Centre for Effective Services
Review of Outcomes & Impact 2008 - 2011
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Foreword

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) was established in Dublin in 2008 with the aim of promoting the development of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice with those working with children, families and communities. The CES Belfast office opened and the staff team were in place by the end of 2010. Three years after the establishment of the Centre, CES undertook this mid-term review to consult with stakeholders on their experience of the organisation and to measure outcomes achieved to date. The intention was that the review would then provide a key part of the basis to develop a new strategy for the organisation.

CES commissioned external consultants, Prospectus and Anne Mc Murray, to carry out this review to ensure that it was independent, of high quality and relevant to the context in which the organisation now works across the island of Ireland. An extensive consultation process was undertaken with stakeholders including, funders, a wide range of external bodies, the staff and the board. An online questionnaire also formed part of the consultation. I wish to thank all those who participated so generously in the consultations and yielded such helpful perspectives.

The review validated the need for, and the importance of, developing an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice. It was encouraging that CES was judged to have developed a good foundation for this work in its formative years. Important messages and challenges were also identified in the review about how CES carried out its work and communicated with its audiences. The suggested changes have been heard and taken on board by CES and are central to the ethos and content of the new strategy.

By organisational lifespan standards, CES is still in its infancy. The concept of an intermediary organisation, connecting the evidence from research to the world of policy and practice, is quite new in Ireland resulting in a steep learning curve for the organisation and our stakeholders. It has, however, been an exciting and pioneering three years, building our own capacity and experience. We think that the core learning has been captured in the review and it will guide the strategic direction for the next three years. The strategy recognises the importance of bringing evidence to bear on decision-making and places an additional emphasis on supporting and improving the implementation of policy and practice to achieve better outcomes for children, families and communities. The strategy takes into account the changed economic realities and charts a direction for a sustainable future for CES.

Dan Flinter,
Chairperson, CES
April, 2012
1. Introduction & Context

1.1 Background to CES

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) was established in 2008 in the Republic of Ireland and in 2010 in Northern Ireland, to provide technical and organisational expertise to promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach to policy-making and service provision across the island of Ireland.

CES is supported by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and by The Atlantic Philanthropies. CES is a, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It has offices in Dublin and Belfast.

CES’ three core aims are as follows:

- to promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice in child, family and community services
- to promote the development of collaborative, joined-up working, which is outcomes-focused across research, policy and service-providing organisations
- to build capacity within Ireland and Northern Ireland to take this work forward in the longer term by developing knowledge, skills and competencies.

The following diagram is a timeline showing key steps in the development of CES:

CES is part of an emerging body of intermediary organisations across the world. The original mission of the Centre was to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of ‘what works’, in order to improve outcomes for children, young people, and the families and communities in which they live. The full staff complement is now 18 people which includes a number of part-time and shared posts across both jurisdictions. CES has since the Autumn of 2011 hosted 3 full-time graduate interns based in the Dublin office. CES has also hosted 5 secondees over the past three years from a number of Government Departments and Agencies.
1.2 Objectives of this Review

The purpose of this review was to undertake a mid-term assessment of the activities and outcomes achieved by CES during the period 2008 to 2011 inclusive. The review findings were used to inform the strategic direction for the Centre over the next three years (Jan 2012 to Dec 2014).

1.3 Overview of the Review Process

CES commissioned Prospectus and Anne McMurray, to complete an independent review of the key activities and outcomes achieved, during the period 2008 to 2011. In order to acquire the necessary feedback and inputs to inform a comprehensive and balanced review, Prospectus / Anne McMurray completed the following:

- Consultation with internal and external stakeholders
- Consideration and review of CES deliverables
- Review of actual activities against work programmes
- Review of outcomes achieved against an original and revised logic model for CES.

An extensive consultation process completed as part of this review included the following:

- One-to-one interviews with 27 key external stakeholders (policy makers, practitioners and researchers in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland).
- One-to-one interviews with 8 members of CES Board and CES Team
- An online questionnaire targeted at external stakeholders (61 responses received)
- A focus group (involving CES Team).

A standardised approach was adopted during all one-to-one interviews to ensure consistency in approach and assessment.

Following collation of the consultation findings a tailored framework was developed to facilitate the assessment of CES’ performance against the three “Early Outcomes” set by CES in their revised Logic Model (a copy of the Logic Model can be seen in Appendix 4). Each “Early Outcome” is reviewed using a number of relevant indicators. An overall assessment and a conclusion regarding CES progress and impact is provided for each of the indicators used.

The assessment framework enables a comprehensive review of CES activities and impact since establishment in 2008. Conclusions are drawn using three distinct inputs as follows:

1) Overall findings from the consultation process;
2) CES’ work programmes and progress reports;
3) Consideration of developments and circumstances in the external environment that may have had a positive or negative impact on the outcomes and impact of CES during the period 2008 – 2011.
2. High Level Analysis of the External Environment

The following section identifies some of the relevant policy or structural developments that have taken place in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, followed by an overview of the primary implications of these for CES.

2.1 Northern Ireland

Our Children and Young People: Our Pledge is the current 10-year strategy in Northern Ireland 2006-2016, set up under the Office of First and Deputy First Minster (OFMDFM). The strategy is shaped around the achievement of six high level outcomes which aim to improve the wellbeing and the realisation of rights of children in Northern Ireland:

i. Being healthy;
ii. Enjoying, learning and achieving;
iii. Living in safety and with stability;
iv. Experiencing economic and environmental well being;
v. Contributing positively to community and society; and
vi. Living in a society which respects their rights.

The arrangements for the commissioning and delivery of services for children and young people in Northern Ireland have undergone structural changes since 2007 with the implementation of the Reform of Public Administration (RPA).

Prior to the RPA reorganisation of health and social care, Children's Services Planning had been a statutory responsibility of the four Health and Social Services Boards. This statutory duty has now transferred to the Health and Social Care Board, which, together with the Public Health Agency, commissions and plans health and social care services across Northern Ireland.

In 2011, the Northern Ireland-wide Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership (CYPSP) was set up to replace the four Children and Young People’s Committees. The CYPSP has been set up with a statutory duty on the Health and Social Care Board to lead the process, but without the duty on all other relevant agencies to collaborate in such planning. It is hoped that agreement for joint statutory collaboration will be secured in due course. It has been agreed that the integrated planning process will take place at three levels:

- Northern Ireland level – through the Children and Young People’s Strategic Partnership
- Local level (Health and Social Care Trust areas) – through an Outcomes Group in each Trust area, and
- Locality level – through locality planning groups.

The partner agencies represent statutory, voluntary and community sectors. The CYPSP relates to a range of strategies and policies, in relation to requirements in terms of children and young people.
Examples of key strategies and policies include:

- Families Matter, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety strategy for family support and parenting
- Every School a Good School – Department of Education
- Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy – Department of Social Development
- Strategic Framework for Reducing Offending – Department of Justice
- Community Safety Strategy – Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)
- Cohesion, Sharing and Integration – Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)
- Community Planning – Department of Regional Development
- Strengthening Families – Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division, Department for Social Development (DSD).

The CYPSP has a number of subgroups which are relevant to CES:

- Advising government on policy
- Early intervention and prevention: evidence implementation through Outcomes Groups and locality groups
- Integrated planning
- Research and evidence.

Legislation was approved in 2011 to establish a statutory regional Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI). The objective of the Board will be to ensure that work being done by both individuals and organisations is effective in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. The Public Health Agency (PHA) will host and provide support for the SBNI.

2.2 Republic of Ireland

The Department of Children & Youth Affairs (DCYA) was established with effect from June 2011, expanding the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. The main rationale for its establishment was to integrate complementary functions into a cohesive framework for the development of policy and delivery of services to children and their families and provide them with greater authority through the Minister. It will drive coordinated actions across a range of sectors, including health, education, youth justice, sport, arts and culture.

To facilitate this, a number of relevant public bodies (or in some cases, components of these) have been transferred to the DCYA. Amongst the bodies coming under the auspices of the DCYA are:

- Irish Youth Justice Service (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform)
- Early Years Education Policy Unit (Department of Education and Science)
- National Education and Welfare Board (Department of Education)
- Family Support Agency (Department of Social Protection).

