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# The Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Multi-Agency Working

**This chapter describes:**

- **The latest research findings on how schools are implementing ECM and engaging collaboratively with other services and agencies**
- **The benefits of multi-agency partnership working within educational settings**
- **The challenges faced by educational settings in establishing and developing multi-agency partnership working**
- **Positive ways forward in meeting the challenges and building the multi-agency team**

This chapter is suitable for those who are researching multi-agency working.

## Recent research into Every Child Matters and multi-agency working

Engagement in Every Child Matters is necessary because the intrinsic links between the educational setting, services, agencies and the community help to improve the educational achievement, the health and the social choices of children, young people and their families. The government continues to encourage schools and other educational settings to collaborate with each other and with outside agencies and organizations, in order to deliver the five ECM outcomes.

One local authority strategic manager commented in a recent NFER report on the value of social care professionals working in extended schools: 'ECM has been the tool that people can identify with and say, well, although I sit in health or social care, or extended schools, I have a part to play ... and it is actually coming from the Government' (Wilkin et al., 2008: 9).

There have been a number of research studies and surveys on the implementation of the Every Child Matters agenda in schools, and how they are responding to the need for greater partnership working with other services and agencies.

The National Foundation for Educational Research in two annual surveys of trends in education 2006 and 2007, reported on how the Every Child Matters agenda was affecting schools. Both surveys identified the following main changes occurring as a result of schools engaging with Every Child Matters:

- school improvement planning reflecting the five ECM outcomes

- review of the curriculum and current school practice

- review of staffing and recruitment in school to align ECM with workforce remodelling

- marked growth in partnership involvement and information sharing

- increased extended school work

- improved school meals and greater awareness of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles

The two NFER surveys on ECM also identified the same challenges facing schools, in delivering the Every Child Matters agenda. These were:

- financial issues, particularly in relation to sustainability of resources

- having sufficient time to develop and implement the ECM agenda

- developing closer collaboration with other services and agencies involved in supporting children and young people's well being.

The NFER surveys of 2006 and 2007 both found that schools had more contact with some local services than others. For example, 90 per cent of primary and secondary schools surveyed accessed health, social care and the police more than housing services which were accessed by only 41 per cent of primary schools and 50 per cent of secondary schools. Housing and social care were the two services which were considered to be the least accessible for support by schools.

The General Teaching Council published a report in autumn 2007 on Every Child Matters and the Children's Workforce in schools (GTC, 2007a). In relation to collaborative working between schools and multi-agency front-line practitioners the report highlighted the need for the following:

- sufficient well-trained, high-quality front-line practitioners from services and agencies with the capacity to respond effectively to the ECM agenda in order to deliver preventative interventions

- greater opportunities for more inter-professional learning, training and development between school staff and multi-agency practitioners working directly with pupils in the school to improve integrated working

- inter-professional training in using inter-agency frameworks and protocols, that is, National Service Framework, (NSF), the Common Assessment Framework, ContactPoint

- the time to invest in building quality relationships between school staff and multi-agency front-line practitioners

- clearer and improved information for schools on where to refer children to and who to seek specific expertise from

- more up-to-date information about voluntary sector provision available

- more information and a clearer understanding about the expertise, role, procedures and processes of children's services and agencies working with schools

- opportunities to get together and work with colleagues from other services to develop an analysis of local needs which can be addressed collaboratively

- greater sharing of exemplification of good practice in how to implement ECM and multi-agency partnership working in educational settings

- more support for educational settings in relation to accountability for monitoring and evaluating the impact of multi-agency interventions and support on improving pupils ECM well-being outcomes.

Harris, A., et al., reported on *Understanding the Reasons why schools do or do not fully engage with the ECM/ES agenda*, on behalf of the NCSL and TDA.

