

Promoting Ethical Innovation in Social Care (PEISC) Framework

What is the PEISC framework?

The Innovate Project conducted a year long review of innovation in social care. One of its most significant findings was that, despite significant investment and acceleration of innovation activity in recent years, very little attention has been paid to the ethical dimensions of innovating in the sector. In addition, the review found that innovation more closely aligned with professional standards and codes of ethics had features that made achieving successful implementation more likely.

In order to promote ethical innovation in social care we have produced the PEISC framework. The framework is designed to help politicians, policy-makers, innovation designers, commissioners, leaders and managers in social care who:

- Are considering using innovation, as distinct from practice improvement, in social care as a response to a system issue, a practice challenge, or desire to improve outcomes, and who want to consider the ethics of this decision as they relate to the process, the innovation itself and its outcomes;
- Are at the early stages of designing or developing an innovation and want to consider the ethics of any proposals or design;
- Have decided to innovate or are commissioning an innovation and are deciding between different methods, models and approaches and want to consider ethics in the decision making process;
- Want a strategic level understanding of the ethics of innovation in social care; and/or
- Are currently innovating but would like to include discussion of the ethics of innovation in future review, learning or planning processes.

Using the framework

We suggest creating space and time for you and/or your team to reflect on the framework's questions when considering new innovation or reviewing innovation in progress. Questions are set out under three domains:

- the innovation process;
- the new service or approach; and
- the outcomes and impact that are produced.

The first section of the framework covers overarching issues and the following sections focus specifically on the principles of human rights, social justice and professional integrity.

A full account and discussion of why consideration of ethics is necessary is set out in the article '*Towards a framework for ethical innovation in children's social care*', which can be read in full here: <https://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/98712/>

Overarching ethical questions to ask of innovation in social care

The innovation

(the new model, service, practice, etc.)

Does the new model, service or practice adhere to and support the ethical principles of social work?

This includes at the levels of:

- The purpose of the innovation (i.e. what it sets out to achieve).
- Practice models and ways of working.
- Partnerships and collaborations (multi-disciplinary, multi-agency and/or cross-sector).
- The ways in which the innovation is funded, commissioned and resourced.
- The roles, training and development of practitioners and other workers.
- The use of technology and data.
- Learning and evaluation activity.

The innovation process

(developing, integrating and growing an innovation)

Does every stage of the innovation process adhere to and support the ethical principles of social work?

This includes at the stages of:

1. Prompting: insight is gathered to understand possibilities for change.
2. Designing: innovation is developed, designed or adapted according to need and context.
3. Testing: innovation is implemented, tested and improved to assess feasibility.
4. Embedding: innovation is delivered, implemented and made sustainable over time.
5. Growing: innovation is spread, scaled and diffused, locally and nationally.
6. System change: the innovation transforms, restructures and prompts the wider system into new forms.

The changes, impact and outcomes that result

Do the changes, consequences and outcomes of the innovation adhere to and support the ethical principles of social work?

This includes with respect to:

- Short-, medium- and long-term outcomes for children, young people, families and adults.
- Outcomes for social work practitioners and the wider social care workforce.
- Changes in assumptions about risk, power and relationships.
- Local and national cost savings.
- Changes in underpinning structures and processes.
- Changes in the overarching paradigms, cultures and assumptions within which the system operates.
- Influence on national policy, legislation or regulation.

#1 Principles of human rights

● Upholding and promoting human dignity and wellbeing

● Respecting the right to self-determination

● Promoting the right to participation

● Treating each person as a whole

● Identifying and developing strengths

The innovation

(the new model, service, practice, etc.)

Does the innovation comprise practices and processes that respect the inherent worth and dignity of all of those involved with services, including children and young people?

Specific considerations might include:

- Equality of provision: will the innovation be available to all who need it? Are there constraints around e.g. funding that might limit reach?
- To what extent does the innovation promote and support strengths-based, holistic and relationship-centred practice?
- How are partnerships fostered to ensure adult service users, young people, children, carers and families are given a voice in all services with which they interact?
- Will technology and data be used in ways that maintain principles of confidentiality and consent?
- Does the innovation encourage and support adult service users, young people, children, carers and families to exercise self-determination?

The innovation process

(developing, integrating and growing an innovation)

Does the innovation process - from beginning to end - respect the inherent worth and dignity of child and adult service users, families, carers and practitioners?

Specific considerations might include:

- Has informed consent been given by child and adult service users to be part of an innovation process? This may be particularly important when involving children or vulnerable adults, or when a family's, child's or adult's involvement in the social care system is not voluntary.
- Is there a commitment to genuine participation, with the use of participatory approaches (e.g. co-production, co-design) to ensure that adults, young people, children, carers and families are actively involved in the innovation process?
- Have participation processes been designed in ways that are clear about roles, rights and procedures, with a commitment to the work being shaped by their insights even if this makes for uncomfortable challenge and requires changes to the process or resulting innovation?
- Can it be ensured that the process does not risk re-traumatising adult service users, young people or children? This may require applying, for example, a trauma-informed lens at each stage of work.
- Will the methods used during the process reflect and promote best social work practice, e.g. strengths-based, holistic and relationship-centred?

The changes, impact and outcomes that result

Do the innovation and the innovation process result in changes, outcomes and consequences that respect the inherent worth and dignity of service users, including children and young people?

Specific considerations might include:

- Do the changes, outcomes and consequences of the innovation build on the strengths of all those involved, including children and young people?
- Have the measures of success been defined alongside people receiving services, including children and young people?
- Do these measures place any unnecessary burden on the people and families involved, or require them to share stories or information that they may not wish to disclose?
- Has an impact or risk assessment been completed for the next 1-5 years, to take into account potential changes in local context, funding or workforce that may affect the outcomes of the innovation in the short- and medium-term?