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1 Safeguarding Board Act (Northern Ireland) 2011
In addition to establishing the DCYA, the Government also committed to fundamentally reform the delivery of child protection services, as outlined within the Programme for Government\(^2\), by removing child welfare and protection from the HSE and creating a dedicated Child and Family Support Services Agency\(^3\). It is expected this new agency will be operational in 2013.

Other priorities affecting children and families relevant to CES mentioned in the Programme for Government include:

- A commitment to hold a referendum to amend the Constitution to ensure that children’s rights are strengthened,
- A commitment to achieving better outcomes for children by improving pre-school standards and training
- Subject to resources, Government will invest in a targeted early childhood education programme for disadvantaged children, building on existing targeted pre-school supports for families most in need of assistance

Another significant development affecting CES is the transfer of responsibility for “Community” matters to the Department of Environment and Local Government. It is envisaged this will allow for greater alignment of local government structures with community and local development.

Further significant reforms in 2011 included the establishment of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). This Department will lead and facilitate the implementation of the Government’s Public Service Reform programme. It is expected this Department will support the public service to successfully deliver reform at local level, as well as leading on important cross-cutting reform initiatives.

At the heart of the DPER reform agenda is a focus on five major commitments to change:
- Placing customer service at the core
- Maximising new and innovative service delivery channels
- Radically reducing costs to drive better value for money
- Leading, organising and working in new ways
- Strong focus on implementation and delivery.

It is likely these reforms, together with the ongoing budgetary constraints affecting all public expenditure, will have significant operational and strategic implications for CES, some of which are identified below.

### 2.3 Implications for CES 2008 – 2011

These changes in the external landscape have already had a significant bearing on CES. A summary of how they have impacted both in Northern Ireland and ROI is provided below.

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\(^3\) The Department recently announced the establishment of a Task Force to advise the DCYA in regard to the necessary transition programme to establish a Child & Family Support Services Agency.
**Northern Ireland**

An outcomes based, evidence-informed approach is well embedded in Northern Ireland. Commissioners are particularly interested in making a direct difference to all professionals whose work and decision making directly impacts on children’s lives. CES can align its effort with what policy makers are seeking to achieve in the future. There are a number of new and emerging bodies which are open to influence and require assistance. This includes the Department of Justice which has only assumed devolved responsibility from Westminster since 2010 with the appointment of Minister David Ford.

The opportunity is to help bring fresh thinking to government policy and strategy by working with existing key stakeholders to further connect the design and delivery of services with the scientific and technical knowledge of what works.

This requires increased collaboration with key organisations, the building of relationships with commissioners and the CYPSP, an ongoing commitment to demonstrate added value, and the ability to differentiate what CES has to offer from other similar providers.

“Look at countries that are performing and bring that to policy makers to drive innovation so that government can take a view on how to change things”

*Service Provider*

**Republic of Ireland**

Changes to the roles and responsibilities of two of CES’ major funders i.e. DCYA and DECLG have resulted in CES having to consider the appropriateness of its service offering to the needs of its changed stakeholder groups. This is particularly obvious in the case of DECLG given its considerably different remit to that of its predecessor, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

The shifting roles and remit of Departments across the public service e.g. Department of Social Protection, Department of Justice etc. have created a quite different landscape with changing personalities to one that previously existed. This has hindered the development of inter Departmental relationships and the ability of CES to secure medium-to-longer term commitments to a shared work agenda.

Given current funding difficulties all Government Departments are under severe pressure to identify cost savings while also ensuring that service provision levels are maintained. Along with many of its stakeholders, CES faces constant pressure to demonstrate the value of their contribution. This can be particularly difficult given the intangible nature of many aspects of CES work. It is expected these pressures will further increase in the coming years as funding becomes even tighter.

On a more positive note the period of public reform that the Republic of Ireland is now undergoing should offer new opportunities for CES given the priority of DPER to maximise innovative service delivery and drive better value for money. All three core aims of CES, (1) applying evidence-informed approaches, (2) promoting joined-up working, and (3) building capacity, align with and support the reform agenda in the Republic of Ireland will be key to service providers achieving DPER’s objectives. This undoubtedly provides opportunities for to support relevant bodies and display the benefits of adopting evidence-informed practices.
3. Synthesis of Consultation Findings

In order to inform the findings of this review, a wide-ranging consultation process was undertaken to gain a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect experiences of internal and external stakeholders. Overall, the consultation process comprised of a total of 35 one-to-one interviews across Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. A breakdown of those consulted on a one-to-one basis is provided in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External Stakeholders</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Provider</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic / Researcher</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Funders</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CES Board Members</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current / Former CES Team Members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>35</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The consultation process also included a focus group session with all members of the CES Team.

The final component to the consultation process involved an online questionnaire. The target audience included a broad mix of service providers, representatives from relevant Government Departments, and academics. The questionnaire was live for a period of approximately two weeks and attracted 61 responses in total. A summary of questionnaire findings is provided in Appendix 2.

The following section provides a synthesis of the key findings from the consultation process.

3.1 Key Messages from Consultation Process

This section provides a summary of the key messages received during the various strands of the consultation exercise outlined above. Findings are presented under two headings:

- Main Successes 2008 – 2011

3.1.1 Summary of Main Successes 2008 – 2011:

The majority of those consulted acknowledged CES’ early stage of development and commended its professionalism and capability to be *operationally effective within a relatively short period of time*.

The **expertise and experience displayed by the CES team** over the past three years was widely recognised by external stakeholders. The findings from one-to-one interviews and

“CES is very competent and precise in terms of implementation support”
Service Provider
responses from the online questionnaire suggest that satisfaction levels are high in this regard. 73% of respondents to the online questionnaire stated that their organisation has had direct benefit from engaging with CES. In addition, 71% claim to have had a positive experience with CES to date.

**Outputs delivered by CES were generally considered to be of a high quality and standard**, for example, tribute was paid to CES for the quality of the Review of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme and the Community Development Programme. Approaches introduced by CES have also received approval from external stakeholders. For example, the *What Works Process* is regarded as a key resource to those operating in the sector and it was thought the output from the *Capturing the Learning* process will be very useful once completed. Findings documented by CES in relation to the development of Children’s Services Committees (CSCs), as outlined within *Learning from Experience to Inform the Future*, were all well received by associated stakeholders. The subsequent introductory guide to key terms for CSCs, published by CES, has also provided a useful resource for those supporting existing Committees or planning the development of future CSCs. In summary, it was generally felt that the majority of outputs emanating from CES were well researched, well written and were useful resources to those operating in the children’s, families and communities arenas.

CES is regarded as having taken a proactive approach to **enhancing the profile and understanding of evidence-informed policy and practice**, within the Republic of Ireland in particular. This was achieved through a mix of approaches, including the hosting of events, establishment and participation in various networks, seminar series, and continuous engagement with key stakeholders (e.g. Government Departments).

Over the course of the past three years CES has **introduced a number of relevant, international experts** to the Irish landscape. It was widely acknowledged this has helped broaden knowledge and experience of evidence-informed policy and practice and has also assisted in reinforcing the potential that is offered by evidence-informed approaches.

3.1.2 Summary of Main Areas for Improvement 2008 - 2011

**Republic of Ireland**

One of the main criticisms made of CES related to its **inability to clearly articulate its role, remit and offer in a manner that was understood by all of its various stakeholders**. This was found to be the case in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and could be seen in the fact that just 55% of respondents to the online questionnaire—all of whom had an existing relationship with the CES—felt that the overarching purpose of CES could be termed “clear”.

A number of people **highlighted the existence of a mutual frustration between CES and its funders**, which it was thought stemmed from mixed expectations and inadequate clarity of communication.

“We consider CES to be a critical friend, an advisor, and a thought leader”

**Service Provider**

“What is the unique selling proposition of CES? I don’t know and I’m not sure they’re certain either”

**Government Department Representative**
It was suggested that a further contributing factor to this frustration was CES’ perceived organisational and operational inflexibility. It was suggested this could be traced to an overly strong emphasis, in establishing CES’ “independence” from funders, policymakers, service providers, academic institutions etc. However, this emphasis may have been counterproductive in the sense that it possibly alienated CES from some of its core stakeholders.

CES was also criticised by a number of service providers for being removed from the day-to-day reality of the challenges they faced. It was suggested by a number of those consulted that CES needed to place a greater focus on supporting service providers directly or else it ran the risk of being regarded as an unnecessary luxury in the current environment. Findings from the online questionnaire suggest that CES must continue to review how it can position itself with front-line service providers. Just 46% of respondents said they were satisfied that CES “understood their needs”. Similarly, 45% of respondents stated that they feel CES is “responsive to their needs”.