Their report findings confirmed those of the NFER and the GTC, in the need for:

- greater clarity of purpose in connection with other agencies

- schools establishing and consolidating links with partners and other agencies

- schools creating a shared vision, purpose, goals with other agencies

- a common understanding of the professional language used across different multi-professional disciplines

- schools establishing a clear line of communication, accountability and decision making with other agencies

- greater involvement of outside agencies on the school's leadership team

- whole-school staff training on strategies for fostering multi-agency ways of working together

- shared evaluative feedback existing between schools and multi-agencies

- a clear understanding of the respective roles and responsibilities of partners and agencies in the implementation of ECM

- sufficient local authority support to facilitate and secure multi-agency inputs for schools, including ring-fenced funding to develop and cement such partnership working

- designated staff in schools to have the time to co-ordinate the wide-ranging multi-agency partnerships for delivering ECM

- school leaders to focus more on interrelationship building, collaborative work-ing, multi-agency leadership, in becoming more politically astute, in order to re-engineer and transform cultural, professional and organisational boundaries and practices.

## The benefits of collaborative multi-agency working

There are many benefits of multi-agency collaborative partnership working for educational settings. Every Child Matters is the 'gel' that holds partnership working together, and the value it adds contributes immensely to improving the learning and well-being outcomes of children and young people.

The main benefits of collaborative multi-agency working, evident in everyday prac-tice within a range of educational settings are as follows:

- leads to enhanced and improved outcomes for children and young people, through a range of joined-up services, advice and support being readily available and easily accessible

- benefits teachers understanding of multi-agency practitioners activities, and knowing about the services to signpost pupils to, enabling them to focus on their core role of teaching

- helps to build consensus, strengthen partnership voice, break down professional boundaries and parochial attitudes

- helps to enhance scale of coverage and sustainability when pooled budgets, joint bids, joint projects and endeavours are put into action

- can help to build a more cohesive community approach through united multi-agency practitioners taking greater ownership and responsibility for addressing local needs jointly, thus avoiding duplication or overlap of provision

- promotes mutual support, encouragement and the exchange of ideas between staff, helping the sharing of expertise, knowledge and resources for training and good practice, leading to more manageable workloads

- increased fit between the services offered and those required by children, young people and their families to meet their needs

- improved co-ordination of services resulting in better relationships, improved referrals and the addressing of joint targets

- offers a broader perspective or focus to working practice

- helps to improve understanding and raise awareness of issues and agencies, and other professionals practice

- increased level of trust existing between partners/providers in relation to everyone knowing each can and will deliver

- facilitates joint planning for future multi-agency developments

- increased staff morale knowing that they do not work in isolation and that issues and problems can be resolved collaboratively

- more enthusiastic and committed staff who have high expectations of themselves and others.

An extended school co-ordinator in a secondary school commented: 'We benefit from having the experience of working with people from other backgrounds. We pick up other perspectives and others' ways of doing things' (Coleman, 2006: 14).

## The challenges of collaborative multi-agency working

The challenges that are identified with multi-agency working arise largely as a result of the complexities involved when practitioners engage in collaborative ventures. The following main challenges are reflected in recent research into multi-agency working in schools and children's centres.

- Funding concerns in relation to sustainability, for example, conflicts over funding within and between different agencies; a general lack of funding for multi-agency training and development work and to cover accommodation and on-costs for service delivery.

- Time – only a finite amount of time available to respond to many different priorities; some services have waiting lists, for example, CAMHS

- Communication – ensuring clear routes for two-way communication between the educational setting, agencies and practitioners in order to exchange information and improve joined-up co-ordinated working.

- The danger of a lack of clarity arising about the roles and responsibilities of practitioners in a wider and more diverse children's workforce.

- Adapting to working in a new and different context, for example, a school or children's centre, as opposed to a hospital environment.

- Competing priorities placing multiple demands and expectations on educational settings and services, for example, Healthy Schools initiative, ECM, Building Schools for the Future (BSF), personalized learning, 14–19 agenda. Danger of initiative overload occurring if not well managed.

- The management of different professional and multi-agency service cultures, for example, staff recruitment and retention, disparities in status, pay, conditions of service, working hours and working conditions. Health works 24 hours a day, seven days a week and education does not.

- Understanding each others professional language and protocols.

- Territorial issues – overcoming the reluctance to share equipment and facilities, professional jealousy and inter-agency mistrust.

- Preventing too much 'referring on' or 'passing the buck' becoming too regular an approach being adopted to give the illusion of effective action having been taken.

