Pitfalls and challenges: Considerations for successful policy implementation and transfer

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Overview

- Policy Implementation
- Why 'perfect implementation' is unattainable
- Policy Transfer- Challenges
- Big Brother, Big Sister as a policy transfer exercise

Policy Life Cycle
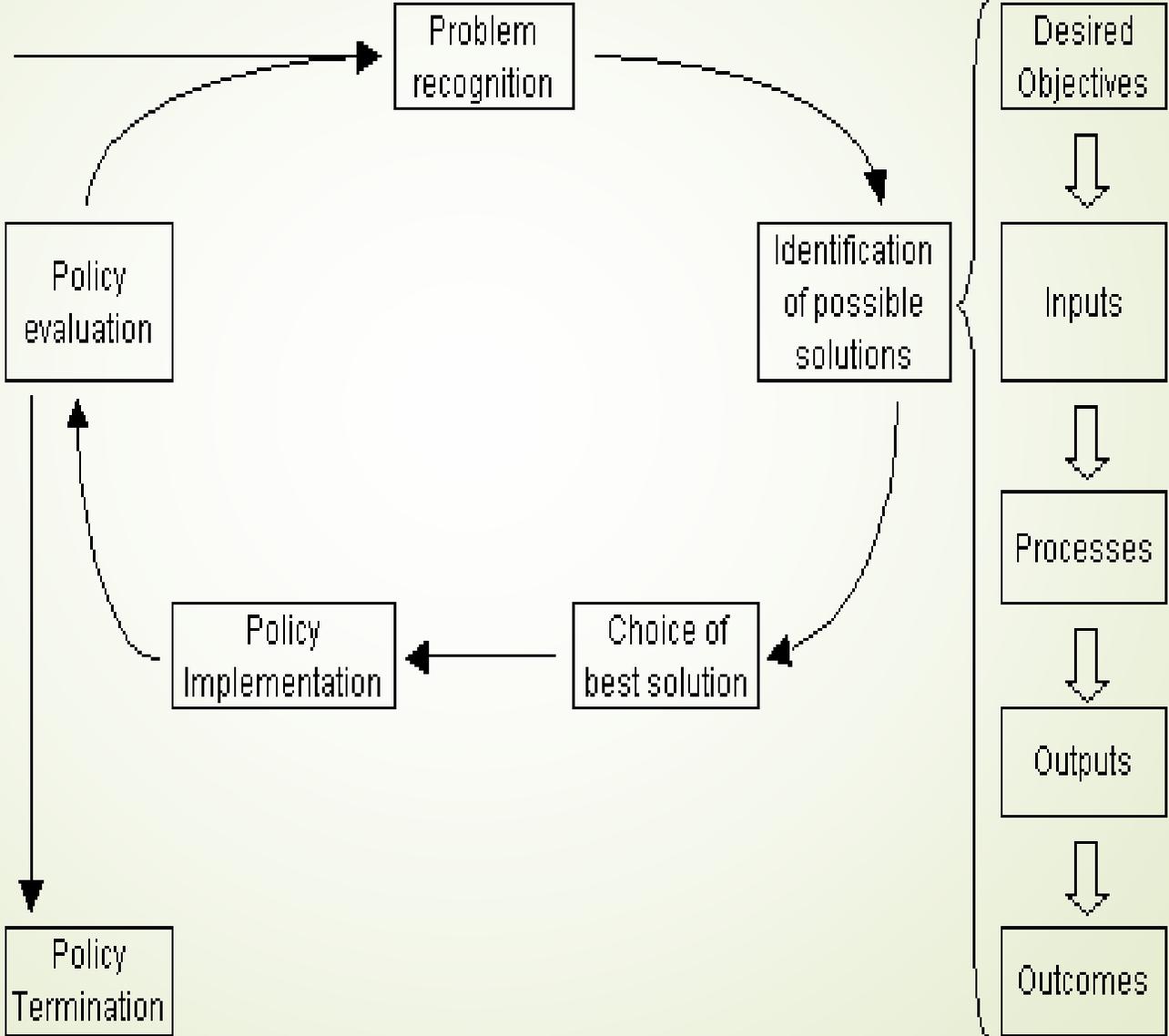
Policy Implementation

- Mundane & taken for granted

- Gunn (1978) "academics have often seemed obsessed with policy formulation while leaving the 'practical details' of policy implementation to administrators".

