primarily to the delivery of National Outcome 5 – our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed, but also to other National Outcomes, notably National Outcome 4 (our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens) and National Outcome 8 (we have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk).

2. There is a commitment in the Early Years Framework (EYF) published in December 2008, for the Scottish Government and local and national partners to work in partnership to:

- identify the outcomes that are crucial to all measures of success in the early years, and
- identify and define the indicators we need to measure to confirm that early years policies are supporting progress toward these and higher level national outcomes.

3. The EYF Data and Indicators Group (DIG) was brought together in July 2009 to take this work forward. A full list of the members is attached at [Annex A](#).

4. The group used a logic modelling approach to develop an outcomes framework, based on the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) wellbeing principles:

- safe,
- healthy
- active
- nurtured
- achieving
- responsible
- respected
- included.

The group then identified a range of indicators that could be used to measure these outcomes.

5. The indicators are neither mandatory nor prescriptive, and are to be seen as a tool for Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) to support them in measuring progress in achieving better outcomes for children in their areas.

6. All of the points above are expanded on in the following paragraphs.

## Objectives

The main aim of the Data and Indicators Group (DIG) was to identify and develop a meaningful, manageable and robust set of indicators against which progress toward national and local early years outcomes can be assessed.

7. More specifically, its objectives were to:

- develop and refine indicators of progress that are key to early years outcomes, using the best available evidence
- explain, through simple narratives, what each indicator, and the set as a whole, can tell us about progress towards outcomes at the local and national levels
- identify gaps in the evidence/data required to support early years progress measures and agree priorities for filling these gaps..

8. The indicators have the potential to be used to:

- provide a profile for Scotland of progress toward National Outcome 5 and other closely related National Outcomes
- allow monitoring of changes and progress over time toward early years outcomes at national and local level
- inform decision-making at local and national level for action and resource allocation
- allow comparison between specific population groups and areas of Scotland and potentially with other countries as far as available data allow.

9. The work of the DIG is very much part of the implementation of the EYF and not a stand alone exercise. The purpose of the group is to provide useful tools to help Community Planning Partners think about, assess and report progress in achieving better outcomes for children, families and communities in their areas. The suggested indicators are neither mandatory nor prescriptive but might be used by CPPs in Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) and for performance management. They will also be helpful in developing a clearer picture of progress at national level for strategic purposes.

10. Important dimensions to the work include:

- what the indicators can tell us about progress at local and national level
- contextual factors including whether the indicators tell us directly about outcomes for children or reflect the key role of other agents in the early years in terms of risk and protective factors (parents/carers, families, communities)
- life course factors across the early years period defined as pre-birth to eight years old (pregnancy, birth and infancy, preschool years, early primary school years).

11. Although the specific focus of the DIG's work is on early years outcomes and indicators, it has been taken forward in the wider context of the Children, Young People and Social Care (CYPSC) Data Review undertaken by Scottish Government Education Analytical Services. The Data Review is exploring outcome and indicator options aligned with National Outcomes for children and young people at local and national levels. Further work to develop and fill in gaps in data sources and indicators in the early years will be conducted as part of the Data Review.

## **Approach**

12. The Early Years Framework (EYF) is all about improving outcomes for children in later life through transformational change, and developing cohesive early years policy to achieve this. It stresses that change will be demonstrated by the improvement in outcomes for children rather than implementation of individual elements of the change process itself. Given this, the Data and Indicators Group (DIG) agreed that the focus of its work would be on identifying indicators of outcomes for children in the early years rather than process or output indicators associated with early years services.

13. The starting point was to agree working definitions of the key outcomes which the EYF was intended to improve. The EYF clearly sets out the elements of transformational change but does not provide a concise statement of the outcomes it seeks to address. In going back to first principles, DIG used logic modelling as a tool to define outcomes for children in the early years. This technique helps set out a shared understanding about the relationship between "what we do" (service interventions), and outcomes or the 'theory of change' that underpins policy and practice.

14. From the logic modelling process, DIG developed an outcomes framework. The framework was used to identify a range of possible early years indicators drawing on relevant data sources and indicators available locally and nationally and on evidence about child development.

