

Children's Services at the Crossroads

**A Critical Evaluation of Contemporary
Policy for Practice**

**Edited by
Patrick Ayre and
Michael Preston-Shoot**



Russell House Publishing

Russell House Publishing
First published in 2010 by:
Russell House Publishing Ltd.
4 St. George's House
Uplyme Road
Lyme Regis
Dorset DT7 3LS
Tel: 01297-443948
Fax: 01297-442722
e-mail: help@russellhouse.co.uk
www.russellhouse.co.uk

© Patrick Ayre, Michael Preston-Shoot and the various contributors

The moral right of Patrick Ayre, Michael Preston-Shoot and the various contributors to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright holder and the publisher, or without a licence permitting copying in the UK issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6–10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

British Library Cataloguing-in-publication Data:
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-905541-64-5

Typeset by TW Typesetting, Plymouth, Devon

Printed by Page Bros, Norwich

Russell House Publishing

Russell House Publishing aims to publish innovative and valuable materials to help managers, practitioners, trainers, educators and students.

Our full catalogue covers: social policy, working with young people, helping children and families, care of older people, social care, combating social exclusion, revitalising communities and working with offenders.

Full details can be found at www.russellhouse.co.uk and we are pleased to send out information to you by post. Our contact details are on this page.

We are always keen to receive feedback on publications and new ideas for future projects.

Contents

About the Contributors v

Introduction

Chapter 1 **Children's Services: Reversing the Vicious Spiral** 2
Patrick Ayre and Michael Preston-Shoot

Part One: The Policy Context

Chapter 2 **Children and Young People's Policy in Wales** 8
Ian Butler and Mark Drakeford

Chapter 3 **Safeguarding Children: The Scottish Perspective** 18
Brigid Daniel and Norma Baldwin

Chapter 4 **The Understanding Systemic Caseworker: The (Changing) Nature and Meanings of Working with Children and Families** 28
Harry Ferguson

Part Two: Service Delivery Issues

Chapter 5 **The De-professionalisation of Child Protection: Regaining our Bearings** 38
Patrick Ayre and Martin C. Calder

Chapter 6 **New Labour and Youth Justice: What Works or What's Counted** 52
John Pitts and Tim Bateman

Chapter 7 **Children in Need: the Challenge of Prevention for Social Work** 64
Kate Morris

Chapter 8 **Inadmissible Evidence? New Labour and the Education of Children in Care** 74
Isabelle Brodie

Part Three: Research Evidence on Services

Chapter 9 **Looking After Social Work Practice in its Organisational Context: Neglected and Disconcerting Questions** 84
Michael Preston-Shoot

Chapter 10	Managerialism – At the Tipping Point? <i>Alex Chard and Patrick Ayre</i>	95
Chapter 11	Technology as Magic: Fetish and Folly in the IT-enabled Reform of Children's Services <i>David Wastell and Sue White</i>	107
Chapter 12	Playing with Fire or Rediscovering Fire? The Perils and Potential for Evidence Based Practice in Child and Family Social Work Donald Forrester	115
Conclusion		
Chapter 13	For my Next Trick: Illusion in Children's Social Policy and Practice <i>Michael Preston-Shoot and Patrick Ayre</i>	127
	<i>Index</i>	133

About the Contributors

Patrick Ayre is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Bedfordshire where he teaches and researches in the fields of social work and child safeguarding. He has worked in the field of child protection and child welfare for over 30 years and was a social worker and manager of child protection services for some 17 years before taking up his present post. In recent years, he has been heavily engaged in the preparation of Serious Case Reviews, and is active as an expert witness in children's services' negligence cases.

Norma Baldwin BA (Hons) M.Phil., trained as a Probation Officer and worked in Greater Manchester and Salford Probation Service before moving to training and personnel in Warwickshire Social Services. She then moved to Warwick University where she taught and researched in child care and residential care. She moved to Dundee University as Professor of Child Care and Protection and Head of Social Work. She was later appointed Associate Dean (Research) for the Faculty of Education and Social Work. She is currently an Emeritus Professor at Dundee and Hon. Prof. at Warwick. Her research interests are in the links between poverty and harm to children and in the assessment of need and risk in families and communities. She continues her research at the Social Dimensions of Health Institute, Universities of Dundee and St. Andrews. She was Chair of the working group on Assessment on which the Scottish Assessment Framework in GIRFEC is based. She is Convenor of the Board of Trustees of the Scottish charity Circle (formerly FSU Scotland).