- Implementation must involve a process of interaction between organisations, the members of which may have different values, perspectives and priorities from one another and from those advocating the policy.

- Implementation is messy,

Policy Implementation

- "Implementation to us, means just what (dictionary definition) … say it does: to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, produce, complete. But what is being implemented? A policy, naturally. There must be something out there prior to implementation; otherwise there would be nothing to move towards in the process of implementation. A verb like 'implement' must have an object like 'policy'. But policies normally contain both goals and the means for achieving them. How then do we distinguish between a policy and its implementation?" (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984).

Policy Implementation

- "We can work neither with a definition of policy that excludes any implementation nor one that includes all implementation. There must be a starting point. If no action is begun, implementation cannot take place. There must also be an end point. Implementation cannot succeed or fail without a goal against which to judge it"

- Process of putting policy into action

- The ways in which policy transmission occurs, or fails to occur through multi-government systems

Health Warning

- By considering 'policy implementation' as a stand alone process in the life cycle of the policy process.

- There is a need to be sceptical about distinguishing those policy actors who are the decision-makers that 'formulate policy' and others the 'policy implementers' who carry out the policies of their 'masters'.

- This distinction enables a situation in which the decision-makers may seek to blame the 'implementers' when the implementation of the policy does not correspond with original expectations.
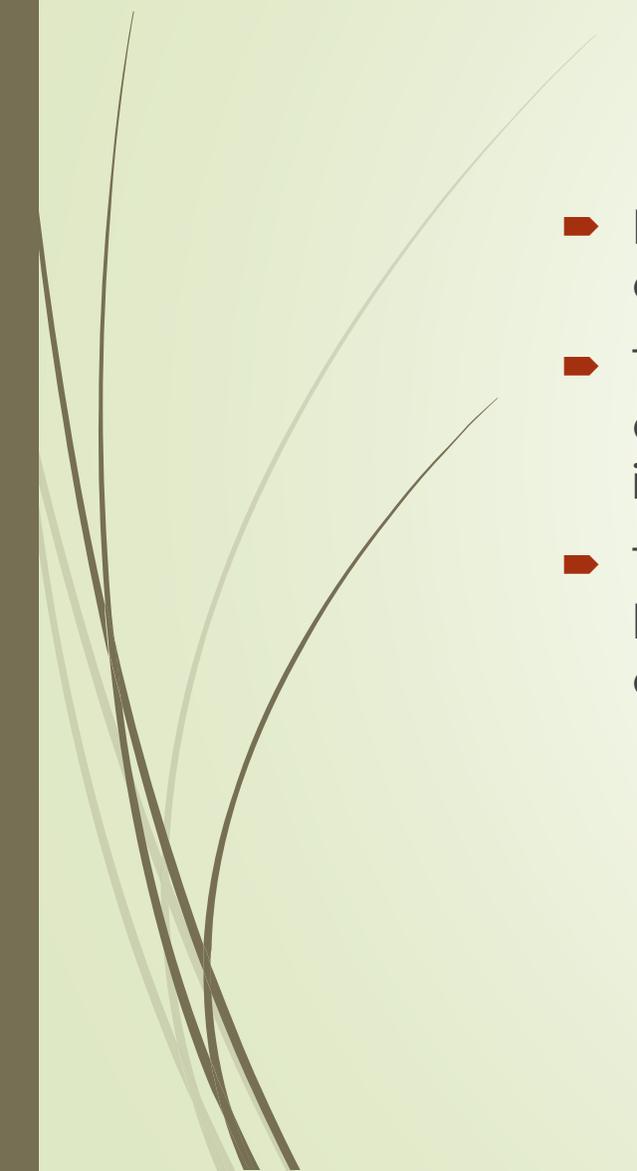
Why 'perfect implementation' is unattainable (Hogwood & Gunn, 1984)

- ***The circumstances external to the implementing agency do not impose crippling constraints***

- Obstacles outside the control of administrators because they are external to the policy & the implementing agency.

- Physical – impact of Foot & Mouth Disease on an agricultural policy

- Political – the policy is unacceptable to vested interests e.g. reforming the Junior Cert

- Little implementers can do to overcome other than considering such possibilities in the policy formulation stage

That adequate time & sufficient resources are made available to the programme.