- Finding mutually convenient times for managers and practitioners to meet.

- Problems of cross-authority working where health authority (primary care trust – PCT) and the local authority boundaries are different.

- Additional stress and pressures arising from unsuccessful or disappointing attempts at multi-agency working having an adverse affect on staff morale and turnover.

- The assumption that multi-agency partnership working must be adopted at all times, even when it may be inappropriate in some instances.

- Lack of coherence in the aims, intentions and joined-up thinking between different agencies, resulting in role overlap or duplication of services.

- Staff resistance to change both within the educational setting and among multi-agency practitioners. A lack of understanding and appreciation about the reasons for change, and what the change process entails and the benefits it can bring to improving the ECM outcomes for children, young people and their families.

- Engaging the 'hard to reach' parents/carers, families, children and young people with multi-agency service provision, education and lifelong learning.

## Positive ways forward in meeting the challenges

Schools, and other educational settings are already contributing in a number of ways to improving the wider well-being of children and young people, however, they cannot do this alone. Every Child Matters provides a climate that fosters and encourages partnership working with external agency practitioners, who also recognize the school or other educational setting as being a valuable resource to help them fulfil their remit in relation to this huge agenda.

One extended school (ES) co-ordinator commented: 'We can't work in isolation from the ECM agenda because anything we do fits in with one category or another' (Kendall et al., 2007: 11).

Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2 will help staff from within the educational setting, in partnership with front-line practitioners from multi-agencies, to examine their beliefs, strengths, and areas for development in meeting the challenges that Every Child Matters poses for them.

Choosing **one** of the following four ECM recommendations, complete the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and thrests (SWOT) analysis using Figure 2.1.

- To improve information sharing between agencies.

- To encourage the development of multi-agency services around schools and children's centres.

**Figure 2.1** SWOT analysis for multi-agency partnership working

| SWOT ANALYSIS |
|---|
| **Aspect of multi-agency partnership working to be addressed:** |

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|---|
| | |

| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
|---|---|
| | |

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**Figure 2.2**    Force-field analysis framework for multi-agency partnership working

# FORCE-FIELD ANALYSIS

The change required for enhancing multi-agency collaborative partnership working:

| FORCES SUPPORTING CHANGE | FORCES PREVENTING CHANGE |
|---|---|
|  |  |

### STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE IMPLEMENTATION OF EFFECTIVE MULTI-AGENCY PARTNERSHIP WORKING

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- To improve the skills and effectiveness of those working in the children's workforce.

- To enable LAs to improve outcomes for children by commissioning services from the public, private and the voluntary sectors.

After undertaking this audit and awareness-raising exercise collaboratively, complete the next three activities using Table 2.1, Table 2.2 and Table 2.3

Harris, A. et al., (2007) identified four important developmental stages essential for building the capacity for the implementation of ECM/ES, and for sustainable multi-agency partnership working. These are:

1. Creating the internal conditions and structural infrastructure within the educational setting to support ECM/ES and multi-agency partnerships.This entails workforce remodelling, ECM/ES as a key priority on the development plan; promoting an inclusive 'can do' ethos and culture; shared moral purpose and focused distributed leadership; staff involvement in decision-making; targeted staff inter-professional development; positive staff collaboration; developing a learning culture of reflection and enquiry among practitioners, and aligning ECM/ES work activities more closely.

2. Developing clarity of purpose in the connection with other agencies. This involves establishing and consolidating links with partners and other agencies; creating a shared vision and purpose between partners; shared goals, evaluative feedback, establishing clear lines of communication and decision-making, and becoming a broker of multi-agency work.

3. Enhancing and extending community support and involvement. This entails setting up parents' groups; involving support workers, and establishing co-located services and the opportunities to work with other agencies.

4. Securing additional external support and additional funding in order to extend and sustain ECM/ES activities. This has involved the effective management of the internal and external conditions for change to support ECM/ES, through securing LA guidance, support, training and resourcing, local businesses and community support, as well as constantly seeking sponsorship and different sources of additional ring-fenced funding and resources to maintain extended school service provision (Harris et al., 2007: 8–9, 30).