Tim Bateman has recently joined the University of Bedfordshire as a Reader in Youth justice, having previously been employed as a senior policy development officer for Nacro youth crime section. He has extensive experience of work in youth justice social work and residential child care. Tim has written widely on youth crime policy and practice. He is news editor of the journal *Youth Justice*, an associate editor of *Safer Communities*, and secretary of the *London Association for Youth Justice*.

Isabelle Brodie is Senior Research Fellow at the University of Bedfordshire. She has some 16 years experience as a researcher, working principally in the area of looked after children and specialising in their educational experiences.

Ian Butler is a qualified social worker with considerable practice and managerial experience in both the statutory and voluntary sectors. He is Professor of Social Work at Bath University. In 2005, he was seconded to the Welsh Assembly Government in Cardiff where he is a Special Advisor to the First Minister. He was joint Editor of the *British Journal of Social Work* between 1999 and 2004 (with Mark Drakeford). He was elected as a member of the Academy of Social Sciences in 2004. In 2009, he was appointed to the Board of Cafcass (England). He has published widely on social work policy and practice with children and families.

Martin C. Calder has specialised in the field of child protection for 25 years – establishing Calder Training and Consultancy in 2005. He is driven to provide robust and practical systems for child protection policy and practice but notes that ‘this task has been made more difficult given the raft of government initiatives detracting from these goals’. He has written over 20 books addressing policy flaws and developing and disseminating assessment frameworks for frontline staff. He is currently Honorary Research Fellow at Durham University.

Alex Chard MSc is a Director of YCTCS Ltd and has worked for the last 18 years as an organisational consultant within children’s services. Recent consultancy projects have included reviewing the strategic role of local children’s trusts. He regularly works with management teams in order to enhance collaborative management practice. Alex is currently completing a Professional Doctorate in Systemic Practice. His MSc was on the impact of inspection on a management team. He is co-author of *Defending Young People*, a comprehensive guide to the law on young offenders. He recently wrote *Creating a Sense of Belonging*, national guidance on Positive Activities for Young People and he is a member of the Editorial Board of Community Care Inform.

Brigid Daniel MA (Hons) PhD, CQSW, originally studied psychology and carried out research in infant perceptuo-motor development. Following qualification as a social worker she practised in Edinburgh in Intake and then in a Children and Families team. She then worked at Dundee University on post-qualifying courses in child care and protection, at Stirling University as Senior Lecturer in Social Work and returned to Dundee as the Professor of Child Care and Protection and Director of Studies of Child Care and Protection. She is currently Professor of Social Work at Stirling University in the Department of Applied Social Science and is head of the Social Work section which delivers undergraduate and post-graduate qualifying social work programmes as well as a range of continuing professional development courses. Brigid was a member of the team that undertook the multi-disciplinary audit and review of child protection in Scotland that reported in ‘*It’s everyone’s job to make sure I’m alright*’. Her research interests and publications are in the areas of child development, children’s resilience, work with fathers and child neglect.

Mark Drakeford has worked as a probation officer, community worker and in youth justice. He is currently Professor of Social Policy and Applied Social Sciences at the University of Cardiff. Since 2000 he has been the Cabinet's health and social policy adviser at the Welsh Assembly Government. He has published extensively on the development of devolution and social welfare services for young people.

Harry Ferguson is Professor of Social Work and Director of the Centre for Social Work, University of Nottingham. He has taught, researched and published widely in the areas of child abuse/protection, domestic violence, fatherhood, men's sexuality and masculinities, best practice, and the social science of social work. His books include, *Protecting Children in Time: Child Abuse, Child Protection and the Consequences of Modernity*, Palgrave, 2004; and *Best Practice in Social Work*, Palgrave, 2008.

