

Learning across the UK: a review of public health systems and policy approaches to early child development since political devolution

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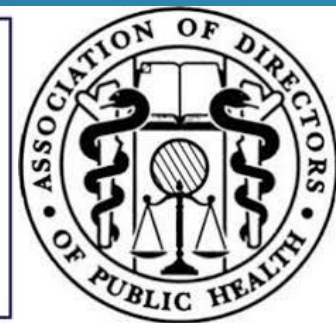
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An introduction to the project

- Part of a wider UK partnership project
- Topic agreed by workshop as relevant to all 4 nations –particularly inequalities
- Giving children the best start in life is critical for their future health and wellbeing
- Political devolution provides a natural experiment to explore how public health systems contribute to children's early developmental outcomes



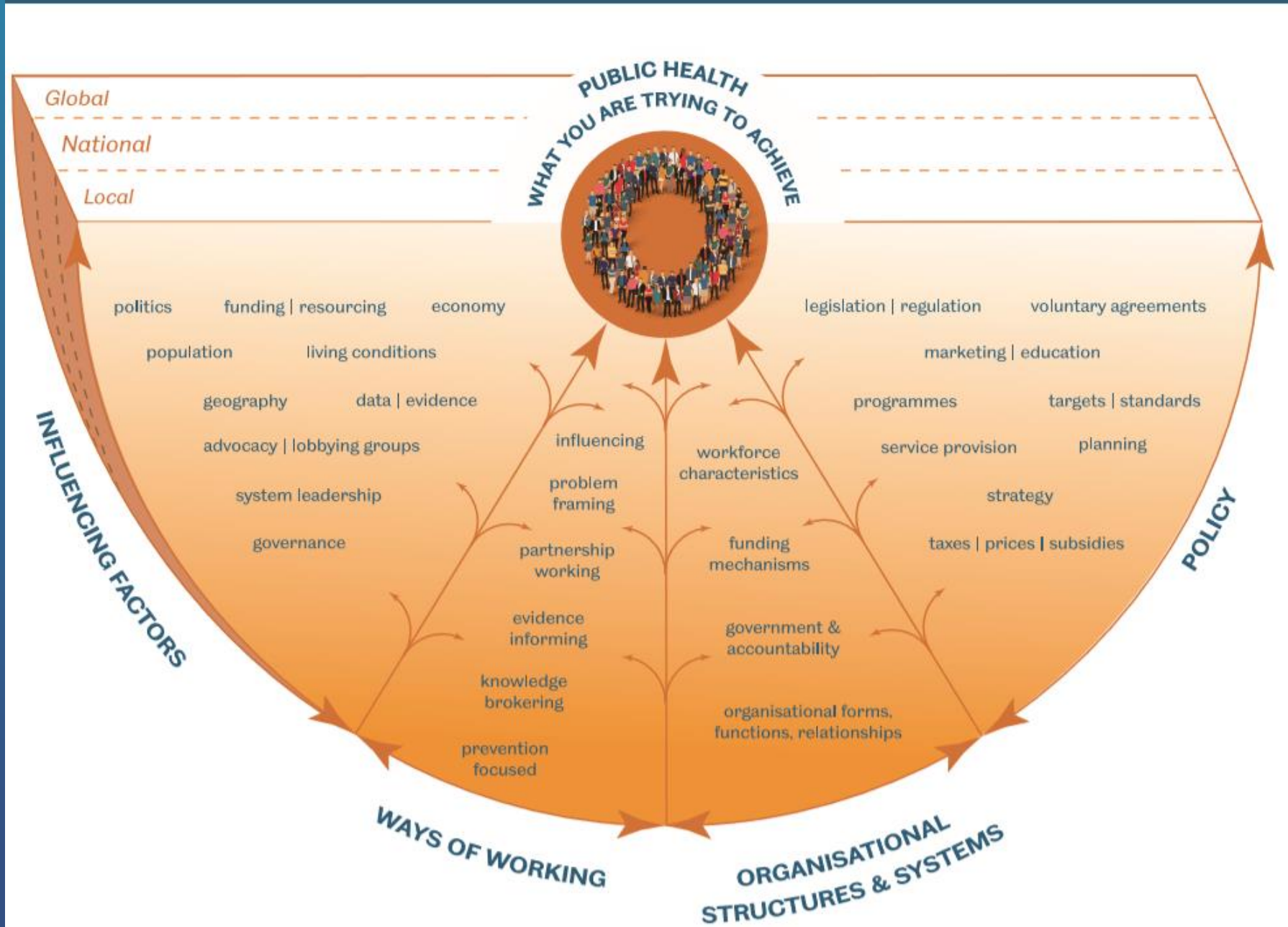
Process: two steps

- A systematic literature review and input from a stakeholder group was used to develop a public health systems framework
- This framework then informed analysis of public health policy approaches to early child development



Public Health Systems Framework

This framework is designed to help you understand public health as a complex system. It sets out elements that affect public health outcomes. These operate at all levels of the system.



Consider all sections of the diagram to answer the questions below. This will help you understand what enables or constrains the improvements in public health that you are trying to achieve.

What are you trying to achieve?

Where are you situated in the system?

Which elements of the system, across all levels, affect what you are trying to achieve?

How do these elements connect & interact?

How does this enable or constrain what you want to achieve?

Where can you influence the system to achieve change?