Schools and children's centres where ECM/ES and multi-agency partnership working are successfully operating, have achieved this by adopting the four developmental stages. However, there have been other specific key factors that have successfully supported moving forward in relation to multi-agency partnership working:

- The concept of the community and the educational setting are intrinsically linked to improving the educational, health and social chances of children,

**Table 2.1**    Benefits practitioners bring to multi-agency team-working

List all the benefits you will bring to the multi-agency team in the educational setting, over the indicated periods of time, and the expected measures of success.

Name: ————————————————— Service: —————————————

Date: ——————————————————————

| In the next month | In six months' time | In a year's time |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| **Measures of success** | **Measures of success** | **Measures of success** |
| | | |

**Table 2.2**    Benefits of collaborative multi-agency partnership working

Nine diamonds inter-professional multi-agency activity:

1.  Read the 12 statements about the benefits of multi-agency partnership working in the box below, and discuss each one within your group.

2.  Agree on three statements to discard.

3.  Using the nine diamond template (Figure 2.3), put the remaining nine statements in order of priority, starting with the top diamond and working down to the last diamond.

4.  Reach a consensus, about which are the **six** most important benefits of multi-agency partnership working, within the educational setting.

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**STATEMENTS**

A.  Taking part in joint activities and projects

B.  Views being listened to by others

C.  Able to effect change

D.  Knowing contributions are valued

E.  Sharing decision-making

F.  Finding solutions to problems in partnership with others

G.  Being respected by other practitioners

H.  Sharing ideas, knowledge and expertise with other practitioners

I.  Participating in regular inter-professional training

J.  Understanding different practitioners roles and responsibilities

K.  Having an agreed vision, aims and objectives

L.   Helping to remove children and young people's barriers to learning

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**Figure 2.3**    Diamond Ranking Template
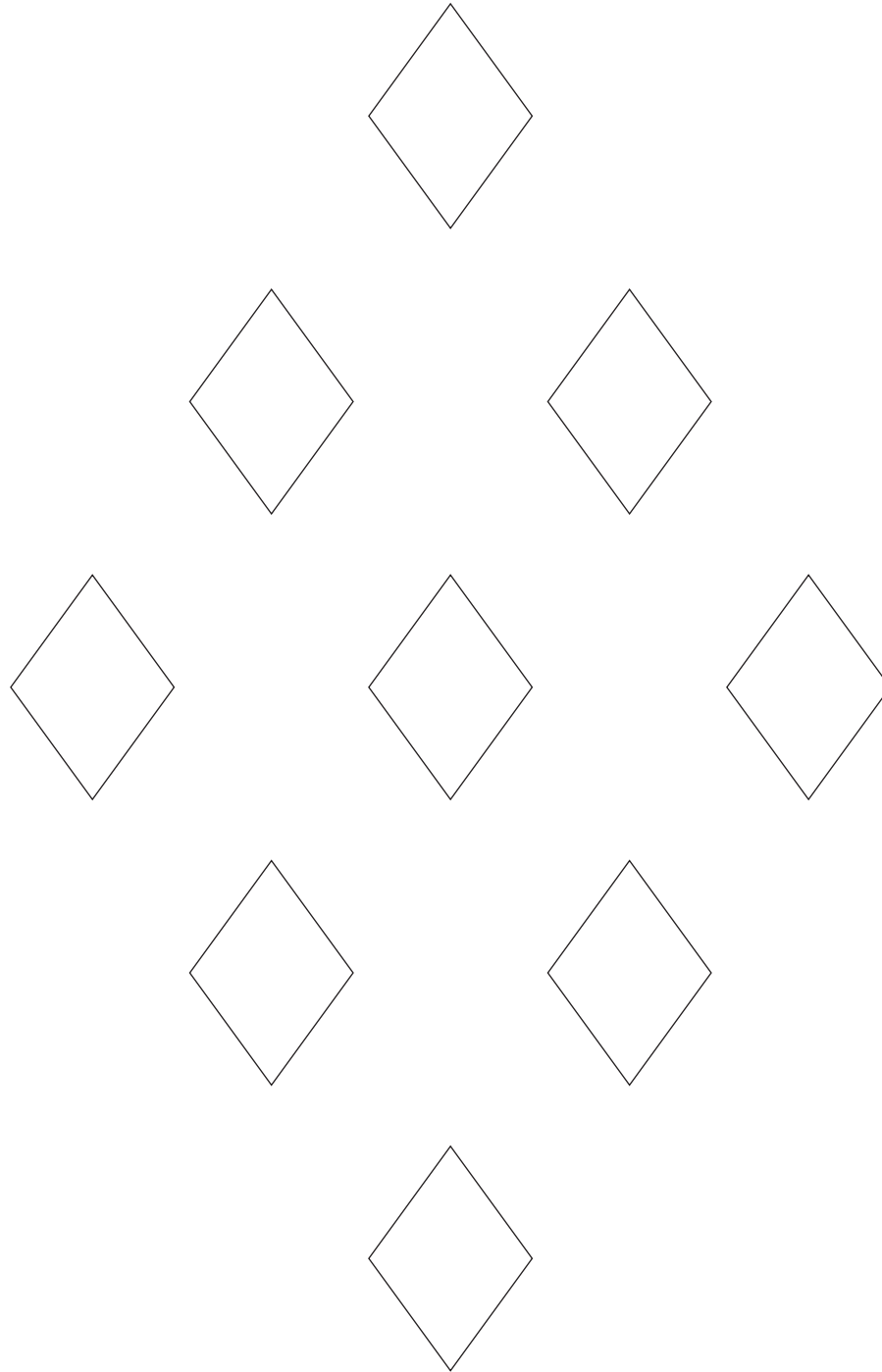