Donald Forrester was a child care social worker in inner London from 1991 to 1999. During this time he worked continuously with families in which there was parental substance misuse, and the challenges and opportunities involved in such work have become a central interest since he became an academic. Professor Forrester is a consultant for the Welsh Assembly Government who are radically reconfiguring services to address parental substance misuse. In 2009 he obtained a grant of £1.1 million to set up the Tilda Goldberg Centre at the University of Bedfordshire. The centre is focused on developing the evidence base in social work with an initial focus on substance misuse issues.

Kate Morris is Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Nottingham; prior to this she was Head of Social Work at the University of Birmingham. She is a qualified social worker with extensive practice and management experience. She has a longstanding interest in family inclusion strategies in social work, and in preventative services and practices. She has researched and published in both these areas and she managed the National Evaluation of the Children's Fund from 2003-2006. More recently she led on the literature review that informed the Cabinet Office 'Think Family' policy stream.

John Pitts is Vauxhall Professor of Socio-Legal Studies at the University of Bedfordshire. He has worked in printing and publishing; as a school teacher; a street and club-based youth worker; a group worker in a Young Offender Institution and as a consultant to workers in youth justice and youth social work, legal professionals and the police in the UK, mainland Europe, the Russian Federation and China. More recently he has acted as a consultant on violent youth gangs to local authorities, police forces and 'think tanks'. His research includes studies of the differential treatment of black and white young offenders; Anglo-French responses to youth crime and disorder; the violent victimisation of school students; inter-racial youth violence; the impact of youth work on the life chances of socially excluded young

people in five European cities; the contribution of detached and outreach youth work to the life chances of socially excluded young people in the UK and violent youth gangs in three London boroughs. His publications include: *The Politics of Juvenile Crime*, Sage Publications (1988); *Working With Young Offenders*, BASW/Macmillan (1990 & 1999); *The New Politics of Youth Crime: Discipline or Solidarity*, Macmillan (2001); *Crime Disorder and Community Safety* (with R. Matthews [Eds.]) Routledge (2001); *The Russell House Companion to Working with Young People* (with F. Factor & V. Chauchun [Eds.]) Russell House Publishing (2001); *Reaching Socially Excluded Young People* (with D. Crimmens, F. Factor T. Jeffs, C. Pugh, J. Spence & P. Turner) National Youth Agency (2004); *The Russell House Companion to Youth Justice* (with T. Bateman [Eds.]) Russell House (2005); *Reluctant Gangsters: The Changing Face of Youth Crime*, Willan Publishing (2008). He is editor of *Safer Communities*, associate editor of *Youth and Policy* and an editorial board member of *Youth Justice* and *Juvenile Justice Worldwide* (UNESCO).

Michael Preston-Shoot is Professor of Social Work and Dean of the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences at the University of Bedfordshire, England. He has held posts in universities since 1988 following a career in local authorities and voluntary organisations as a social worker, groupworker and team leader. He has also practised as a family therapist and psychotherapist. He is an elected Academician of the Academy of Social Sciences. He was Chair of the Joint University Council Social Work Education, which represents the perspectives of United Kingdom social work education in higher education institutions, between 2005 and 2009. He was editor of *Social Work Education: The International Journal* between 1993 and 2006 and was managing editor of the *European Journal of Social Work* between 2003 and 2007. He is one of the founding editors of the journal *Ethics and Social Welfare*. He was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship by the Higher Education Academy in 2005. His research and writing has concentrated on the interface between law and social work practice, on which in 2005 he co-authored a systematic review on teaching, learning and assessment of law in social work education for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE). He has subsequently co-authored a resource guide and ten e-learning objects on the subject of law and social work, also published by SCIE. He has also undertaken research and published in the areas of social work education, group work, the involvement of service users in social work education and research, and on the needs and service outcomes for young people in public care and older people requiring care in the community. He is the Independent Chair of a Local Safeguarding Children Board and of a Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Board.

David Wastell is Professor of Information Systems at Nottingham University Business School. He began his academic career as a psycho-physiologist, carrying out research on stress and technological innovation in collaboration with British Telecom. His interests in technology developed during an extended period at

Manchester and Salford Universities, before moving to Nottingham in 2005. Dave's current interests are in public sector reform, innovation and design, and cognitive ergonomics. He has extensive public sector consultancy experience and was co-author of the SPRINT design methodology, which is widely used in the local government community.

