**Abstract for oral presentation**

**Title of paper:** Outcomes, indicators and professional work in integrated children’s services

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**Abstract**:

**Conference theme**

The presentation relates to the theme of policies and services that achieve good outcomes for children, namely integrated children’s services.

**Background**

This paper will explore the use of outcomes and indicators in the development of integrated children’s services in the UK. A review of the literature on children’s services shows that the concept of outcomes has been deployed in various ways, from the overarching values of *Every Child Matters* to the more concrete measures used for performance monitoring and quality control. The driving principle has been to refocus services on children’s needs, rather than around organisational or professional boundaries, at the same time as improving standards and accountability.

**Main points**

The focus on outcomes in children’s services provides a conceptual link between ideas of evidence-based practice and of risk management, in order both to ensure positive outcomes and to prevent negative ones. For frontline practitioners, this has resulted in a steady increase in technocratic and managerial controls over their work. New IT-based workflow systems, designed partly to yield statistical indicators for inspecting and monitoring services, have been found to be unduly rigid for supporting professional work. Evaluations of integrated working have been unable to demonstrate through positivist methodologies that such services improve outcomes for children. At the same time, studies of professional work show a more qualitative dimension to outcomes, which are complex and often long-term processes of change viewed from multiple perspectives.

**Conclusion**

It is argued that the tendency to conflate outcomes with measurable indicators is bound up with a procedural approach that fails to capture the complex processes and relationships at the heart of professional work. Managerial and supervisory systems need to be able to deal more reflexively with the demands and limitations of assessment and decision-making in conditions of uncertainty.