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**Table 2.3**    Personal profile for multi-agency practitioners

| |
|---|
| Your name: _____ <br><br> Job title: _____ <br><br> Contact details: _____ |
| Briefly outline your role: <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • |
| What have been your main successes and achievements in working with children in the educational setting? <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • <br><br> • |
| What has been the most significant contribution you have made to multi-agency partnership working in the educational setting? <br><br><br><br><br> |
| What **three** things would help to improve your work with children and young people in the educational setting? <br><br> 1. <br><br> 2. <br><br> 3. |
| What aspects of multi-agency partnership working do you wish to improve or know more about, and receive inter-professional training on? <br><br><br><br><br> |

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young people and their families, and these stakeholders are actively engaged in identifying and informing services to meet local needs.

- The creation of five change teams that work on each of the five ECM outcomes, or on each of the five extended school core offer areas, that is, wrap-around child-care, a varied menu of activities, parenting support, swift and easy referral to a range of specialist support services, and providing wider community access to ICT, sports and arts facilities, including adult learning. These change teams include representatives from local stakeholders, for example, parents, children and young people, governors, school staff and practitioners from external agencies.

- Proactive parental and community representatives and pre-existing networks, for example, community development group, visible school head in the community, parent ambassadors, family liaison support workers all aiming to make a difference in the locality overall.

- School staff and multi-agency practitioners better informed about the requirements and opportunities that ECM/ES bring.

- Positive, optimistic and innovative leadership which has a vision of the possible; a belief in the whole child, parent and community centred approach to lifelong learning; willing to take risks; taking the wider outward looking community view, and understanding the local political context.

- Promoting relationship building and a team approach through distributed leadership and effective delegation to facilitate the more effective partnership working, which is supported by appropriate training and ongoing professional development.

- ECM and ES are integral to the learning process and pupil entitlement, viewed as central to everything that the educational setting does, and not perceived as a 'bolt-on' extra.

- Finding 'win-win' situations, where it is clear how the educational setting can enable multi-agencies to achieve their aims and, more importantly, to enable the educational setting in partnership with multi-agency practitioners to help each other to achieve the ECM aims.

- Providing sufficient quality protected 'time out' for practitioners from the different agencies, and key staff in the educational setting to meet up, get to know each other, work together as a group and access inter-professional training.

- Developing the skills of active listening, negotiation and compromise among multi-agency practitioners and staff within the educational setting.