CES was also considered by service providers to be difficult to access and gain appropriate supports. However, it is acknowledged by those who did manage to obtain supports from CES that the standard of service provided is of a very high quality.

It should be noted a marked improvement was recognised by services users in CES’ addressing both of the above points in 2010 and 2011 with many saying they considered CES to be now far more open and receptive (to advances, requests for support / advice, etc) than was previously the case. This may reflect the fact that the majority of the CES team is in place since 2010 and not before.

A number of stakeholders questioned if CES has had any real impact in moving key policy makers and service providers to adopting an evidence-informed approach. Whilst it was widely accepted that it is most likely too early to make a definitive call on this at this point in time, it was argued that few noticeable shifts and commitments from the various Government Departments to an evidence-informed approach had been achieved. Findings from the online questionnaire however highlighted that the majority viewpoint held was that CES had ‘significantly supported the case for evidence based policy and practice’ and that CES has an important role to play in leading the case for the adoption of evidence-informed policy and practice amongst all of its stakeholders.

**Northern Ireland**

At the time of consultation CES had only had a “presence” in Northern Ireland for 12 months. Consequently stakeholders had limited experience of what CES offers on which to base their views. Feedback ranged from very positive e.g. Department of Justice, on the basis of direct work that had been carried out, to some criticism from similar type providers who perceive CES as a competitor.

The Northern Ireland context is different from the Republic of Ireland in that there is a commissioner of services i.e. the Health and Social Care Board. The “evidence-informed”, “outcomes-based” approach and philosophy is well embedded in Northern Ireland...
mainstream commissioning and service delivery, in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. However there is an openness to CES becoming more active in Northern Ireland if it is able to provide a quality service based on a clear “social change” model to differentiate it from other organisations. It was recommended that CES’ focus must be on providing knowledge and evidence of what makes a positive difference and can impact on frontline practice, to those making decisions about children’s lives. It was suggested that this would increase clarity about CES offering and its unique selling point which may lie in its ability to link policy with capacity building on the ground.

There was agreement that CES should stay narrow and deep in its focus, offer products and services which are “grounded in need” and easily accessed and “consumed” by recipients. There is a need to increase urgency around delivery and produce results faster.

There is an opportunity for CES to build an all island offer that is, locally and culturally aware, and promotes CES “brand” awareness across agencies and government. This could include fostering interdepartmental and cross border co-operation.

CES must be perceived as bringing fresh thinking to government policy and strategy, either from international sources or from local examples of evidence from practice on the ground. To be relevant and attract funding from government in Northern Ireland CES needs to align its programme of work with what policy makers are seeking to achieve in the future.

A key message in Northern Ireland is the need for CES to foster partnership and collaboration with others. To do this, CES has begun in the last 6 months to identify and target key influencers and build networks. CES future success in Northern Ireland will depend on its ability to use existing conduits and infrastructure to effect change on the ground.

3.1.3 Key Take-away Messages:

Positives

- Majority of services and outputs from CES were regarded as high quality and a useful resource to the children, families and communities sectors
- Increased awareness and understanding of evidence-informed messages and approaches amongst many of CES’ key stakeholders
- Despite a “bumpy” initiation in Northern Ireland, positive relationships are now being developed.
- Acknowledgement of the need for what CES offers at all levels.

“People who make decisions about children’s lives need to be influenced so that they provide evidence based practice on a day-to-day basis. We need this knowledge to be NI-based and locally relevant”

Government Department Representative

The agenda in Northern Ireland is about better outcomes for children, cost benefits, transformation and scalability for NI wide application. This requires CES technical assistance. For example, how to grow from a pilot to a regional mainstream organisation

Funder
3.1.3 Key Take-away Messages:

**Negatives**

- CES has not managed to clearly articulate its purpose, role, remit and service offering in a manner that is understood by all of its stakeholders north and south
- Mixed expectations and a lack of shared understanding resulted in a degree of frustration developing between CES and its funders and broader stakeholder group
- Considered to be inflexible and overly rigid in terms of who it agreed to work with and how it chose to support external clients. This is particularly true of Years 1 and 2
- CES was perceived by a number of service providers to be detached and inaccessible.

A tailored framework was utilised to review the outcomes and impact of CES during the period 2008 to 2011. At the time of establishment, a logic model was developed and agreed between CES and its three funders. The logic model identified short, medium and long term outcomes that CES intended to achieve, as well as defining inputs, activities and outputs. These outcomes represent the three overarching targets for the organisation for years one to three inclusive:

1) Increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation of services, and of high quality evaluation
2) A number of service providers receive appropriate technical, professional or scientific support
3) Increased understanding, collaborative and joined up working between service providers, researchers and policy makers.

It should be noted that Outcome 1 above is considered the overarching target of CES for years 1 to 3 with Outcomes 2 and 3 supporting the achievement of Outcome 1.

The following Section provides a summary of the key findings and observations for each of the three Outcomes. Please refer to Appendix 2 for a more detailed overview of all findings and observations.

4.1 Summary of Key Findings & Observations

Outcome 1: Increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation of services, and of high quality evaluation

- Some success has been achieved by CES in leading the promotion of evidence-informed approaches. However, CES has not yet managed to clearly articulate what precisely it is trying to achieve and how CES can add value to service providers, policy makers and researchers. This has undoubtedly limited the impact of CES to date

- CES has secured access to, and maintained relationships with, key stakeholders in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Indications suggest that CES has used opportunities well to convey the benefits of an evidence-informed approach

- CES has increased awareness and understanding of the importance of high quality evaluation. The application of this remains extremely inconsistent however, particularly within the Republic of Ireland

- CES has had some success in delivering on a knowledge dissemination approach in years 1 to 3

- It is expected that the increased understanding of evidence-informed service design and implementation, as driven by CES over the last three years, will convert to further changes in practice in 2012 and beyond.
Outcome 2: A number of service providers receive appropriate technical, professional or scientific support

- CES has supported an increasing number of service providers year-on-year. It has taken a proactive and strategic approach to the use of knowledge transfer initiatives, delivery of workshops/ seminars, and the provision of technical, professional and scientific support.

- Working relationships with both the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the Republic of Ireland have evolved and developed since 2008 in terms of the role of CES.

- It is not clear if CES has managed to establish how it can make most appropriate use of its expertise to best support the objectives of its stakeholders. This may necessitate that roles and relationships between CES and some of its stakeholders might need to be reassessed and reframed.

- CES has introduced and cultivated relationships between a range of leading national and international experts and their stakeholders. This should be further developed with CES playing a central role.

- It is thought that as awareness of CES and evidence-informed approaches increases this will result in a broader mix of service providers requesting and receiving direct support from CES in the future. However, this will be dependent upon the following:
  a) a new clarity regarding the role and function of CES
  b) a more open approach by CES to work with service providers
  c) the fact that CES now has an experienced team in place.

- 2012 is likely to be critical in determining the future role of CES in Northern Ireland. This window should allow CES to determine whether the potential shown by the organisation to date can be converted into a defined role and presence for CES in Northern Ireland in the years ahead. Whether or not CES manages to secure funding from Northern Ireland bodies will be a good indication of their likely success on this front in the future.

Outcome 3:
Increased understanding, collaborative and joined up working between service providers, researchers and policy makers

- CES has played an active role in promoting collaboration between service providers, researchers and policy makers since 2008, with some successes. However it is too early to judge the impact of these new collaborative relationships at this point in time.

- The pace of commitment to new forms of collaboration and joined up working will continue to vary significantly across the overall landscape, depending on the state of readiness and urgency within organisations. This will present specific challenges to CES in managing the expectations and requirements of all key stakeholders in order for real change to be achieved.

- The medium to longer term sustainability of new collaborations and examples of joined-up working is questionable without CES, or an appropriate substitute, continuing to manage and foster engagement.
• It will be necessary that CES demonstrates a level of flexibility across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in terms of its approach to future collaboration and joined up working. In the Republic of Ireland

• Given the all-island remit of CES, there is an opportunity also for CES to assume a more proactive role to facilitate new forms of cross-border collaboration.