Sue White is Professor of Social Work at the University of Lancaster. She qualified in social work at the University of Leeds in 1983 and was employed as a practitioner and manager in statutory children's services until 1995 when she took up an academic post at the University of Manchester. Her research has focused principally on the analysis of professional decision-making in child welfare, with a particular emphasis on safeguarding. She has recently completed two influential Research Council funded studies, the first focusing on electronic information sharing in multi-disciplinary child welfare practice and the second on the relationship between performance management of public services responsible for safeguarding children, and the impact of anticipated blame within the decision-making practices of those providing, supervising and managing these services. During 2009, Sue served on the Social Work Task Force, charged with undertaking a comprehensive review of frontline social work practice in England. She is currently Chair of the Association of Professors of Social Work and editor in chief of *Child and Family Social Work*.

Introduction

Children's Services: Reversing the Vicious Spiral

Patrick Ayre and Michael Preston-Shoot

Failing services and failed reforms

In response to widespread and persistent concern over the ability of social services for children and families to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of the most vulnerable children, the UK government has in the last decade introduced some of the most far reaching changes ever encountered in this field. However, the evidence as to whether these changes are in every case yielding improved results is at very best equivocal. Indeed, it may be argued that, in England at least, despite the best intentions of those driving these changes forward, the outcome of the particular approaches to reform which have been adopted has been to substantially diminish the capability of children's social services to respond effectively to the complex challenges they face and there is a danger that these services are becoming locked into a vicious spiral of decline from which it will be hard to recover.

The failure of the government's preferred approaches to quality improvement may be seen clearly reflected in key reports presented to the government in 2008 and 2009. Lord Laming (2009) has commented trenchantly on the apparent intractability of many of the problems identified by him in his earlier report (Laming, 2003) noting with some surprise that, though existing law and procedures were repeatedly and determinedly asserted to be adequate, safeguarding performance continued to display persistent serious flaws. The recent summaries of the findings of Serious Case Reviews produced by Ofsted (2008; 2009) have raised again for our attention a host of failings first identified in similar digests dating back as far as 1994 (Brandon et al., 2008; Brandon, Owers and Black, 1999; Falkov, 1996; James, 1994; Sinclair and Bullock, 2002). Tony Blair, in his foreword to *Every Child Matters* (Boateng, 2003: 1) mourned Victoria Climbié as the latest addition to a litany of names of the victims of child safeguarding tragedies, which 'echoing down the years, are a standing shame to us all' and inquiries into the

death of Peter Connolly suggest that many of the same grave causes for concern remain.

The contributors to this book recognise that child and family social work represents only one element in the complex web of interagency activity which forms the 'team around the child' in modern child welfare practice. It is, however, our view that social workers can and should play a key role within this team, but that their ability to do so has been substantially degraded. If social work is to fulfil its potential within a multi-agency context, significant systemic change will be required and it is on this change which this book focuses. In seeking to outline and address the challenges which we face, this book examines the impact of a number of linked strands of the reform agenda on key areas of children's services practice including child safeguarding, youth offending, children in care, child and family support and child welfare law. It also draws on more general reflections on the nature of social work with children and families and on how it should be organised and delivered. Each contributor offers a range of original insights, but a number of common cross-cutting themes may be seen to emerge.

The obstacles to better services

Read as a whole, this book suggests that many of the obstacles which we face in rebuilding our profession have their origins in profound changes which have taken place within the environment within which child care social work is conducted. The following are some of the key propositions which are offered:

- The predominant position accorded to managerialist approaches has, overall, had a profoundly undermining effect on performance (see chapters by Ayre and Calder; Chard and Ayre; Ferguson; Pitts and Bateman; Preston-Shoot)
- In consequence of this approach, social work is being transformed from a professional activity

to a technical one. Within this new environment, process and procedures are prioritised over objectives and outcomes (Ayre and Calder; Butler and Drakeford; Pitts and Bateman), targets and indicators over values and professional standards (Butler and Drakeford; Preston-Shoot) and compliance and completion over analysis and reflection (Ayre and Calder; Ferguson; Forrester)