- Appointing a multi-agency co-ordinator within the educational setting, or an ECM manager/director

- Developing clear inter-agency protocols for shared working and inter-agency service-level partnership delivery agreements.

- The existence of a strong genuine will and desire of practitioners from a range

of services truly wanting to be involved in multi-agency partnership working, rather than being directed and compelled to engage in such activity.

- Producing a multi-agency directory for the educational setting, parents, carers, pupils and other stakeholders, which outlines different practitioners roles, provides contact details, times of availability, and the location of the service or personnel.

- Holding multi-agency days in the educational setting, which enables members of the community, as well as other stakeholders to find out what support and services are offered to pupils and the wider community.

- Inviting multi-agency practitioners to parents' evenings, staff meetings and in-service education and training (INSET) days, in order to promote and publicize their achievements and services in working directly with children and young people in the educational setting.

## The stages in the development of a multi-agency team

Bruce Tuckman's (1965) theory of team development and behaviour is helpful in assisting multi-agency practitioners to understand the four stages they work through, in order to become an effective team.

1. **Forming**: (clarifying roles and establishing relationships). Multi-agency team members:

   - will be introducing themselves and getting to know each other

   - will be trying to establish their individual identities

   - will be discussing the team's purpose

   - will be exploring the scope of the task

   - may be avoiding serious topics and feelings.

2. **Storming**: (resolving any tensions and disputes). This stage may involve:

   - multi-agency team members competing with one another

   - conflicting interests between team members arising, as the group becomes more focused on tasks

   - bending ideas, attitudes and beliefs to suit the team organization

   - questioning about who is responsible for what

   - discussing the multi-agency team's structure

   - conflicting views about structure, leadership, power and authority.

3.  **Norming**: (starting to build the team identity). At this stage there will be:

- more cohesive multi-agency team relations

- a higher level of trust between multi-agency team members

- a greater focus on tasks

- accepted leadership of the multi-agency team

- a creative flow of information to inform the tasks.

4.  **Performing**: (the multi-agency team has a shared vision, and it knows clearly what it is doing and achieves its goals). At this stage:

- multi-agency team members show a high level of dependence on one another

- there are deeper relationships between people

- the multi-agency team becomes good at problem-solving and there is more experimentation

- individual team members become more self-confident

- the multi-agency team is at its most productive

- team members review what they are doing (adapted from ContinYou, 2005b: 75).

## Points to remember

- Educational settings cannot improve the wider ECM well-being of children and young people alone.
- Working in partnership with fron-tline multi-agency practitioners enables educational settings to focus on their core role of teaching and learning.
- Collaborative multi-agency partnership working promotes the sharing of skills, knowledge, expertise and ideas between practitioners.
- Every Child Matters is the 'gel' that holds partnership working together.

## Further activities

The following questions, based on aspects covered in this chapter, are designed to enable staff from within the educational setting, in partnership with front-line practitioners from multi-agencies, working directly with pupils, to discuss and identify the benefits and challenges of collaborative partnership working in the context of the setting, and agree on positive ways forward to overcome any potential challenges.

- How is the educational setting you work in responding to, and being affected by, the implementation of Every Child Matters?

- What are the implications of Every Child Matters for the multi-agency frontline practitioners working with pupils in the educational setting?

**Table 2.4**   External service/agency information sheet

| Name of organisation: | |
|---|---|
| Profile: | |
| Address: | |

| Contact details: |
|---|
| Person: |
| Telephone:                              Fax: |
| Email:                              Website: |

| Opening/contact times: | |
|---|---|

| Services offered: |
|---|

| One-to-one support | | Practical support | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group support | | Advice/information | |
| Outreach | | Other | |
| Interpretation | | Gender/ethnic specific | |

| Referral procedures: |
|---|

| Other information: |
|---|

*Sources*: CEDC/ContinYou, 2003

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1.   Do we share the same values and aspirations?

☐   There is a common vision that is set down and interpreted in similar ways between stakeholders.

☐   The full range of stakeholders have been involved through effective planning processes in developing the vision.