### 4.2 Medium Term Outcomes

The logic model for CES, agreed with its funders, identified a series of Early Outcomes (Years 1 – 3), Medium Term Outcomes (Years 1 – 5), and Long Term Outcomes (Years 1 – 10) (see Logic Model in Appendix 4 for more details). We have already discussed the Early Outcomes above, however we recognise the importance of remaining focused on the Medium and Long Term outcomes. For this reason some brief commentary is included below in relation to the three Medium Term Outcomes and progress towards their achievement.

1. A growing proportion of services are applying outcomes-focused and an evidence-informed approach

**Assessment at Year 3**

An increasing understanding and appreciation of the application of outcomes-focused and evidence-informed approaches would appear to be developing across the island of Ireland. Unquestionably the trend is steeper in Northern Ireland at this point in time given the presence and involvement of more advanced UK bodies in NI. However shifts are now noticeable in both jurisdictions in recent years. While CES cannot claim sole responsibility for these improving trends, the fact that it is actively supporting a number of these services in terms of on-going implementation and evaluation support can be viewed as being extremely positive.

CES has actively, and quite successfully, promoted the use of logic modelling to support programme and service design, strategy development, and the completion of operational plans which invariably demands a greater focus on outcomes and measurement. In our opinion this represents constructive use of CES expertise and should serve as a further step in convincing key stakeholders of the benefits of adopting an outcomes-focused and/or evidence-informed approach.
2. More effective partnerships are developed between research, policy and practice

**Assessment at Year 3**

CES has been active in developing partnerships since its inception. Partnerships have generally been established to date for information sharing and cross-fertilisation (e.g. between service providers, across geographic boundaries, etc) purposes.

Ensuring that these partnerships become the basis for effective linkages between research, policy and practice is critical and still remains a real challenge for CES. More specifically, CES should take stock of the configuration of existing / future planned partnerships to ensure that all key stakeholders are involved. In particular CES needs to develop “more effective partnerships” between research, policy and practice, and specifically how it engages with Third Level Institutions in Ireland. The next strategic planning process should include consideration of the overall stakeholder map and enable the prioritisation of future partnerships.

3. Policy making for services is increasingly applying evidence of what works

**Assessment at Year 3**

Evidence of what works is increasingly being applied in policy making. Recent examples of this include:

- The Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership (Northern Ireland) uses an evidence-informed approach
- The National Strategy for Research & Data on Children’s Lives (Republic of Ireland) prioritises evidence-informed policy and practice
- The use of an evidence-informed approach to the development of Children’s Services Committees in Ireland

CES can build on this to further support and expand the use of evidence-informed approaches in policy making and service planning.

As previously stated CES has supported the development and connection of evidence to policy and practice in the Republic of Ireland over the past three years. Whilst it is difficult to attribute specific policy shifts to the work of CES, the overall promotion of CES objectives has increased awareness and the profile of evidence-informed approaches amongst key stakeholders.

In light of the existence of other organisations in Northern Ireland with similar objectives to those of CES, it is critical that CES identifies a specific role that builds on and/or supports the functions and objectives of the more established providers in Northern Ireland.
5. Conclusions

The following summarises the key conclusions of the review.

5.1 Foundations Laid

The vision of CES requires a significant change in the way in which policy and services for children, families and their communities are designed, delivered and evaluated in Ireland. This necessitates sustained effort and it is unrealistic to think that it could have been achieved in the relatively short period under review i.e. three years. It is thought actual change on the ground, however minimal, will only occur on a phased basis over a number of years. However, it is our assessment that CES has developed a foundation which provides a basis for evidence-informed approaches in the Republic of Ireland.

Three significant building blocks are in place:

a) An increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation for policy and services is evident within the broader environment
b) Some service providers are already applying evidence-informed practices
c) CES has received buy-in and engagement across a range of stakeholders to consider new forms of collaboration and joined up working.

5.2 Sharper and Clarified Role

From the consultation process and our analysis of the findings it is evident that CES has not yet managed to establish a clear understanding amongst various stakeholder groups of its role, purpose and functions. This lack of clarity and understanding has undoubtedly hindered its development across both jurisdictions.

5.3 Relationship Management

There were high expectations of CES when it was established, as it was, and remains, a unique organisation in Ireland and even further afield. However, from our assessment it would appear these expectations have not yet been fully met; nor have they been managed as effectively as possible. Differing expectations, coupled with a failure to effectively manage communications between parties, has resulted in mutual frustration between CES and some of its stakeholders.

It would appear that this can largely be attributed to:

a) A lack of shared understanding (in this formative phase) on the part of the funder group as to what they collectively wanted CES to specifically achieve; and
b) CES’ inability to clearly define and communicate its objectives in a manner that could be seen to meet the respective needs of both CES and funders.
5.4 Facilitating and Driving Linkages

As an intermediary organisation CES’ added value is in creating, increasing understanding and supporting linkages between organisations and bodies that previously may not have been engaged in a cohesive manner. Some progress has been made on this front, although it appears that this is where CES needs to focus greater attention in the coming years if bodies other than the current funders are to see tangible benefits in supporting an organisation, such as CES, in the future.

5.5 Emerging Northern Ireland Presence

CES’ role and experience in Northern Ireland has been mixed over the past three years. Unquestionably the lack of local physical presence during the first two years of CES existence severely hindered CES development and standing amongst local stakeholders in Northern Ireland. However, since recruiting, locating and adequately supporting staff in Belfast there have been noticeable improvements in CES’ standing amongst key stakeholders. It is important that CES continually assess its role and standing in Northern Ireland. In addition, securing clients with the resources to pay for CES services in the future is critical.

5.6 Building on the Formative Phase

The formative phase of CES is now complete. The effectiveness of CES to establish its role must take into account:

a) The efficacy of CES efforts and approach
b) The readiness of the external environment to engage and respond to the CES offering and evidence-informed approaches.

It is our overall assessment that CES has made a solid start in terms of the agreed Early Outcomes. It is widely recognised that evidence-informed approaches take time to embed. This is particularly the case when there is limited understanding and experience of adopting these approaches. As a result, expectations in relation to what is achievable within the first three years of CES existence must be realistic.

Overall CES has managed to establish its role as an active participant in the system, north and south. CES will learn through this review from the experiences of its formative phase. This will increase its capacity to deliver on its mission in the next phase of CES’ development.
6. Implications for CES 2012 and Beyond

This review process has signalled the need for CES to consider a number of key strategic issues as the organisation enters the next phase of its development.

1. Clarification of the role and function of CES
The overarching mission of CES is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of ‘what works’, in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and the families and communities in which they live. We suggest that CES considers where it can best add value and constructs its offer around this. We would not envisage significant changes to the existing mission of CES, but do recommend that CES dissect the various components of it as a means to test the continuing validity. Ensuring a shared understanding exists across CES’ stakeholders will be critical to the successful implementation of the future strategic direction.

There are two further specific queries associated with this suggested test of the mission:

   a. An extension to other areas of activity?
   CES has specific sectoral experience in relation to the design, delivery and evaluation of services for children, families and communities. In addition, it has sharpened these skill-sets significantly since 2008 through specific engagement with service providers, researchers and policy makers. As a result, CES can obviously add most value in the short-term by continuing to work with those supporting children, families and communities. However, CES approach of connecting scientific evidence of what works to policy and practice could equally be applied to improve the lives of other population groups (e.g. older people, people with disability, etc). CES must consider whether it has ambitions to become the go-to organisation for evidence-informed approaches in Ireland.

   b. How can CES add value across jurisdictional boundaries?
   Given the policy and practice differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and the experience developed to date from CES activities in both jurisdictions, it is evident that the role of CES should not be exactly the same across both jurisdictions. It is our view that a more detailed assessment of where and how CES can add value in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland should be undertaken.

2. Moving from building awareness to driving implementation
CES has concentrated up to now primarily on building awareness of and commitment to evidence-informed approaches. This was a necessary starting point in the Republic of Ireland. Much attention and commitment will be required from CES on an ongoing basis in continuing this type of function.

In addition CES must now also begin to consider how it can facilitate and drive the design and implementation of evidence-informed approaches on the ground where it matters. For example, CES must play a lead role in connecting policy development with practice as a means to achieve overall systems change.
3. Working with others to achieve better outcomes for service users

A drastically changed financial environment has resulted in an increased emphasis and onus on all service providers to work smartly together to deliver effective services in a more cost efficient and collaborative fashion. CES is no different, and as an intermediary organisation has arguably got a greater opportunity than most to support the implementation of evidence-informed practices. To do this CES must reconsider how it engages and works with all of its stakeholders so that it supports the delivery of better outcomes for service users.