- There has been an irrational faith in improvement strategies which have proved unsuccessful and inappropriate (Chard and Ayre; Wastell and White)
- We are in danger of forgetting that the essence of social work lies in what happens between the social worker and the service user when they meet. Real change in the wellbeing of the children and families with whom we work is more likely to derive from the effectiveness of our interaction with them and with our professional environment than from our attainment of statistical targets (Ayre and Calder; Butler and Drakeford; Fergusson; Forrester; Pitts and Bateman; Preston-Shoot)
- Research evidence has been used as a prop for policy, rather than a foundation (Brodie; Forester; Morris; Pitts and Bateman)
- Substantial investment has been devoted to addressing a number of key factors contributing to social exclusion. However, the effectiveness of the social care response has often been undermined by undue haste and a failure fully to analyse the challenges before rolling out solutions intended to resolve them (Brodie; Morris) In some instances, services have been configured as short term initiatives outside the social care mainstream. As a result of their position on the fringes, they all too readily disappear when their funding ceases, leaving only a limited legacy of learning or experience (Morris).

It may be tempting to dismiss these concerns as the musings of social work academics remote from the realities of service delivery, but it must be recognised that those selected by the government to report on the state of practice are offering many of the same messages. Whilst Lord Laming seems on occasion to be suggesting that what we need is 'more of the same' and that significant improvements might be brought about by tinkering with targets (2009: 16) he has nonetheless described clearly some of the systemic weaknesses underpinning existing

provision. He notes, 'concern that the tradition of deliberate, reflective social work practice is being put in danger because of an overemphasis on process and targets, resulting in a loss of confidence amongst social workers' (p 32), adding that 'supervision should be open and supportive, focusing on the quality of decisions, good risk analysis, and improving outcomes for children rather than meeting targets' (p 32). He reports anxieties that professional practice and judgment are being compromised by process-driven assessment and recording systems (p 44) and uses two helpful quotes to illustrate how children's services social workers may be losing their sense of what really matters about what they do:

It seems like they have to do all this form filling, their bosses' bosses make them do it, but it makes them forget about us.

Boy, 16

She does things by textbook, she doesn't know me as a person.

Girl, 16

At the same time, the social workers who spoke to the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009b: 6) told them that they were 'tied up in bureaucracy' and did not have enough time to devote to the people they wanted to help. Systems for managing performance were not driving quality and they were frustrated with the tools and support they received. The Task Force 'found evidence of some social workers feeling overloaded, unsupported and de-skilled by some of the resources and systems designed to support their effectiveness' (p 19) and frontline workers reported widely that 'supervision tends to be process driven and dominated by case management' (p 20) at the expense of its supportive, analytical and evaluative functions. Overall, the Task Force gained 'a sense of a profession that is, in places, at risk of becoming too mechanised and of being "de-skilled" through an over emphasis on compliance rather than judgement' (p 32). They noted that 'many of these weaknesses can end up compounding one another, causing a vicious circle in which service improvement becomes hard to achieve' (p 35).

Analysis at three levels

Both Lord Laming and the Social Work Task Force (Social Work Task Force, 2009a) have

offered a range of important recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of social work services. However, it is a commonplace in the field of service evaluation and improvement that recommendations are only as good as the analysis on which they are based. The Social Work Task Force and Lord Laming note with some concern that social workers' skills in analysis and interpretation are generally in need of improvement, but it may be argued that similar frailties are demonstrated in their own reports, which may be felt to be very strong on the 'what?' questions, but rather weaker on the 'why?' questions. A clear and cogent account is given of what is wrong with existing patterns of provision, but the analysis of why these problems have arisen may be felt sometimes to lack the requisite depth.

One of the authors of this introductory chapter (Ayre) has a particular interest in the effectiveness of Serious Case Reviews, which are conducted when a child has been killed or seriously injured, and abuse or neglect are felt to be causal factors. He has identified three levels of analysis to be found in such reports, each with an associated type of recommendation. At the first and crudest level, which we may refer to as *injunctive* or *Level 1* analysis, the problem is simply reformulated as an instruction. For example, the conclusion that 'this child was injured because we did not do X' is associated with a recommendation stating simply that 'we must do X in the future'. Many Serious Case Review recommendations have, unfortunately, tended to follow this unreflective and essentially unhelpful format, which clearly ignores the fact that we need to concern ourselves less with *the fact that X did not happen*, and more with *why X did not happen*.