2.   Do we have agreed priorities for significant policy and service shifts?

☐   There is a common interpretation of where and how services are currently succeeding and/or failing to meet children and young people's needs and wishes.

☐   There is agreement over the significant service changes that the partnership is designed to help achieve.

☐   The necessary links are in place with other planning processes to ensure policy and service changes are linked to the mainstream.

☐   Outcome criteria have been established to show whether changes have led to positive outcomes for children and young people.

3.   Is there a willingness to explore new service options?

☐   Partners are willing to open up all aspects of service and practice to scrutiny through best value and user-led reviews.

☐   There is a culture of innovation and positive risk-taking in terms of service planning and design.

4.   Is there agreement about the boundaries of the partnership?

☐   Resources are aligned with administrative and/or geographical boundaries in order that they can be shared flexibly.

☐   Boundaries with other services are agreed and clear.

5.   Are we clear and comfortable with who will be responsible for what within the team partnership.

☐   It is clear where commissioning responsibility rests.

☐   There is a common definition and understanding of commissioning.

☐   There is a shared understanding of the nature of person-centred planning, care management and assessment, and of who is responsible for which aspects.

☐   The nature of the relationship between commissioners and providers of services is mutually acceptable.

☐   The role of service users in decision-making is clear and acceptable to all.

6.   Is there confidence that each party's resource commitment is clear and open?

☐   Each party is confident and accepts that the resources committed to the partnership fully reflect the partners' contributions in reality.

☐   Any disagreements about past financial issues have been put behind you.

☐   Financial systems are robust enough to monitor and track resource commitments.

7.   Is there effective, committed leadership to the partnership vision?

☐   Key senior players understand the issues and implications around partnership and are committed to its development.

☐   Senior officers are able and willing to make the time and space to build partnership working into their organisational agendas.

☐   Key practitioners are committed to a multi-professional way of working.

8.   Are there people with time and capacity to take forward the partnership agenda?

☐   One or more individuals have been given a clear brief to lead on partnership development.

☐   Partnership is an integral part of everyone's work and job description.

9.   Is there trust, openness and good will between key players?

☐   Key players at all levels in the organization are able and willing to work together constructively.

☐   There are strategies in place for managing and addressing difficult relationships.

☐   Time and opportunity is being built into working practices to allow people to get to know and understand each other's agendas.

(DH 2002: 17–9)

**Figure 2.4**    Checklist for building the multi-agency team

- What does each key practitioner from within the educational setting, in addition to those from multi-agencies, bring to the collaborative partnership, that enhances the learning and well being outcomes of pupils?

- What benefit does each frontline multi-agency practitioner hope to achieve from working with the educational setting?

- How have you made clear the benefits that collaborative multi-agency partnership working brings, to the different stakeholders?

- What do front-line multi-agency practitioners expect from the others they collaboratively work with, in the educational setting?

- What are the views of pupils, and their parents/carers about the benefits and challenges that multi-agency service provision brings to them, and the educational setting?

- Are there any dangers to increased multi-agency partnership working? If so, what are these?

- What are the main barriers and challenges partners face in multi-agency working within the educational setting?

- What joint solution focused approaches are you taking in order to remove, and/or significantly reduce these barriers and challenges?

## Further information

The following websites have downloadable resources which can help to support the aspects covered in this chapter.

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/annual-survey-of-trends.cfm   'NFER' (2006) *How Is the Every Child Matters Agenda Affecting Schools? Annual Survey of Trends in Education.*

www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/annual-survey-of-trends-2007/ecmcollaborationprinted.pdf 'NFER'*How Is the Every Child Matters Agenda Affecting Schools? Annual Survey of Trends in Education.*

www.gtce.org.uk/publications/pub_policy/everychildmatters/?sort=dateDESC   *GTC document entitled, HM Government: Children's Workforce Strategy*

*Update – Spring 2007. Building a World-Class Workforce for Children, Young People and Families.*

http://lmscontent.ncsl.org.uk/ECM/   *NCSL/TDA report entitled, Understanding the Reasons Why Schools Do or Do Not Fully Engage with the ECM/ES Agenda.*

Do not forget to also visit the Sage website for downloadable resources to use with this chapter.