

The Multi-Agency Model in Wales promotes the welfare of Children and Young people. Critically discuss this.

The multi-agency model in Wales plays a large role in promoting the welfare of children and young people, to ensure their needs are met through collaborative working across various sectors. This approach brings together professionals from education, health, social services, and law enforcement to share information, coordinate responses, and provide comprehensive support to vulnerable individuals. By fostering communication and joint decision-making, the model seeks to safeguard children more effectively and enhance outcomes in their development and well-being. This essay will critically discuss the effectiveness of the multi-agency model in Wales, exploring its strengths, challenges, and the extent to which it successfully promotes the welfare of children and young people.

In education, schools promote child welfare through the Curriculum for Wales teaching children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and offering support services such as Family Engagement Officers (FEO's), Emotional Literacy Support Assistant's (ELSA's), breakfast and after school clubs, extracurricular activities, and platforms for pupil voices to be heard (Welsh Government, 2025; Golden Grove School, 2025a; ELSA, 2017; UNICEF, 2025; Golden Grove School, 2025b). Policies such as anti-bullying, pupil participation and safeguarding reinforce these efforts, along with the school governing body (Golden Grove School, 2025a; Golden Grove School, 2025b).

Estyn inspects safeguarding practices, ensuring schools have appropriately trained staff and suitable policies (Estyn, 2025). Safeguarding induction is a requirement, and refresher training is essential at least every two years; although most schools do this annually, and they also use reporting tools like Edukey to keep a written log of concerns (Welsh Government, 2021a; Edukey, 2025).

Safeguarding involves "protecting children from harm, abuse, and neglect" (Welsh Government, 2021b). Whereas child protection focuses on responding when a child is suspected to be at risk, with procedures activated by professionals such as school staff, police, social workers, or healthcare staff when there are concerns of

significant harm (Welsh Government, 2021b; Right Decisions for Health and Care, 2025; Welsh Government, 2021a). Therefore, multi-agency working is critical to safeguard and protect children effectively (HM Government, 2023).

Multi-agency working in the UK dates to the 19th century, but it gained formal momentum in the 1980s, with the Children Act 1989 requiring inter-agency collaboration and the UNCRC giving children enhanced rights and protection (Cheminais, 2009; UNCRC, 1989). The 1990's saw the growth of partnerships tackling issues like social exclusion; however, despite initiatives such as Sure Start and Youth Offending Teams, there were persistent challenges such as poor coordination, limited information sharing, and unclear accountability (Cheminais, 2009). Following Lord Laming's (2003) report of the Victoria Climbié case, which highlighted the failings of various agencies to work collectively, the Children Act 2004 strengthened joint working requirements within Local Authorities (LA's) (Cheminais, 2009). In Wales, this was superseded by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Welsh Government also introduced the national Wales Safeguarding Procedures in 2021 (Welsh Government, 2016; Welsh Government, 2021b).

Multi-agency working involves collaboration among professionals from different agencies supporting a child or family, encompassing information sharing, coordinated service delivery, and joint assessments or visits (Peckover & Golding, 2017). The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 promotes person-centred and integrated care through a strong emphasis on multi-agency working. It encourages continuous reflection on the impact of individual and organisational actions, fostering a culture of learning, transparency, and improved communication, role clarity, and shared accountability across professionals and organisations (Wallace & Garthwaite, 2023).

No single model exists for multi-agency collaboration and models of multi-agency work typically focus on either the level of collaboration involved or the structural organisation of teams and services (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). According to Cheminais (2009), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) outlines three multi-agency frameworks for supporting educational settings: the multi-agency panel, the multi-agency team, and the integrated service.