#2 Principles of social justice

● Challenging discrimination

● Recognising diversity

● Distributing resources

● Challenging unjust policies and practices

● Working in solidarity

The innovation

(the new model, service, practice, etc.)

Does the innovation comprise practices and processes that promote social justice, both in relation to those who are directly affected by the innovation and to the community or society more widely?

Specific considerations might include:

- How might conditionality or access thresholds change power dynamics and prevent equality of access to provision?
- Has the innovation been designed or adapted to take account of local context and need?
- Does the innovation take into account equalities, diversity and inclusion to adequately provide for the complexity of people's and families' lives?
- Have a variety of innovative models (services, practice, etc) been assessed to understand which is best suited to meet the needs of local people, families or specific cohorts?
- Can the innovation accurately identify those at risk or in need, so that resources are allocated to where they will have most impact?
- What resources might the innovation require and what are the possible consequences of this to other parts of the service, organisation or system?
- Is the innovation likely to be sustainable in the long-term? If not, how will relationships with adult service users, young people, children, carers and families be transferred or closed?
- Does the innovation uphold or disrupt existing system structures that may perpetuate social inequality, poverty or discrimination?
- If the local context or environment changes, how will the delivery of the innovation adapt to take this into account? (e.g. changing cohorts, new financial pressures, inspection frameworks/processes.)

The innovation process

(developing, integrating and growing an innovation)

Does the innovation process - from beginning to end - promote social justice, both in relation to those who are directly affected by the innovation and to the community or society more widely?

Specific considerations might include:

- Is there an appropriate range of service users, including children and young people, involved in the innovation process?
- Has the process accurately identified those at risk or in need, and the ways in which innovation can plausibly improve outcomes?
- What resources are required for each stage of the process, and what are the potential trade-offs involved in allocating resources in this way?
- How representative are the groups involved in evaluative research (e.g. trials, RCTs)?
- How might innovation practices such as co-production, ethnographic research or co-design need to be adapted and informed by work with different cohorts of vulnerable adult service users, children or young people?
- Has enough time and resource been built into the process for piloting, testing, refining and collecting/analysing results?

The changes, impact and outcomes that result

Do the innovation and the innovation process result in changes, outcomes and consequences that promote social justice, both in relation to those who are directly affected by the innovation and to the community or society more widely?

Specific considerations might include:

- Is there good reason to believe that the model will improve outcomes? Is there compelling evidence of the model's effectiveness?
- Is the model likely to cause unintended consequences or adverse knock-on effects, for example on other areas of provision, services, resources and budgets, workforce wellbeing or family-practitioner relationships?
- Are there objections to or concerns about the innovation or process? If so, have these been fully discussed alongside families, communities and practitioners, and adjustments or mitigations made accordingly?
- How will outcomes be measured and communicated in ways that are relational, co-productive and strengths-based?
- What responsibilities does the organisation or service have to support and share learning with other organisations working in social care?
- Will evidence and learning contribute to the common understanding and development of new practices or services?
- What responsibilities does the organisation have to speak truth to power, in advising national bodies where innovation is not meeting intended outcomes, producing negative outcomes, or exposing problems in existing systems?

#3 Principles of professional integrity

● Upholding the values and reputation of the profession

● Being trustworthy

● Maintaining professional boundaries

● Making considered professional judgements

● Being professionally accountable

The innovation

(the new model, service, practice, etc.)

Does the innovation comprise practices and processes that support practitioners to respect and uphold the values and principles of social work?

Specific considerations might include:

- How might the innovation change practitioners' roles? Are there ethical considerations around making significant changes to roles and responsibilities?
- How might multi-agency working be structured and supported so that it fosters collaboration rather than competition?
- Does the innovation draw on robust evidence of effectiveness?
- Does the innovation recognise and support practitioners to build consistent, trusting relationships?
- How will practitioners and other staff be recruited, trained, supervised and developed?
- Is the innovation genuinely deliverable (i.e. are people being set up to fail)?
- How might practitioners be required to adjust their professional identities?
- How will quality be assured?

The innovation process

(developing, integrating and growing an innovation)

Does the innovation process - from beginning to end - support practitioners to respect and uphold the values and principles of social work?

Specific considerations might include:

- How ready and prepared is the workforce to undertake innovation - and what might need to be in place to best support them to do so?
- Is the process drawing on additional expertise and relevant evidence?
- What is the existing level of understanding of the workforce on the aims and processes of innovation?
- How might the culture of the organisation or service be affected?
- Are there likely to be any knock-on effects to the rest of the team, service or organisation?
- Does the process require changing long-standing rules or procedures in a way that might affect the ability of practitioners to make professional judgements?
- Are leaders 'modelling the model', relating to staff in a strengths-based way and working in partnership?
- How will accountability be ensured throughout?

The changes, impact and outcomes that result

Do the innovation and the innovation process result in changes, outcomes and consequences that support practitioners to respect and uphold the values and principles of social work?

Specific considerations might include:

- How will learning or evaluation activity assess the impact of the new model?
- How will the performance of practitioners be assessed, in ways that are relational, co-productive and strengths-based?
- What protocols and structures are in place to ensure that practitioners can raise concerns about negative consequences of the innovation?
- How will data be shared across the workforce and between collaborating organisations?
- Are evaluation metrics and plans realistic and appropriate, avoiding placing additional burdens or pressure to demonstrate success rather than share learning?