15. From the refined list of indicators, those which can currently be monitored using existing data and those where relatively minor 'tweaks' to the data itself or collection systems would allow monitoring at local and national level were identified. For those indicators where data is not currently available, suggestions have been made for possible future sources. Additional data needs to support the indicators will be developed as part of the wider Data Review and are detailed in the indicators table associated with this report.

16. There is a great deal of work taking place in developing indicators including, for example, a large scale project to develop mental health and well-being indicators for children and young people which is being undertaken by NHS Health Scotland and is due to report in 2011. In particular, DIG has

contributed to the Society Of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Improving Local Indicators Project and the Menu of Local Indicators for SOAs as well as ongoing work to coordinate analytical support around the three major policy frameworks (EYF, Achieving our Potential and Equally Well) in the context of the Concordat.

17. It was not the purpose of DIG to pre-empt or duplicate this work and undertake a technical exercise to produce another set of indicators. Rather, the intention was to ensure that the work of DIG is complementary to other work and enhance understanding of how outcomes can be improved for children by linking evidence, policy and practice. Throughout this work, the expertise of DIG members has been utilised to provide signposts to relevant work which is yet to report and which might have an impact on the evidence base for the early years and on the most appropriate data sources and indicators in the future. This is essentially an evolutionary process which will continue as the EYF is implemented.

## **Defining Outcomes for Children in the Early Years**

18. The Early Years Framework (EYF) sets out a wide-ranging vision of the best start in life for children based largely on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, there is no definitive statement of outcomes for children. This vision is summed up in the eight elements of the Wheel of Wellbeing which underpins Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). These elements are Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Responsible, Respected and Included (SHANARRI). GIRFEC is seen as the delivery mechanism for the EYF and provides a common language across all the services which support children and families.

19. DIG used the SHANARRI themes to provide a framework for defining outcomes for children in the early years. From the logic modelling work, it became clear that some of the themes are more pertinent in the early years than others and could be seen as the primary elements in the best start in life affecting the other elements in different ways. Children who are safe, healthy, active and nurtured are more likely to be achieving and over time, respected and responsible. The Inclusion theme underpins and is vital to all of these elements and to positive outcomes associated with them.

20. The DIG produced logic models on the key themes for early years outcomes (Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving) which attempted to capture the main determinants of outcomes in the early years. The logic models were used to develop an outcomes framework as a basis for identifying meaningful indicators.

21. The framework sets out short, intermediate and long term outcomes in terms of the key themes. The short term 'outcomes' tend to reflect changes in inputs and processes that will contribute to longer term outcomes.

Intermediate outcomes mark the steps along the way to achieving long term outcomes, which are largely high level and aspirational. There is no specific time scale associated with achievement of the outcomes beyond an expectation that some impact on longer term outcomes is visible by the end of the 10 year timeframe of the EYF. In many cases, Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) are already making progress toward short term and intermediate outcomes but these will vary depending on local circumstances.

22. Another feature of the framework is that the long term outcomes are specifically focussed on children while the intermediate outcomes tend to apply to parents, carers and families. The short term outcomes apply more widely still at the community level. This reflects the fact that outcomes for children in the earliest years are heavily dependent on the behaviour and circumstances of other agents including parents, carers, other family members, teachers, health professionals and the wider communities of which they are a part.

23. The outcome indicators will provide an assessment of progress toward achieving longer term outcomes for children. However, there are so many policy strands and external factors that impact on outcomes for children that the outcome indicators cannot in themselves enable evaluation of the impact of transformational change as set out in the EYF on outcomes for children. Evaluation of specific local programmes and practice will help provide a clearer picture of how the EYF is impacting on outcomes for children in the longer term.

## **Defining Outcome Indicators**

24. Having defined the outcomes that the Early Years Framework (EYF) is intended to facilitate and explored the theory of change underpinning the outcomes through logic modelling, it was possible to consider what would be the best indicators of progress toward early years outcomes.

25. A focus in defining the indicators has been to develop indicators which provide more than simply process information. In doing so, a suite of indicators has been produced which aims to provide meaningful information which can be used to gauge progress towards the wide-ranging outcomes identified.