“All of us have a job to do around saying to policy makers ‘Get real, there is no golden bullet you are going to find elsewhere!’. CES can offer something by coming at it with a problem solving spirit rather than feeling we have to have a shiny new car.

Academic
## Appendices

### 1 Consultation Process

#### External One-to-One Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jim Breslin</td>
<td>Department of Children &amp; Youth Affairs (Republic of Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Maura Campbell</td>
<td>Department of Justice (NI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Liz Canavan</td>
<td>Department of Children &amp; Youth Affairs (Republic of Ireland)</td>
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<td>4 Madeleine Clarke</td>
<td>Genio</td>
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<td>5 Catherine Comiskey</td>
<td>Trinity College Dublin</td>
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<td>6 Tom Costello</td>
<td>The Atlantic Philanthropies</td>
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<td>7 Jane Forman</td>
<td>The Atlantic Philanthropies</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Pat Dolan</td>
<td>NUI Galway</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Mary Doyle</td>
<td>Department of Children &amp; Youth Affairs (Republic of Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Mark Dynarski</td>
<td>Mathematica's Center for Improving Research Evidence</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 Billy Gamble</td>
<td>Chair of the Dissemination Initiative for Prevention and Early Intervention, Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 Martin Galvin</td>
<td>Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick</td>
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<td>13 Neil Haran</td>
<td>Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 Carolyn Harper</td>
<td>Public Health Agency (NI)</td>
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<td>15 Sean Holland</td>
<td>Department of Health &amp; Social Services (NI)</td>
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<td>16 Gordon Jeyes</td>
<td>Health Service Executive</td>
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<td>17 Tony Kavanagh</td>
<td>Department of Justice (NI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 Noel Kelly</td>
<td>Preparing for Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 Pauline Leeson</td>
<td>Children in Northern Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fionnuala McAndrew</td>
<td>Health &amp; Social Care Board (NI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rita McNulty</td>
<td>Department of the Environment, Community &amp; Local Government (Republic of Ireland)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Celine McStravick</td>
<td>NCB Northern Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Murray</td>
<td>The Atlantic Philanthropies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aileen O’Donoghue</td>
<td>Archways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conor Owens</td>
<td>Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel Perkins</td>
<td>Penn State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Pinkerton</td>
<td>Queens University Belfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lynda Wilson</td>
<td>Barnardos, NI</td>
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**Internal One-to-One Discussions**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominic Burke</td>
<td>CES - Board Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nuala Doherty</td>
<td>CES – CEO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dan Flinter</td>
<td>CES - Board Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah Ghate</td>
<td>Former CEO and Founding Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen Keenan</td>
<td>CES - Board Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth Lavery</td>
<td>CES - Board Member</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heino Schonfield</td>
<td>CES – Deputy Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Walsh</td>
<td>CES - Board Member</td>
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2 Assessment Framework

Whilst the CES logic model was modified slightly by CES senior management in 2008-9, it was not specific enough to use as the sole means of evaluating CES’ performance over the past three years. For this reason we developed a more detailed assessment framework using the three Early Outcomes identified in the logic model, but also including a number of more detailed indicators under each outcome to facilitate a more comprehensive review of CES activities and impact since its establishment in 2008.

Our assessment of each Early Outcome is informed by:
   i. Overall findings from the consultation process;
   ii. CES’ work programmes and progress reports;
   iii. Consideration of developments and circumstances in the external environment that may have had a positive or negative impact on the outcomes and impact of CES during the period 2008 – 2011.

These indicators were developed by Prospectus and Anne McMurray based on our understanding of the original intention of the Outcome. Feedback is divided between Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland where appropriate.

High level commentary is also provided in regard to the level of progress CES has made against achieving the three Medium Term Outcomes as it is acknowledged the three shorter term outcomes are a stepping stone towards the longer term objectives.
### Outcome 1:
**Increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation of services, and of high quality evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Demonstration of leadership by CES</td>
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<td>b) CES engagement with key influencers</td>
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<tr>
<td>c) Shifts to evidence-informed design and implementation</td>
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<td>d) Early evidence of shifts to high quality evaluation</td>
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<td>e) Effective dissemination of evidence</td>
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### Outcome 2:
**Certain service providers receive appropriate technical, professional or scientific support**

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<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) Mix of service providers supported</td>
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<td>b) Progression of support-type</td>
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<td>c) Responsiveness of CES to service provider needs</td>
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<td>d) Involvement of international / external experts where appropriate</td>
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### Outcome 3:
**Increased understanding, collaborative and joined up working between service providers, researchers and policy makers**

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<th>Indicators</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) Evidence of new collaboration and joined-up working today</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Demonstration of leadership by CES</td>
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**Outcome 1:**
*Increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation of services, and of high quality evaluation*

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<tr>
<th>Indicator 1A:</th>
<th>Demonstration of leadership by CES</th>
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**2008 - 2011 Assessment**

*Republic of Ireland*

CES has demonstrated leadership in relation to the promotion of evidence-informed policy and service design and implementation in the Republic of Ireland. For example, CES was frequently referred to as a “thought leader” and an “advisor” by service providers, particularly fellow Atlantic Philanthropies grantees, during the consultation process.

It has taken a proactive approach to the hosting of events (e.g. seminar series, roundtable discussions, etc); establishment of networks / groups (e.g. Special Interest Groups) and developing resources and information for use by other bodies in the sector, such as The *What Works Process* and the *Capturing the Learning* project.

*Northern Ireland*

Demonstrating leadership in Northern Ireland presents different challenges. Given that CES has only been physically present in Northern Ireland for approximately one year it is difficult to identify any clear examples of leadership success. However, it is thought that as cross border projects and initiatives develop e.g. Capturing the Learning, the Dissemination Initiative for Prevention and Early Intervention (DIPEI) etc. and relationships are further cemented between CES and other Northern Ireland bodies that opportunities for CES to demonstrate leadership will increase.

**Conclusion**

CES has had some success in leading the promotion of evidence-informed policy and practice in the Republic of Ireland, but a certain amount of work still needs to be done. It is acknowledged that this will take time as it requires considerable attitudinal and systemic shifts by a number of stakeholders groups before this can be achieved.

There is no explicit evidence of leadership success in Northern Ireland given its early stage of development.
**Indicator 1B:**
*CES Engagement with Key Influencers*

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<th>2008 - 2011 Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Republic of Ireland</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>CES has achieved a satisfactory level of engagement with key influencers in the Republic of Ireland. Key influencers have been targeted using a range of different approaches, some being more successful than others (e.g. seminar on relevant policy issues was attended by 16 senior policy makers, including five Secretary Generals from the Republic of Ireland). In the majority of instances to date, the primary objective has been to inform key influencers of the potential offered by successfully connecting the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of what works. Given that the process to shift mind-sets typically requires commitment over a prolonged period of time (as the evidence-base grows etc); maintaining engagement with key influencers will increasingly be an ongoing requirement for CES.</td>
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<td>CES has taken advantage of a number of opportunities (Global Implementation Initiative, What's Working for Children Conference 2011, International Network of Child Policy Research Centres Conference 2010, etc) to engage with key influencers and promote the objectives of the organisation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CES’ role in coordinating and managing Irish attendance (Northern Ireland &amp; the Republic of Ireland) of senior civil servants and leading service providers at the Global Implementation Conference in Washington in 2011 helped to cement relationships and increase knowledge and awareness of the value of employing evidence-informed practices</td>
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**Northern Ireland**
Notwithstanding the initial difficulties experienced in Northern Ireland, it would appear good progress has been made in the past year in building relationships with key influencers in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, the pre-existence of other comparable bodies to CES in Northern Ireland has meant that CES has had to give specific consideration to the identification of a unique niche in Northern Ireland if it is to be sustainable in the future.

**Conclusion**
Its formal relationship with DCYA, DECLG, AP etc. has provided CES with access to key policy and service personnel in the areas of children, families and communities and even wider afield (the calibre of personnel, both North and South that attended the Global Implementation Conference in 2011 provides some indication of the ability of CES to access and engage key influencers). Whether CES has managed to utilise this access to best possible effect is debateable. However this is where many service providers consider CES can provide significant value in advancing knowledge and awareness of the evidence-informed agenda.