- Too much is expected too soon

- Politicians sometimes will the policy 'end' but not the 'means', so that expenditure restrictions can stave a programme of resources

- Special funds are made available but have to be spent with an unreasonable timeframe

- Implementers need to advise politicians about realistic lead times, plan annual cash flow and anticipate any blockages in converting cash into real resources.

That the required combination of resources it actually available

- At each stage in the implementation process the appropriate combination of resources must actually be available

- Bottlenecks – dearth of skilled workers, delay of planning permission in housing

- Administrative staff need to anticipate potential bottlenecks and take appropriate action in terms of generating or redistributing resources within the programme.

- Network planning & control

That the policy to be implemented is based on a valid theory of cause & effect.

- Bad policy – based upon an inadequate understanding of a problem to be solved, its causes and cure; or if an opportunity, its nature and what needs to exploit it.

- Pressman & Wildavsky – policy as a 'hypothesis containing initial conditions and predicted consequences. That is the typical reasoning of the policymakers is along the lines of 'if X is done at time t(1) then Y will result at time t(2)'.

- Cause and effect – if the policy fails, it may be the underlying theory that is at fault rather than implementation.

- Can only be tackled by better analysis at the issue definition & policy option stages of the policy making process.

That the relationship between cause & effect is direct & that there are few, if any, intervening links.

- Policies which depend upon a long sequence of cause & effect relationships have a particular tendency to breakdown, since the longer the chain of causality, the more numerous the reciprocal relationships among the links and the more complex the implementation becomes.

- E.g. Lone Parents are living in poverty the solution is Labour Market Activation policy which will result in a decrease in child poverty.

- Let us consider the long sequence of cause & effect in that policy solution.

That dependency relationships are minimal

- This condition of 'perfect implementation' requires that there is a single implementing agency which need not depend on other agencies for success, or if other agencies must be involved, that the dependency relationships are minimal in number and importance.

- Relatively rare phenomena

That there is an understanding of, and agreement on, objectives

- Complete understanding of, and agreement on, the objectives to be achieved, and that these conditions should persist throughout the implementation process.

- Objectives often difficult to identify or are couched in woolly, vague and evasive terms.

- Often poorly understood.

- Goals are susceptible to succession, multiplication, expansion & displacement.

That tasks are fully specified in correct sequence

- In moving towards agreed objectives it is possible to specify, in complete detail and perfect sequence, the tasks to be performed by each participant.

- Desirable as well as inevitable that there be room for discretion & improvisation in the most carefully planned programme.

- Network planning & control can provide a framework in which projects can be planned and implementation controlled, by identifying the tasks to be accomplished, the relationships between these tasks & the logical sequence.

- Programme management.

That there is perfect communication & co-ordination

- All but impossible within and among organisations which are characterised by departmentalism, professionalism and the activities of many groups with their own values, goals and interests to protect.

- Co-ordination is not simply a matter of communicating information or setting up suitable administrative structures but involves the exercise of power, and leads to the final condition for perfect implementation.

That those in authority can demand & obtain perfect compliance.

- The least attainable condition is that those 'in authority' are also those 'in power' & that they are able to secure total & immediate compliance from others (internal & external to the agency) whose consent and co-operation are required for the success of the programme.

- Change – high probability of suspicion, recalcitrance or outright resistance from those affected, especially if insufficient time has been allowed for explanation & consultation or if any previous experience of change has been negative.

- This will always be present but we can learn how to respond to it.

Policy Transfer

- As Rose (1991) identifies, policy transfer results as governments search for remedies to problems.

- Remedies may involve appropriating more funds for an existing program, looking at how that nation dealt with a problem in the past, or **searching elsewhere to determine how others have dealt with the problem**

- In particular, **'policy transfer'** and '**lesson-drawing**' is a dynamic whereby knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements or institutions is used across time or space in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions elsewhere

Page and Mark-Lawson (2007: 49)

- The term 'policy transfer' might be somewhat misleading. Like heat transfer, or even the transfer of money from one bank account to another, the word suggests the process is straightforward, if not involuntary. It implies a simple movement of a set of policies from one place to another with no (or limited) change of state, as the policy can be clearly recognized as an import from another jurisdiction ... policy transfer in this sense is rare.

