

ADCS conference - Enthusiasm for early intervention must not conceal the scope of the challenge ahead.

The pace and enthusiasm in government for the concept of early intervention must not be allowed to obscure the complexity of funding and delivery of this area of work, and the potential threat to the provision of universal services for children and young people, the President of the Association of Children's Services said.

Mr Dunkley welcomed the increased focus on early intervention to prevent serious problems from developing and particularly the commitment of central government to reviewing the evidence base so thoroughly, though he said that it was important to maintain a holistic picture of the early intervention programmes and reviews already underway.

"There is a sense that the concept has gained a foothold in the minds of government ministers... One of the challenges seems to be that now that everyone understands the benefits of early intervention; everyone wants to have a go at it."

The consequence of rolling funding for previously universal services such as youth clubs into the Early Intervention Grant, and then reducing the funding total, had signalled to local authorities that these services should become targeted at those most in need. Children's centres, youth services and careers services would increasingly retreat from offering universal services to focus on early intervention he said.

"It may be morally right to focus on those who would benefit most from receiving public services, Matt Dunkley said, but we must consider how we continue to identify those who would benefit from early intervention." And he added that *"the remaining universal services, including schools, will have a role to play in referring children and families to additional support"*.

He said that the government had made clear that there would be an expanded universal offer for the under fives, but that this would be at the expense of universal services for older children unless other funding could be found. Mr Dunkley welcomed the proposals put forward by Graham Allen to attract external finance to support early intervention. However, he cautioned that defining outcomes that could form the basis of a system of outcomes based contracts or payment by results would be challenging – *"there is a reason that this hasn't been done before – it's very complicated"* he said *"but there is now a real political and professional will to stop ducking the difficult questions – nothing focuses the mind on what is important like a 25% budget cut"*, he said.

Notes to Editors

- 1) The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd (ADCS) is the professional leadership association for Directors of Children's Services and senior managers in local authorities.
- 2) The ADCS annual conference on "The Changing Shape of Children's Services" is taking place at the Midland Hotel Manchester from Thursday 7th July until Friday 8th July.
- 3) Graham Allen MP published his report into Early Intervention funding on Monday 4th July. He recommended ways of attracting private finance for early intervention services in order to allow for investment in services that have been shown to save money over time.

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