26. The indicator table details these indicators, the rationale for their inclusion, Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) theme covered, impact on outcomes and a brief commentary on data availability and quality. This approach is consistent with that of the wider Data Review (undertaken by Children, Young People and Social Care) and reflects data availability and quality relative to indicators at both national and local levels. Included in this are indicators where data and evidence are not necessarily available and therefore denote where further analytical work is required to improve understanding of progress towards Outcome 5.

27. The indicators have been subject to input from policy colleagues across a broad spectrum of policy areas to ensure that they are comprehensive and compatible with other work in more focussed areas, such as the afore-mentioned mental health indicators for children and young people. In the long-term, this should reduce repetition in monitoring the indicators; however, in the short-term, it may be necessary to consider data collection systems at both local and national levels to ensure the sustainability of the indicators. The wider Data Review will seek to ensure that appropriate data is collected relative to the indicators.

### **The Early Years Indicator Suite**

28. The indicators reflect what are considered to be the key issues relative to the early years in Scotland. They represent all areas of the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) Well Being indicators (Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Responsible, Respected and Included), with some areas naturally being reflected more given the 0-8 stage. Indicators around child health, safety and nurture for example, are prominent. An underpinning theme across the indicators is the impact of deprivation, child poverty and inequality on outcomes.

29. The indicators should act as a comprehensive but by no means complete framework through which progress towards Outcome 5 can be measured. As a suite, the indicators should provide a good overview of development across a broad range of issues. In isolation, the indicators can be used with more focussed and micro-level data to shed light on progress in specific policy areas.

### **Using the Early Years Indicators**

30. At a national level, the indicators can be used by government as a tool for measuring progress towards Outcome 5. They can also be used by policy and analytical colleagues to inform where data and evidence is lacking and where further analysis is needed. This function should play a key role in influencing analytical activity and should also ensure efficiency in developing future work programmes.

31. At a local level, the indicators can be used as a resource to help inform local authorities as to how progress towards Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) can be presented, though the indicators are neither prescriptive nor comprehensive.

32. Data availability, both at a national and local level, will be key to providing the information that demonstrates progress. Data availability at the national level is not always replicated at the local, and vice versa. Therefore, it

will be important to consider the suitability of purpose of indicators at different levels dependant on whether or not data is collected.

## **Forward Look**

33. The indicators and outcomes that they measure currently will provide a useful framework to focus the work of the Early Years Framework (EYF) Research into Practice Group.

34. It is important to remember that these indicators are not fixed and will require monitoring and review over time. New evidence and data sources may impact upon the suitability of indicators and it will be necessary to consider how fit for purpose the indicators are.

35. The wider Data Review work and indicators that it will produce may also necessitate the need for review of the EYF indicators and their subsequent refinement.

36. A number of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) are developing assessment tools around various child progress measures while others are piloting parenting programmes. There is therefore a need for local evaluation and sharing of practice/experience in these sorts of activities at a local level as this will help inform understanding of progress towards outcomes. Evaluation will be important in demonstrating how programmes are meeting EYF outcomes relative to the indicators and therefore should be a key consideration in the design and implementation of early years initiatives.

## ANNEX A

### Membership

Rod Harrison (Chair)	Head, CYPSC Analytical Services, Scottish Government
Sarah Campbell	Principal Researcher, CYPSC, Analytical Services
Jim Chalmers	ISD
Kate Cherry	HMIE
Susan Duncan/ David Milne	Public Services Reform Division, SG
Ingrid Gilray	Care Commission
Nuala Gormley	ASU, DG Health
Sara Grainger	Office of the Chief Statistician, SG
Gillian Henderson	SCRA
Marion MacLeod	Children in Scotland
Robert McGeachy/Anne Darlington	Action for Children
Andrew McGuire	Improvement Service
Rory Mitchell	NHS Health Scotland
Robert Nicol/Ian Storrie	COSLA
Judith Tait	SWIA
Carolyn Wilson	Child and Maternal Health, DG Health
Jonathan Wright	ASU, DG Health
Anncriis Roberts	Early Years Team, DG Education

### Supporting team ASU

Anne Marie Dorrian  
Susan Robinson  
Paul Sloan