Big Brothers Big Sisters comes to Ireland: A case study in policy transfer Brady & Curtin (2012)

- The question arises as to how such models are accepted and become embedded in countries with differing cultures and where formal mentoring programmes have not been a feature of the policy landscape.

- There has been little acknowledgement in the mentoring literature that transferring a proven intervention such as Big Brothers Big Sisters from one culture to another is not a simple 'copy and paste' exercise and that there are a range of policy, cultural and implementation issues that can affect whether or not the intervention will 'work' and if the intended outcomes will be realised.

Big Brothers Big Sisters comes to Ireland

- Evans (2009)identifies a series of obstacles that 'imported' models or programmes must overcome if they are to become assimilated into the new policy environment.

- These are *cognitive decisions in the pre-decision phase,* in other words decisions made prior to the policy model being transferred.

These issues include

1. The process by which the policy problem was <u>recognised and defined, the nature of the search for a solution and the receptivity of policy actors to the alternative.</u> According to Evans, the key issues to be overcome at this stage relate to the prevailing organisational culture and the need to ensure that the policy chosen is compatible with existing policy.

These issues include

2.& 3 environmental obstacles, which include the need to ensure effective implementation and the institutional and political constraints that can affect the success of the model. For the purposes of this analysis, these have been separated into policy compatibility and feasibility of implementation.

4. A further variable identified by Evans relates to public opinion, including bureaucratic, political, media and importantly, the attitudes and resources of constituency groups.
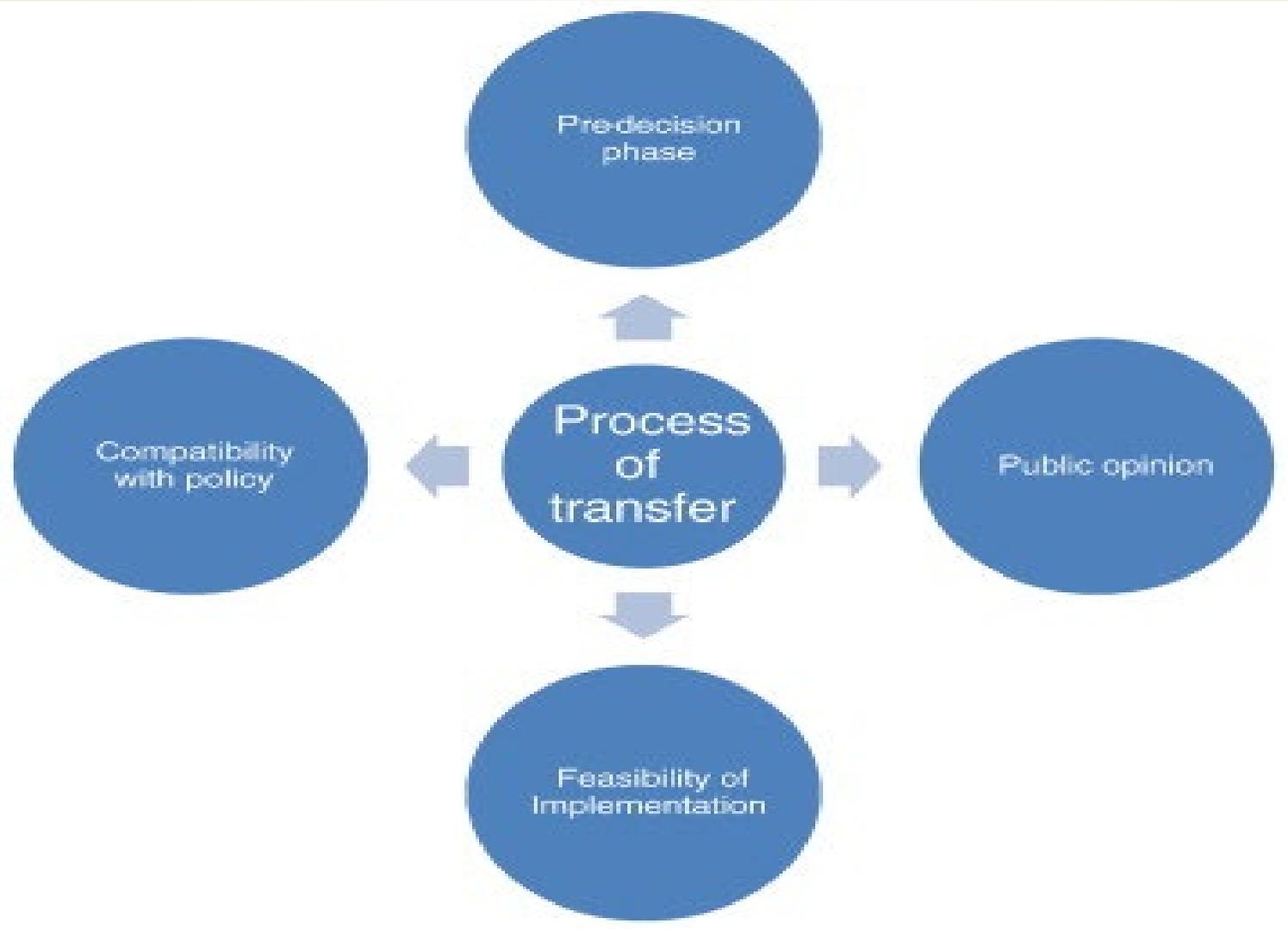
Pre-decision phase