At the second and slightly more analytical level, which we may refer to as *procedural* or *Level 2*, the problem is addressed by suggesting change to, or enhanced promotion of, approved processes for managing the issue in question. We should write more procedures, provide more training or, very often, do both of these things. This approach assumes that failures have arisen because those involved did not understand what they should be doing, either because essential guidance did not exist, or because they were insufficiently familiar with the guidance which was available. Such a response, though limited, may have utility in some circumstances. However, it does not recognise that if we

consider the most infamous recent child abuse scandals, we may observe clearly that tragic consequences arose because key participants failed to take in practice actions which they must certainly have known in principle were the right things to do. The central question, which so often goes unanswered, is 'why, then, despite adequate training and guidance, did they still fail to take the action required?'

The answer to this question requires analysis at a third level. Such *Level 3* analysis is *systemic* and involves seeking out and describing the fundamental organisational and relational weaknesses which underpin and encourage failures in performance (see Fish, Munro and Bairstow, 2009). The Social Work Task Force report (2009a) and to a lesser extent that of Lord Laming (2009) are notably lacking in analysis at this level, and one of the main contributions of this book to the change debate may be felt to rest on its ability to fill this glaring gap. Unless we truly understand the cause of the illness which we seek to cure, the remedies which we prescribe are likely to be at best ineffective and at worst positively harmful.

By way of illustration, we may note that the Social Work Task Force and the contributors to this book agree that weaknesses in supervision are currently a significant factor in the social work profession's ills. The Task Force report offers a Level 2 analysis of this, suggesting that this deficiency may be addressed by changing procedures to define a minimum frequency for supervision, and by enhancing the training provided to managers (2009a: 28). Ayre and Calder, however, adopting a Level 3 analysis, suggest that the managerialist culture which holds sway in social care inevitably conditions managers to undertake supervision which focuses on procedure and process at the expense of analysis and evaluation. Indeed, it may be argued that, given that resources of time are limited and that the measures of effectiveness currently in place focus on quantity not quality, managers are acting entirely rationally in providing supervision which is almost entirely managerial, and that to offer supervision of the analytical and evaluative type recommended by the Task Force would, however praiseworthy in professional and ethical terms, be irrational in these circumstances.

Here we come across something which we might describe as the *Mission Statement fallacy*, under which it is assumed that if one asserts an

objective with which all relevant stakeholders agree strongly in principle, this objective will be realised in practice. In fact, we know that you could train managers in good supervision practice from now until eternity, but if the environment in which they are working in practical reality emphasises the importance of only one aspect of supervision, it is that aspect which will, by and large, be delivered, and other aspects, however worthy, admirable and 'right' will receive less attention. A similar argument may be applied to the emphasis on early engagement asserted as a commitment within the *Every Child Matters* agenda. We may be able to agree that every children's services worker, whether manager or practitioner, values prevention and would like to be doing it, but asserting the rightness of a preventive approach does not mean that such an approach will thrive in the longer term if, in reality, this approach is marginalised and its resourcing rendered insecure by powerful systemic drivers which remain unchanged by the underlying Mission Statement (see Morris in this book).

Change at three levels

Whilst the summary of Serious Case Reviews produced by Ofsted in 2008 (Ofsted, 2008: 24) seems to suggest that, in evaluating the reasons for failures of performance, we have tended to pay insufficient attention to the individual shortcomings of the staff involved, the authors of this book are unanimous in regarding the most crucial failings of children's social care as being institutional rather than personal, and in seeing the staff involved as, in most cases, 'inheritors rather than instigators' (Reason, 1995: 1711) of the performance deficiencies which arise. The problems are thus not technical ones, requiring a Level 1 or 2 tweak to existing patterns, but fundamental, requiring radical systemic transformation which must take place at each of three levels: central government, service management and frontline practice.

