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[Blog article](#) by Chris Jenkins, Senior Policy Officer, Equality Commission NI

Equality and The Children's Services Co-operation Act

We need leadership and collaboration to advance equality, in particular for children and young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Collaboration between public bodies is essential in delivering effective services for children with complex needs.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act

[The Children's Services Co-Operation Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#) is a piece of legislation designed to promote collaboration. It aims to improve co-operation across public bodies and places a duty on Children's Authorities to co-operate to improve the wellbeing of children and young people. It also enables the sharing of resources and finances to deliver effective services.

Co-operation and sharing must improve

Recently the Department of Education published the [First Report on the operation of the Children's Services Co-operation Act](#). It highlighted a number of areas in which cooperation and collaboration must be improved, for example, better data sharing, and better engagement with young people.

The Report also concluded that examples of sharing resources and funds has been limited and that there "is a need to explore how commissioning and funding arrangements could better support this".

Maximising the potential of the Act

Given the potential of the Act to improve outcomes for children and young people, ensure more efficient and effective use of resources, and address longstanding inequalities, The Department of Finance should consider creating guidance on how the Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 may be used in practice. This will provide officials with clear information on how resources may be shared and pooled between different Departments. To date, while the Department has highlighted relevant existing guidelines, development of specific advice has not occurred.

Such advice, processes, and guidance would support genuine and deep collaboration, use resources more effectively, and improve outcomes for children and young people in all contexts and for children and young people with SEN.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act is a key piece of legislation to enable change, but to date has not been used to its full potential.