

The theme of the 2007 Interdisciplinary Conference held between the 28th and 30th September 2007 at Dartington Hall in Devon was “Integrating Diversity”. The contributors were drawn from many of the professions involved with the family justice system and the collected papers of the conference will be published by Family Law in March 2008 (www.familylaw.co.uk). The resolutions adopted by the conference are set out below.

Neither Blind to Culture nor Blinded by Culture

1. This Conference adopts the proposition that there are no homogeneous cultures. We must understand culture in context as it is not monolithic or static but variable and dynamic. The Conference recommends that in dealing with individual cases all professionals involved in Family Justice do receive appropriate training to enable them to elicit culturally related information that is relevant.
2. This Conference believes that if the Family Justice System is to improve its approach to diversity more time is needed to prepare and investigate individual cases. This Conference fears that this may not be possible given the imminent public funding changes.
3. This Conference advocates that families must be able to access culturally sensitive support and services to prevent court intervention.
4. This Conference seeks a review of policy to enable every child to have access to care, education and medical services regardless of immigration status.

5. The expectation of this Conference is that Independent Reviewing Officers will fulfil their duty to ensure the welfare of children regardless of immigration status.
6. This Conference strongly recommends review of current practices of deportation and incarceration of children and young adults who do not have the automatic right to remain in this country.
7. This Conference believes that children who are born as a result of egg or sperm donation are entitled to information about their genetic identity but the provision of this information should not automatically give rise to any parental entitlement to the donor.
 - A. This Conference invites a re-examination of the concept and definition of Parental Responsibility to reflect diverse and complex family relationships.
8. This Conference recommends that there be an amendment of the welfare checklist so that s1(3)(d) of the Children Act 1989 reads “his age, sex, background, including his **racial, religious, cultural and linguistic background** and any other characteristic of his, which the court considers relevant”

The Conference notes that making changes to primary legislation is a lengthy process and therefore recommends that, as an interim measure, a practice direction should be issued, the purpose of which would be to indicate that the wording highlighted above is already implicit within the existing legislation and that consideration of those matters to which it refers would be appropriate and proper, notwithstanding that the wording is not yet explicitly contained within primary legislation.

9. This Conference recommends that in cases where parental learning disability is a significant factor, save in exceptional circumstances, the local authority should only bring cases before the Court where, having complied with their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, the children's needs have nevertheless not been met.

A. This Conference advocates as good practice the nationwide use of a model akin to the Cornish Special Parenting Service.

B. This Conference recognises that there needs to be more uniform awareness of the Good Practice Guidance on Working with Parents with a Learning Disability (2007) and the work of the Disability Rights Commission. It recommends to the Judicial Studies Board and CAFCASS in England and Wales that it should form part of the basic training for all levels of judiciary and for Children's Guardians doing public law work to ensure the provisions of the Guidance upon local authorities are complied with when cases involving learning disabled parents are litigated.

10. This Conference highlights the need for good quality interpreters and agrees that the current mixed quality of the interpreters available to the Courts and professionals is a cause for concern. We encourage long term investment in training and accreditation of interpreters to achieve high professional standards and a uniform good service throughout the country.

11. This Conference recommends that all experts, including paediatricians, should address relevant issues of diversity in their assessments and reports.

12. . This conference believes that physical abuse as a form of discipline of children is unacceptable and transcends class, race, cultures and religion.

13. This Conference recommends the wider dissemination of discussions arising from Dartington Conferences to ensure the spread of the valuable information. For example by way of regular articles in practitioners' publications such as Family Affairs, Family Law, Resolution Review, etc.

14. This Conference recommends that there be improved training and support for alternative carers, including family members to enhance the child's sense of belonging and identity.

15. This Conference requests that research be commissioned for the purpose of ascertaining the accurate demography of children, in particular minority ethnic children, in the Family Justice System and Looked After children system across England and Wales.