The absence of any financial contribution to CES from Government departments in Northern Ireland suggests that CES has not yet managed to establish itself with key influencers in NI. Whilst it is clear this remains a critical indicator of CES’s standing with key influencers; it is acknowledged CES has made some important in-roads in the past 12 months in establishing its presence and standing with key personnel and bodies in Northern Ireland.
Indicator 1C:
Shifts to evidence-informed design and implementation

2008 - 2011 Assessment
Shifts to evidence-informed design and implementation typically require a concerted commitment over a prolonged period of time and for this reason CES’ impact must be judged against what is a relatively short operational period.

Republic of Ireland
CES is currently supporting a number of service providers involved in the adoption and delivery of evidence-informed service design and has helped to sustain and build on progress achieved to date. It is expected that CES projects such as the What Works Process and Capturing the Learning will provide significant further momentum in the shift to evidence-informed design and implementation.

Further evidence that policy is shifting in the direction of evidence-informed approaches can be seen in the National Strategy for Research and Data on Children’s Lives (2011-2016) which prioritises evidence-informed policy and practice. The evidence base on inter agency working to support the establishment of CSCs continues to grow and has been fundamental to the extended roll-out of the CSC concept in the Republic of Ireland. In addition, CES’ role in reviewing the LCDP using an evidence-informed methodology resulted in a significant shift in policy direction and approach.

Northern Ireland
The application of evidence-informed approaches is arguably better understood and more developed in Northern Ireland. As a result a wider range of advisors and proponents of evidence-informed practice are already in place. It is therefore thought CES’ role in Northern Ireland might differ from that in the Republic of Ireland and may have a greater focus on developing partnerships and collaborative arrangements with incumbent providers.

Conclusion
The adoption of evidence-informed approaches at both policy and practice levels will take time and as such it is unrealistic to have expected considerable shifts in just three years. That being said some progress has been made and it is thought further shifts may begin to occur in 2012 and beyond.

The situation in Northern Ireland is different given that there are a number of established proponents of evidence-informed approaches, most of which have been consolidating their position in Northern Ireland before CES’ arrival. Given this fact, CES must identify where it can best be used to further advance the application of evidence-informed approaches beyond what is already being done by others and this may mean it adopts a very different approach to that pursued by CES in the Republic of Ireland.
Indicator 1D:
Early evidence of shifts to high quality evaluation

2008 - 2011 Assessment
The *Capturing the Learning* process, led by CES, is primarily about collating the findings from current project evaluations underway in 33 services in 18 organisations, across the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland and providing key messages of what has been learned. Through this activity it is hoped that CES will increase awareness and commitment amongst stakeholders to using evaluation as a means of identifying appropriate policy and service interventions. However, until the Capturing the Learning process advances, it is difficult to determine how successful CES and others have been in achieving a shift to high quality evaluation.

It is thought that other work undertaken by CES (e.g. Review of the Local Development Social Inclusion Programme and the Community Development Programme, Development of the *What Works Process* and supporting tools) have contributed to improving awareness and understanding of the benefits of adopting evaluation methodologies.

Conclusion
Our assessment concludes that CES has had some success in increasing awareness of the benefits of improved forms of evaluation within the Republic of Ireland, particularly amongst Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) projects.

The *Capturing the Learning* process will continue to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of high quality evaluation. However there is still some way to go both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland before the true value of this process and the benefit of CES's role in progressing this can be seen.
Indicator 1E: Effective dissemination of evidence

2008 – 2011 Assessment
CES has a dedicated knowledge exchange and communications function with a key objective being to engage participants in a discussion about the benefits of adopting evidence-informed approaches. It has attempted to do this through a number of means e.g. publications, seminars, workshops, conferences, network participation etc.

CES has published a number of documents of key relevance to the objectives of the organisation. These include:
- *Learning from Experience to Inform the Future (A review of the first phase of CSC’s)* (2010)

The Dissemination Initiative on Prevention and Early Intervention (DIPEI) project also offers potential to share learning with a broad mix of stakeholders.

CES also used other standard communication approaches (e.g. newsletter, Ezine, website) to engage with interested parties. It is worth noting CES’ role in hosting the SharePoint tool which shares information and notice of events with other AP grantees.

Conclusion
CES has taken a proactive and comprehensive approach to the dissemination of knowledge and learning. Our assessment suggests that CES has been sufficiently thorough and strategic in this regard, particularly in relation to key CES outputs (e.g. summaries of key learning and messages from CES events, key CES tools and studies).
**Outcome 2:**
A number of service providers receive appropriate technical, professional or scientific support

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<th>Indicator 2A:</th>
<th>Mix of service providers supported</th>
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**2008 – 2011 Assessment**
A review of work plans and progress reports points to a solid start by CES in terms of the provision of technical, professional and scientific support to service providers in Ireland. It is recognised that CES did not have a complete team in place for much of the period under review and therefore was not fully equipped to support a broad range of service providers, particularly in 2009 and early 2010.

CES has been an active participant in the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Network in providing support and inputs to other members on implementation and evaluation matters. Progress was also made in 2011 in addressing the balance of commitments between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; This is largely due to the appointment of local staff in Northern Ireland which has facilitated increased activity.

Approaches adopted by CES, such as logic modelling, are now frequently used by a range of service providers following the delivery of high quality workshops by CES on the subject.

**Republic of Ireland**
CES continues to work with a range of service providers delivering evidence-informed or evidence-based programmes (e.g. Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership, Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick (SSIRL), Archways, Preparing for Life, Young Ballymun, and Childhood Development Initiative). It has supported these projects for much of the period under review.

**Northern Ireland**
Direct provision of support by CES to service providers in Northern Ireland was delayed in comparison to the Republic of Ireland. While it is true that CES has had an all-island remit since inception, it has only had a physical presence for a period of approximately one year. Additions to the range of providers being supported in 2011 are noted (e.g. Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC), Colin Early Intervention Community, Barnardos NI, etc). It is expected that CES will continue to build on this progress in 2012.

**Conclusion**
CES has supported an increasing number of service providers year-on-year. It has taken a proactive and strategic approach to the use of knowledge transfer initiatives, delivery of workshops / seminars, and the provision of technical, professional and scientific support.

It is expected that the increased awareness of CES and evidence-informed approaches achieved during 2008 to 2011, coupled with (a) a more open approach to working with service providers and (b) the fact that CES now has an experienced team in place, will result in a broader mix of clients both in Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. This should be achieved across child, family and community services, across geographic boundaries and across programme/project types.
**Indicator 2B:**
*Progression of support-type*

### 2008 - 2011 Assessment

CES has made significant inputs to a number of key projects including: Review of LDSIP / CDP (from collation of evidence to implementation support), support to the Children’s Services Committee Initiative, and the What Works Process (from the initial development of a needs assessment tool to the provision of training to support application of the process). It has applied resources and expertise in multiple areas and for multiple purposes. For example, CES has supported the Colin Early Intervention initiative through its planning and early stages of implementation processes. The ongoing role of CES in terms of a number of associated programmes and initiatives (e.g. Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership, Supporting Social Inclusion and Regeneration in Limerick) has also evolved over the previous three years.

It is questionable however whether CES is maximising the use its expertise in certain situations. While it is accepted that technical support provided by CES has involved a mix of strategic and operational supports; it is unclear if this mix of supports will continue into the future as demands for specific operational support increase as some funders and service providers experience a severe reduction in their operational resources and capabilities. This raises significant issues for CES management and staff, if this is allowed to happen, as it will challenge some of the basic principles underpinning CES establishment and existence.

A further consequence of CES involvement in specific operational projects on behalf of Government Departments in Republic of Ireland (e.g. the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) has resulted in the independence of CES being questioned. A concern exists amongst some stakeholders that CES is increasingly becoming a “wing of the state”. This has led to some concerns being raised by service providers and other external bodies about CES objectivity. It is suggested this perception is somewhat ironic given the very strong emphasis CES placed on establishing its independence from its funders over the first two years of its existence; arguably at times to the detriment of CES.