- The introduction of the BBBS mentoring programme to Ireland is clearly a case of policy transfer undertaken by policy entrepreneurs.

- Rose (1991) defines such policy entrepreneurs as those with a special concern for a subject, which leads them to build up a nationwide or international network of contacts that are a source of new ideas for programmes

Pre-decision phase

- In this case, the policy entrepreneurs were the Foróige Regional Manager (now CEO) and Health Service Executive (HSE) Family Support Manager.

- In line with the literature on policy transfer, their motivation for seeking out the new model was a dissatisfaction or problem with the status quo, namely a need for a model of individual work with young people to complement Foróige's group work with disadvantaged young people in the West of Ireland

Pre-decision phase

- The BBBS model was chosen on the basis that it was a proven model, reflecting the view of Rose (1991) that in searching for an effective programme, policy actors prefer the assurance of something that has worked before, or been effective elsewhere.

- The approach taken by Foróige was one of emulation, whereby the core BBBS model, including policies and procedures, was adopted but the overall implementation was different to the US programme in a number of ways. The manual was written for an Irish context and some minor changes were made to reflect the different cultural context.

Compatibility with policy

- The key policy and legislative developments relating to both child care and youth development in Ireland in recent decades emphasise the need for community based programmes and flexible supports for children and young people.

- The 1991 Child Care Act favours a preventative approach that prioritises child welfare and provides a framework for the provision of services that support families to care for their children.

Compatibility with policy

- Since then, successive policies and acts all emphasise the need for flexible, youth centred, community based interventions to meet the needs of children and young people deemed to be at risk.

Public opinion

- Many Foróige staff members said that they were initially very sceptical regarding the concept of mentoring.

- For them, the idea of an adult being matched with a young person on a one-to-one basis was very different to their understanding of youth work, which involved groups of young people working with one or more adults.

Public opinion

- Foróige staff spoke of how this initial scepticism was overcome when they saw how positively young people responded to the idea, and also from their experience of how positive it has been for young people.

- In seven of the nine matches studied as part of this research, in addition to taking part in the BBBS programme, the family were involved with the community youth services provided by Foróige.

- They appeared to have a trusting relationship with the organisation, which had a positive influence on their attitudes to the BBBS programme, which was introduced to them by Foróige staff.