Multi-agency panels are typically coordinated by a designated lead, with meetings arranged by a panel manager (Cheminais, 2009). These panels bring together a diverse mix of agency representatives, while practitioners remain employed by their respective organisations (Cheminais, 2009). Panels usually meet monthly or termly to discuss and review support for children with additional or safety needs requiring multi-agency input (Cheminais, 2009). Members can conduct casework themselves or appoint key workers to lead (Cheminais, 2009). Examples of such models are the Pembrokeshire Inclusion Service and Pembrokeshire Family Support Team, which was formerly known as Team Around the Family (TAF) (Pembrokeshire County Council, 2025a; Pembrokeshire County Council, 2025b).

Multi-agency teams are led by a dedicated team leader working toward shared goals, with staff drawn from various disciplines (Cheminais, 2009). These teams have a strong collective identity; however, practitioners often retain links with their home agencies for supervision and training (Cheminais, 2009). Their work spans multiple levels, engaging with universal services, individual children, families, and wider groups (Cheminais, 2009). Examples include the Pembrokeshire Family Support Network (PFSN) and Pembrokeshire's Youth Justice Teams (YJT) (Pembrokeshire County Council, 2025c; Pembrokeshire County Council, 2025b).

Integrated services function as community hubs, typically based in schools or early years settings, where multiple services operate from a shared location under a unified vision and principles (Cheminais, 2009). Partner organisations commit to funding and supporting integrated delivery, often including health services, specialist advice, outreach, and adult learning (Cheminais, 2009). These models frequently incorporate joint inter-professional training (Cheminais, 2009). Examples include the Pembrokeshire Community Hub and Springboard (PAVS, 2025; Learning & Work Cymru, 2025).

In all models, robust multi-agency working is vital within education settings to effectively identify and respond to the needs of children and their families; as even though school staff often have daily contact with pupils and are well-placed to notice early signs of concern, they may not have the full picture (HM Government, 2023). However, by working closely with other professionals, such as social workers and the police, schools can ensure that children receive the necessary support at the

right time (HM Government, 2023). This collaborative approach helps to build a more comprehensive understanding of a child's needs, supports early intervention, and contributes to improved outcomes in both learning and wellbeing. Additionally, it strengthens safeguarding practices by enabling timely information sharing and coordinated action. For a multi-agency approach to be effective, it "requires individuals, agencies, and organisations to be clear about their own and each other's roles and responsibilities, and how they work together" (HM Government, 2023).

The key benefits of multi-agency working include a more effective and person-centred holistic approach with improved joint problem-solving, as well as stronger trust and communication between agencies (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). In educational settings collaborative multi-agency working offers numerous benefits; it enhances outcomes for children and young people by providing accessible, coordinated support services (Cheminais, 2009). Teachers gain a clearer understanding of external agencies, enabling them to focus on their core teaching role; it can be rewarding as collaboration also encourages mutual support, enhanced knowledge of other services, professional learning, and the sharing of best practices, leading to more manageable workloads (Cheminais, 2009; Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). This approach fosters stronger partnerships, reduces professional isolation, and promotes shared responsibility for addressing local needs, while minimising service duplication (Cheminais, 2009). Pooled resources and joint initiatives also increase the scale and sustainability of support; this improved coordination enhances referrals and aligns services more closely with the needs of children and families (Cheminais, 2009). Additionally, it broadens professional perspectives, builds trust between agencies, supports future joint planning, and boosts staff morale, engagement, and a collective sense of purpose (Cheminais, 2009).

The benefits for children and their families include faster and more appropriate referrals; better access to services; and greater emphasis on early intervention (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). Proactive and preventative early intervention strategies are key to providing timely support; as "identifying and addressing a child or family's needs early on can increase protective factors that positively influence a child's wellbeing, and decrease risk factors that may be impacting a child's life

negatively” (NSPCC Learning, 2023). Children’s lives are influenced by many factors, including the support network, environment and community that surrounds them; ineffective support that causes trauma or hardship can prevent them from achieving their potential (NSPCC Learning, 2023). This is supported by Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs, which emphasises that children must have their fundamental needs met to reach self-actualisation. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory highlights the influence of interconnected environmental systems on a child’s development and overall well-being. Good multi-agency practice reduces the likelihood of critical information being missed, such as in the case of Victoria Climbié where at least twelve key opportunities were missed by various agencies to intervene and protect her from harm (Lord Laming, 2003). If “risk thresholds” are too high in multi-agency practice, it can inhibit “preventative work”, which could proactively work with cases at a lower level to prevent them from escalating (Home Office, 2014).

Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers a useful way for understanding how multi-agency teams can work collaboratively with children and families, rather than simply doing things for them. Within ZPD, learning and development are most effective when support is provided just beyond the current level of independent ability, this is the space between what a learner can do alone and what they can achieve with guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) explain this concept of “scaffolding” further, highlighting how knowledgeable others, such as practitioners from education, health or social care, can model and gradually transfer strategies to parents and carers. In practice, services such as Sure Start and Flying Start epitomise this approach by offering parenting programmes, home visits, and play-based interventions that aid families through support (Early Years, 2025; Welsh Government, 2024; Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). Instead of imposing solutions, professionals work with parents to build confidence and skills; therefore, fostering long-term change and resilience within the family unit (Irranca-Davies, 2018).

Effective multi-agency working depends on trust, positive attitudes, and strong communication, which require time to develop among professionals and can trigger disagreements over the right course of action; as a result, children and/or their

families often do not experience the same perceived benefits of multi-agency working as frontline staff (Wallace and Garthwaite, 2023). The effectiveness of multi-agency work can be undermined by weak leadership, limited senior management support, unclear shared goals and “underdeveloped” performance management assessment (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007; Home Office, 2014). Challenges also include insufficient or short-term funding, high staff turnover, recruitment issues, and limited time for joint activities (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). Most notably, a lack of clarity around role demarcation emerged as the most frequently reported barrier to success; this can also lead to “parallel working” rather than a joined-up cohesive approach (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007; Wallace and Garthwaite, 2023). Likewise, the infrastructure of information technology (IT) systems and misunderstanding of information sharing under data protection have also caused significant problems, and arguments have been made for a national multi-agency system (Munro, 2011).

In conclusion, effective multi-agency working is built on four key foundations: clear roles and responsibilities; commitment at all levels; mutual trust and respect; and inter-agency understanding (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). This is further supported by effective communication, shared goals, and coordinated planning (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). Strong leadership, robust governance, and joint performance management are critical for ensuring accountability and informed decision-making (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). Moreover, the success of such collaboration depends heavily on sustained resources, including funding, staffing, and time for planning and delivery (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). Good practice in multi-agency work also includes allowing time to build relationships, delivering joint training, and establishing shared aims and objectives, all of which overcome common barriers in inter-agency collaboration (Atkinson, Jones and Lamont, 2007). When these elements are in place, the multi-agency model in Wales can successfully promote children and young people's welfare, as it fosters a cohesive and responsive support system that works with families to meet their complex and evolving needs.

However, as mentioned, currently “there is no blueprint for multi-agency working”; which means there can be a significant variation in how multi-agency working is

carried out between different LA areas and how effectively different agencies work together (Cheminais, 2009; Wallace and Garthwaite, 2023). For example, Bridgend County Borough Council (2025) operate differently to many other LA's in Wales in terms of multi-agency working. They have established a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), this configuration follows similar hubs in England, which streamlines communication between agencies and provides a more efficient service (Bridgend County Borough Council, 2025; Home Office, 2014).

To address the discrepancies and ensure improved outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people; the Welsh Government is devising a National Multi-Agency Practice Strategy for Children, to promote a strong, consistent practice across the country (Bowden, 2025). As part of this process, it has reviewed the impact and effectiveness of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and “found a degree of inconsistent practice and perceptions around multi-agency working”; however, the review also highlighted “a number of critical success factors” and gave six recommendations to improve future effectiveness (Wallace and Garthwaite, 2023). If these are implemented, then it could ensure a solid foundation for a coherent multi-agency practice throughout Wales.

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