### Conclusion

Working relationships with both the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in the Republic of Ireland have evolved and developed since 2008 in terms of the role of CES. This is partly due to the evolution of relevant projects (e.g. Review of LDSIP / CDP, CSC support, Capturing the Learning etc.), but also as a result of the increased demand on the funders part to ensure value for money is achieved. It is thought this pressure will further increase as closer scrutiny is placed on all government expenditure.

Increased involvement in “operational” type projects on behalf of Government Departments will only serve to increase concerns about the relationship between CES and the State.

Overall, it is our assessment that CES needs to consider how it can make most appropriate use of its expertise to best support the objectives of its stakeholders. We appreciate that CES has declined to support some service providers given the focus of the request and fit with CES. This will continue to be necessary in the future as awareness of CES and familiarity with CES’ offer increases. It is also timely that CES considers existing relationships with service providers and reflects on how these relationships have evolved over the last few years. This reflection should be used to explore where value can best be added by CES.
Indicator 2C:  
*Responsiveness of CES to service provider needs*

**2008 - 2011 Assessment**

CES was initially considered by some service providers to be “unreceptive” and appeared “closed to advances”, particularly during years 1 and 2. Given the size of the team at that point, and the fact that the organisation was essentially being assembled, these early perceptions of CES from service providers are not surprising. The need for CES to manage the range of its commitments and its workload at this early stage was understandable.

However, the findings from the online questionnaire suggest that a significant proportion of service providers still consider CES unresponsive. 33% of respondents rated CES as “weak” when asked to rate the responsiveness of CES to their specific needs. This statistic is interesting given the online questionnaire was largely circulated to stakeholders located within existing CES networks.

A further criticism levelled at CES during the consultation exercise was that it was ‘*too academic*’ in its focus and approach. This was a significant issue for some service providers who argued that CES is too removed from the reality of on-the-ground delivery to be of real significant value.

**Conclusion**

It is our assessment that CES has made significant progress in this regard over the past 12 – 15 months in particular. Satisfaction levels before this point were likely to have been quite poor. It is important to stress once again, that for much of 2009 and early 2010, the majority of CES team members were either being recruited, or those in situ, were being pulled into areas requiring intensive input e.g. LCDP Review etc. In conclusion, despite having a challenging and mixed start, CES has made some firm progress on a number of fronts, especially in regard to ensuring its responsiveness to service provider needs.

As in the previous indicator, an issue for CES in the future will be ensuring that increased responsiveness does not distract from the strategic intent of the organisation. Support provided by CES must represent good use of available expertise within the organisation. This may require a recalibration of some existing relationships.
**Indicator 2D:**
*Involvement of international / external experts where appropriate*

**2008 - 2011 Assessment**

Although this type of role can sometimes be dismissed as being of less strategic value, we believe CES has filled a significant void through introducing and involving international experts in CES activities and thinking.

CES has developed and maintains a network of international experts available to provide training and consultancy support on specific technical matters. CES has also brokered access to international and Irish experts on behalf of other Irish stakeholders. This brokering role has involved helping the organisation to specify their needs and to identify and brief a small number of international / external experts who could support them.

The seminar series, as devised and overseen by CES, has enabled Irish stakeholders to avail of the expertise and insights from a number of international experts to date. This includes Professor Sandra Nutley (University of Edinburgh), Professor Daniel Perkins (Penn State University), Professor Jenny Beecham (University of Kent) and Dr. Karen Blasé (University of North Carolina).

**Conclusion**

CES would appear to have added significant value in this regard throughout the period under review. Whilst opportunities for service providers and policy makers to interact with international / external experts obviously existed before the establishment of CES, CES has opened various doors and created new prospects for personnel to interact and learn from a broader list of thought leaders and experts across all of CES’s areas of activity.
Outcome 3:  
Increased understanding, collaborative and joined up working between service providers, researchers and policy makers

Indicator 3A:  
Evidence of new collaboration and joined up working today

2008 - 2011 Assessment

Linkages between this mix of professionals (service providers, researchers, and policy makers) have traditionally been weak. It is our assessment that CES has made some progress in promoting a new focus on collaboration and has gone some way towards creating a stronger appetite for joined up working. A considerable amount of work still remains to be done as this is seen as one of CES’s core functions.

An example of where CES has made some progress on this front can be seen in their development of two Special Interest Groups (to date) which promote the sharing of good practice and learning. These have both proved valuable largely because they provide structures for networking around specific issues and have successfully been used to broker relationships between professionals locally and internationally. In addition it is acknowledged these Special Interest Groups (parenting support and community) has also served to foster collaboration between service providers, researchers and policy makers across the island of Ireland.

CES has also played a lead role in combining two research networks in Ireland to form the all-Ireland Children’s Research Network (CRN). The role of CES involved a hands-on approach to the planning and implementation of the new Network. The CRN has successfully brought together a wide range of professionals with an interest in research on child and family issues across the island of Ireland.

Some questions were raised by a number of people interviewed about CES’ role in the Dissemination Initiative for Prevention and Early Intervention (DIPEI) and why it is not the main driver of the DIPEI process given its close alignment with CES’ purpose and position? It was suggested previous decisions by CES not to assume a greater leadership role within DIPEI were flawed and that this is something CES needs to rectify if it wants to be seen as a “connector” amongst the various stakeholder groups.

Conclusion

Services for children, young people and families are still typically designed and delivered through a system that supports silo-mentalities amongst stakeholder groups and individual participants. Given this fact, achieving buy in from key stakeholders for new forms of collaboration is most challenging. These challenges tend to further increase as participants come under pressure to deliver more efficient and effective services with fewer resources.

As can be seen above CES has lead, or supported the development of a number of new collaborative and joined-up working processes. Undoubtedly CES has had some success in bringing groups and individuals together and helping them to work more effectively. However, given CES role as an intermediary organisation that requires them to act across a number of stakeholder groups e.g. policy makers, researchers, service providers etc, previous decisions not to assume a more central role in initiatives, such as DIPEI, are difficult to understand. It was suggested this is where CES needs to be most active if it is to be seen to provide “added value” and in turn be sustainable in the future.
### Indicator 3B: Demonstration of leadership by CES

#### 2008 - 2011 Assessment

Despite CES being perceived by some as being too “American”, “academic”, “elite”, and “removed from reality on the ground” almost half of all respondents to the online questionnaire stated that they had the required confidence in CES to promote collaborative working across research, policy and service organisations. As an indicator, it points to a respectable start by CES. However, it does suggest the organisation has work to do if it is to lead and drive new forms of working and engagement amongst all of its stakeholder groups.

Within Northern Ireland, the Health & Social Care Board, the Children & Young Person Strategic Partnership, and Children in Northern Ireland are all positioned with the objective to improve understanding and promote collaboration / joint working. As a consequence, opportunities for CES to lead within Northern Ireland have been limited to date.

#### Conclusion

CES has played a role in creating an environment where service providers, researchers and policy makers can collaborate on a routine basis. However, there remains a considerable amount to be done both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

In the Republic of Ireland, CES needs to play a more active role in promoting, supporting and, where appropriate, leading collaborative initiatives involving all of its stakeholder groups, as this is arguably where CES can bring the most value. Within Northern Ireland, the role of CES is likely to be different given the existence of organisations with similar objectives and strong relationships. However, it is thought opportunities exist in Northern Ireland for CES to actively support various bodies and bring a new perspective.
3 Summary of key results from the Online Questionnaire

An online questionnaire, open for a period of approximately two weeks, was utilised to capture the views of a broad target audience in relation to a number of key CES issues. 61 responses were received in total from a range of backgrounds including service providers, government representatives, academics, representatives of CES funder organisations, and service commissioners.

The graphs below summarise the key results from the online questionnaire

Profile of respondents to online questionnaire

![Graph showing profile of respondents]
Profile of respondents to online questionnaire (continued)

What best describes your organisation's role?