Public opinion
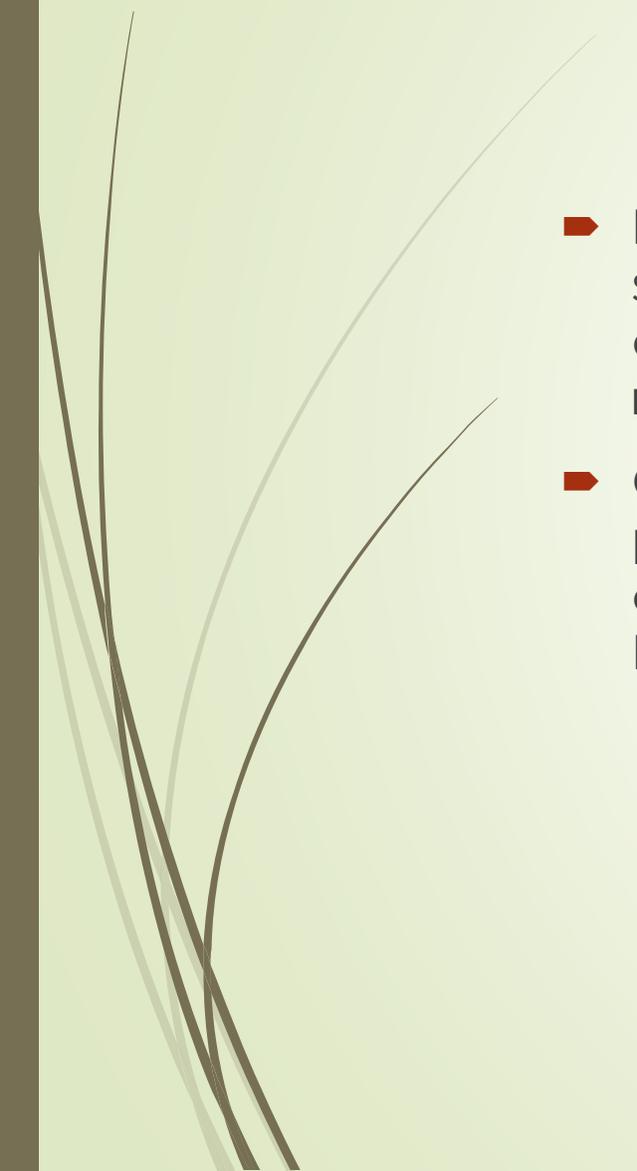
- Furthermore, given the rural nature of the programme in many of the areas studied, parents referred to the fact that they actually knew the mentor and respected him or her, a factor which helped them to overcome any reservations they may have had

- One area in which cultural attitudes provided a challenge to the new programme relates to the difficulties in the recruitment of male volunteers, an issue that was acknowledged to be a factor in the lack of success of the BBBS model in the UK.

Public opinion

- The Irish programme has not had difficulty in recruiting female volunteers but finds it more difficult to recruit male volunteers, with the result that only one male match can be made for every two female matches.

- Interviews with mentors suggest that the culture of fear surrounding child protection concerns and allegations may make male mentors reluctant to volunteer for the programme.

Public opinion

- The BBBS programme has responded to this issue in a number of ways. Firstly, they have developed marketing campaigns tailored to males and encouraged other males to recruit mentors.

- They have targeted male-dominated organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and rugby clubs, have run high profile media campaigns to recruit '30 male mentors in 30 days' and other strategies.

- This appears to have had some success.

Feasibility of implementation

- Miller (2007) identified the lack of integration of the UK model of BBBS with other services as one of the main reasons for its failure.

- This underlines the need for a new intervention to complement existing services, build relationships, encourage referrals and inspire confidence regarding its value.

- The implications of Foróige's decision to offer the BBBS programme through existing youth projects initially was to prove very significant in terms of establishing a foundation for the programme in Ireland.

Feasibility of implementation

- The Foróige staff interviewed also expressed positive views about the BBBS programme. Evidence suggests, therefore, that the decision to integrate the BBBS programme with existing Foróige services was a prudent one.

BBBS Conclusion

- The evidence in this case suggests that the success of the mentoring model may be influenced by whether a need for such a programme has been established, whether the model 'fits' with policy objectives regarding children and young people in the jurisdiction and whether it is likely to be supported by influential policy actors.

- The prevailing culture in relation to child protection and other relevant issues must be considered and strategies developed to ensure that the new model is implemented safely and sensitively

BBBS Conclusion

- Furthermore, this case study also suggests that the cultural issues that are likely to arise from 'importing' a model developed in a country with a strong tradition of formal mentoring to one where such a tradition may not exist must be given due consideration.

- At an operational level, gaining acceptance for the programme from young people, parents and relevant agency personnel is likely to be critical to the success of the programme.

- Finally, the Irish experience points to the importance of ensuring that the mentoring programme is feasible to implement, for example, with a sufficient supply of potential volunteers and a culturally appropriate programme manual.