The process must start with central government. This book argues that the approaches to service development and performance management adopted by central government in recent decades have created a framework for practice which is undermining rather than promoting the effectiveness of children's services and of their practitioners. This framework must be reconfigured to value quality

as well as quantity and to appreciate and facilitate those aspects of social work practice most closely related to improving outcomes for children, rather than those which it is most easy to measure. It will be essential that ministers come to understand that it is through their deeds, not their words, that they convey to service providers where their priorities should lie.

Change is required at managerial level as well as governmental, but we may promote this change most effectively if we recognise that service managers may not be falling short because they are ignorant or incompetent, as a Level 1 or 2 analysis may suggest, but on the contrary, their behaviour may be a rational response to the environment in which they find themselves. Rational managers, senior or junior, will seek to ensure that the services which they offer are judged effective by those above them in the chain of responsibility. They will, in short, seek to give us what we ask for. If we ask for evidence based services which emphasise analysis and transformational relationships and if we confirm our wishes by providing a framework of resources and regulation which supports this, they will attempt to comply. On the other hand, if we make it clear through our evaluative frameworks that our primary concern centres on compliance with process and procedure, we may expect them to configure their services accordingly. Certainly, some retraining may be required by managers whose professional style has been shaped by the audit culture which has dominated recent years, but without a change in the demands placed on them by the environment in which they work, such training may be expected to have little impact in practice. Wastell and White set out very compellingly in their chapter in this book how our requirements of managers should be reconfigured to recognise that performance is conditioned by systems:

Middle managers need to see it as their main business not to be the brutal enforcers of targets but to be the benign designers of the workplace ... In an organisational context, this means the design of systems made up of people, processes and technology in order to achieve the best possible performance. Finding the best way of organising the workplace, in more prosaic terms. If this is not the primary business of management, then what on earth is?

Reconfiguration at governmental and managerial levels of the environment within which social work with children is conducted will open up

opportunities for social workers in the frontline to rediscover their identity and efficacy. If the processes of deprofessionalisation described in this book (Ayre and Calder; Chard and Ayre; Pitts and Bateman; Ferguson; Preston-Shoot) can be halted, the enhanced supervision, training and career structure recommended by the Social Work Task Force (2009a) may be expected to yield good results. If, however, we fail to acknowledge and address the systemic failings identified by contributors to this book, we must expect to find it hard to escape from the vicious spiral of decline into which children's services seem currently to be locked.

References

- Boateng, P. (2003) *Every Child Matters*. Cm 5860. London: Stationery Office.
- Brandon, M. et al. (2008) *Analysing Child Deaths and Serious Injury Through Abuse and Neglect: What Can We Learn?* London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Brandon, M., Owers, M. and Black, J. (1999) *Learning How to Make Children Safer: An Analysis for the Welsh Office of Serious Child Abuse Cases in Wales*. Norwich: University of East Anglia/Welsh Office.
- Falkov, A. (1996) *A Study of Working Together Part 8 Reports: Fatal Child Abuse and Parental Psychiatric Disorder*. London: DoH.
- Fish, S., Munro, E. and Bairstow, S. (2009) *Learning Together to Safeguard Children: Developing a Multi-Agency Systems Approach for Case Reviews*. London: SCIE.
- James, G. (1994) *Study of Working Together Part 8 Reports*. London: DoH.
- Lord Laming (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming*. Cmnd 5730. London: The Stationery Office.
- Lord Laming (2009) *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Ofsted (2008) *Learning Lessons, Taking Action*. London: Ofsted.
- Ofsted (2009) *Learning Lessons from Serious Case Reviews: Year 2*. London: Ofsted.
- Reason, J. (1995) A Systems Approach to Organizational Error. *Ergonomics*, 38: 8, 1708–21.
- Sinclair, R. and Bullock, R. (2002) *Learning from Past Experience: A Review of Serious Case Reviews*. London: DoH.
- Social Work Task Force (2009a) *Building a Safe, Confident Future: The Final Report of the Social Work Task Force*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
- Social Work Task Force (2009b) *Facing up to the Task: The Interim Report of the Social Work Task Force*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.