- Atlantic Philanthropies Grantee: 17%
- Academic: 18%
- Government Department: 5%
- Service Provider: 5%
- Service Commissioner: 1%
- Funder: 1%
- Charity: 6%
- State Agency: 1%
- Other: 32%

Rep. of Ireland

- 31%
- 8%
- 16%
- 10%
- 5%
- 3%
- 3%

Northern Ireland

- 18%
- 23%
- 5%
- 16%
- 8%
- 36%
Awareness and experience of CES

Please rate the following statements

- Awareness of CES’s role is high in my organisation:
  - Agree: 46.2%
  - Disagree: 44.2%
  - Not Sure: 9.6%

- Awareness of CES’s role is high in my sector:
  - Agree: 25.5%
  - Disagree: 37.3%
  - Not Sure: 37.2%

- My organisation is making good use of what CES has to offer:
  - Agree: 46.2%
  - Disagree: 14.8%
  - Not Sure: 19.2%

- My organisation finds what CES provides ‘easy to consume’:
  - Agree: 46.2%
  - Disagree: 15.4%
  - Not Sure: 38.5%

- CES’s role is well differentiated from others in the sector:
  - Agree: 39.2%
  - Disagree: 17.8%
  - Not Sure: 43.1%

- My organisation has had direct benefit from engaging with CES:
  - Agree: 72.5%
  - Disagree: 11.8%
  - Not Sure: 15.7%

- My organisation has had a positive experience with CES:
  - Agree: 71.2%
  - Disagree: 11.7%
  - Not Sure: 21.2%
Awareness and experience of CES (continued)

How would you rate CES according to each of the following? (Where 1 = Weak and 5 = Strong)

- **Clarity of CES purpose**
  - 1 Weak: 14.3%
  - 2: 14.3%
  - 3: 16.3%
  - 4: 40.8%
  - 5 Strong: 14.3%

- **Understanding of My Needs**
  - 1 Weak: 10.4%
  - 2: 8.3%
  - 3: 35.4%
  - 4: 27.1%
  - 5 Strong: 19.8%

- **Responsiveness to My Needs**
  - 1 Weak: 12.8%
  - 2: 21.3%
  - 3: 21.3%
  - 4: 27.7%
  - 5 Strong: 17.0%

- **CES Engagement and Collaboration with Stakeholders**
  - 1 Weak: 8.9%
  - 2: 13.3%
  - 3: 22.2%
  - 4: 28.9%
  - 5 Strong: 26.7%
Expectations of CES

Would you agree that CES has the relationships in place (locally and internationally) to deliver on their core objectives?
(Where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree)

1. Promote and support application of evidence to policy and practice.

- 10.6% 1 Strongly Disagree
- 12.6% 2
- 36.2% 3
- 25.5% 4
- 14.9% 5 Strongly Agree

2. Promote collaborative working across research, policy and service-providing organisations.

- 2.2% 1 Strongly Disagree
- 17.4% 2
- 37.0% 3
- 28.3% 4
- 15.2% 5 Strongly Agree

3. Build capacity to support this work in the RoI and NI.

- 6.5% 1 Strongly Disagree
- 13% 2
- 37.0% 3
- 32.6% 4
- 10.9% 5 Strongly Agree
Expectations of CES (continued)

![Bar chart showing expectations of CES work for the next three years.](image-url)
### 4 Key Messages from the Internal Focus Group Sessions

An internal focus group was held with staff from CES as a means to capture their opinions in relation to four fundamental questions. A summary of the key findings is outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One</th>
<th>What has worked well (internally and externally) over the past three years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Increased awareness of evidence-informed / based messages in the system</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of high quality deliverables produced by the team (e.g. CDP Framework, What Works Process)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of high quality events organised / hosted</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• CES credibility largely secured amongst key stakeholders, particularly in the Republic of Ireland</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recruitment of a strong and experienced multi-disciplinary team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two</th>
<th>What has not worked so well (internally and externally) over the past three years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CES has commonly found itself in a situation whereby it is “trying to be all things to all people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engagement in Northern Ireland lacked the necessary planning and preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balancing relationships and responsibilities between CES Board and CES Funders has presented challenges at times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three</th>
<th>What have been the main internal and external challenges for CES over the past three years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Articulate a clear and consistent role / remit, both internally and externally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Carve out a specific niche for CES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balance the requirements and expectations of all three funders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Manage the implications of a funders landscape that has frequently been subjected to change (e.g. structural change, changes in personnel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish a strong and credible presence in Northern Ireland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Four</th>
<th>What have been the key learning points for CES over the past three years?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• There remains a distinct and fundamental need to clearly define and articulate the function(s) of CES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CES needs to be more proactive in identifying connects and interdependencies between projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• CES must equip itself more appropriately to respond to an external environment that is characterised by frequent and significant change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CES Logic Model (Revised Version)

The overarching mission of the Centre is to connect the design and delivery of services with scientific and technical knowledge of ‘what works’, in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and the families and communities in which they live.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs and Resources</th>
<th>Overarching aims</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Activities and outputs</th>
<th>Early Outcomes (by year 5)</th>
<th>Medium Term Outcomes (by year 10)</th>
<th>Long Term Outcomes (by year 20) and Impact beyond Generalisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. **Promote and support the application of an evidence-informed approach**
   - Foster evidence-informed and evidence-based policy and practice
   - Support professionals and educators to apply an evidence-informed approach to decision-making processes
   - Support the development of key concepts
   - Promote the sharing of good practice and learning by setting up structures for dialogue and joint learning
   - Promote access to expertise in service planning, design and delivery, and evaluation and capture and embed new learning within the research, policy and practice communities
   - Develop models for supporting key individuals or groups of stakeholders to access new learning and skills in evidence-informed and evidence-based practice and policy-making
   - Support to client services
     - Assist service providers to identify and define the technical, professional and scientific support they need
     - Assist services to secure appropriate assistance to tackle identified needs
     - Support staff within services to link with the wider practice and research communities for cross-sectoral learning and professional development
     - Encourage transfer of the latest relevant knowledge and information direct to practitioners
   - Sectoral and strategic
     - Advance learning by assisting the sector to connect with scientific developments in prevention and development science locally and internationally
     - Develop and host the shared up of a multi-disciplinary network for researchers
     - Develop directory of key experts and contacts
     - Support government and third sector organisations and research new initiatives
     - Develop information resources
     - Establish accord and hosting arrangements for policy makers, researchers and practitioners
     - Work in other ways as capacity allows to support and disseminate the evidence of what works
   - 1. Increased understanding of the importance of evidence-informed design and implementation of services, and of high quality evaluation
      2. Centres service providers receive appropriate technical, professional or scientific support
      3. Increased understanding across the sector by linking with the wider practice and research communities for cross-sectoral learning and professional development

2. **Promote joined working**
   - Improve understanding and promote collaboration and joint working across the sector
   - Build capacity across different parts of the sector to acquire and develop skills in the application of an evidence-informed approach, and embed within the system as a whole

3. **Support to client services**
   - Develop a ‘Diagnostic’ needs analysis process and a set of tools, consistent with evidence-informed and evidence-based practice
   - Apply tool to engage in joint work to improve practice and problem solving
   - Provide direct or broker access to appropriate assistance to tackle identified needs
   - Provide access for service staff to networks and learning events and structures
   - Provide tailored, guided access to specialist and information resources
   - Work in other ways as capacity allows to support service providers in their daily work and special projects

4. **Support to client services**
   - A growing proportion of services are applying outcomes-focused and evidence-informed approach
   - More effective partnerships are developed between research, policy and practice
   - Policy making for services is increasingly applying evidence of what works

5. **Support to client services**
   - CES provides a model and tools for:
     1. The majority of services to be designed, implemented and evaluated with understanding about what works
     2. Services to be subject to regular improvement on the basis of evaluation findings
     3. Services to achieve better outcomes
     4. Other areas of social care to recognise the value of, and apply, an evidence-informed approach
   - And beyond year 10:
     1. Most children’s services are designed, implemented and evaluated on the basis of understanding of what works
     2. Children, young people, families and communities are using these services experience positive outcomes
     3. The policy practice and research communities has the necessary capacity to support and sustain evidence-informed services for children on an ongoing basis

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Overview of the Review Process

Approach
- Desk Research
  - Key CES documentation
  - External info
  - International practice
- Review of key developments within external environment
- Assess progress against objectives as per CES Logic Model

Consultation
- One-to-one interviews with CES staff
- One-to-one interviews with external stakeholders
- Online questionnaire
- Internal focus group

Participants
- CES Staff
- CES Funders
- CES Board
- Centre for the Study of Social Policy
- Prospectus
- Anne McMurray

Outputs
- Documentation of findings
- Discussion with Project Team
- Feedback to funders
- Feedback to board

Complete Final Review

Input into CES Strategic Plan for 2012 - 2014

September - December 2011

Dec 2011 - Feb 2012