Review of Literature- purpose

Public Health community desire to better understand how policy and the public health system contribute to children's early developmental outcomes, so as to reflect on how to effect change

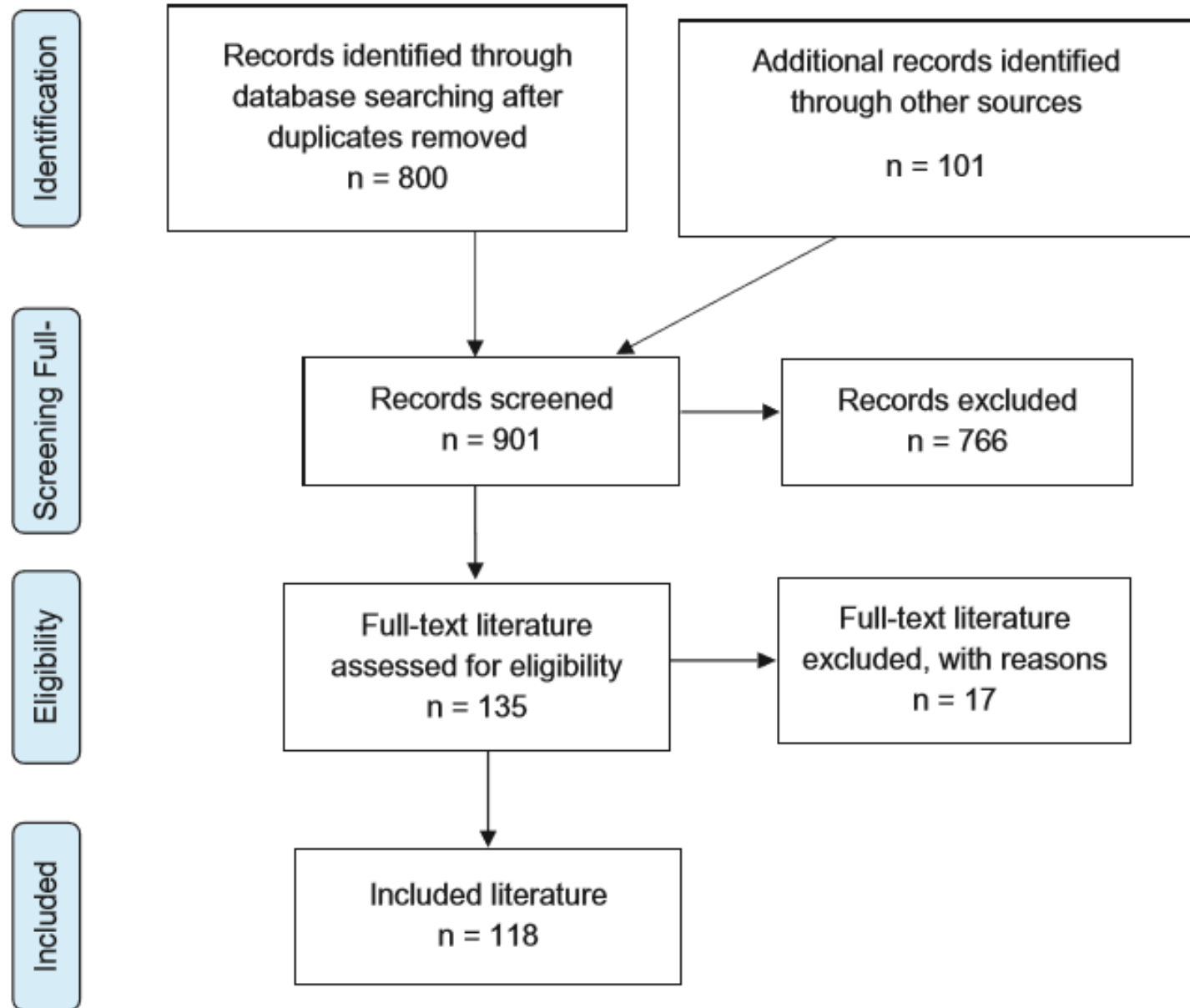
Author/date Country: Study objectives: Study design : <table border="1"> <tr><td>Descriptive</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Qualitative</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Quantitative</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Sys. review</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Mxd methods</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>Other:</td><td></td></tr> </table> Study participants: Contextual factors: Data collection methods/sources:	Descriptive		Qualitative		Quantitative		Sys. review		Mxd methods		Other:		<i>[insert MAIN POLICY FOCUS OF PAPER IN RELATION TO SCHOOL READINESS?, e.g. early years provision/early years curriculum, breastfeeding, vulnerable families, general pre-school child development]</i>				PH outcomes England: Northern Ireland: Scotland: Wales: PH impacts England: Northern Ireland: Scotland: Wales: Main author conclusions: LIST any papers in reference list to include in review:
	Descriptive																
	Qualitative																
	Quantitative																
	Sys. review																
Mxd methods																	
Other:																	
PH processes / ways of working / activities:																	
England	NI	Scotland	Wales														
Influencing factors (shape PH action – amplify/dampen):																	
England	NI	Scotland	Wales														

Inclusion Criteria

- Studies or documents relating to policy and system approaches to address development in children up to 7 years in 4 nations/UK since devolution (1999)
- Including: policies, interventions, indicators and outcomes that contribute to supporting child development in the early years
- Outcomes were defined as any population level health and wellbeing outcomes



PRISMA Flow Chart

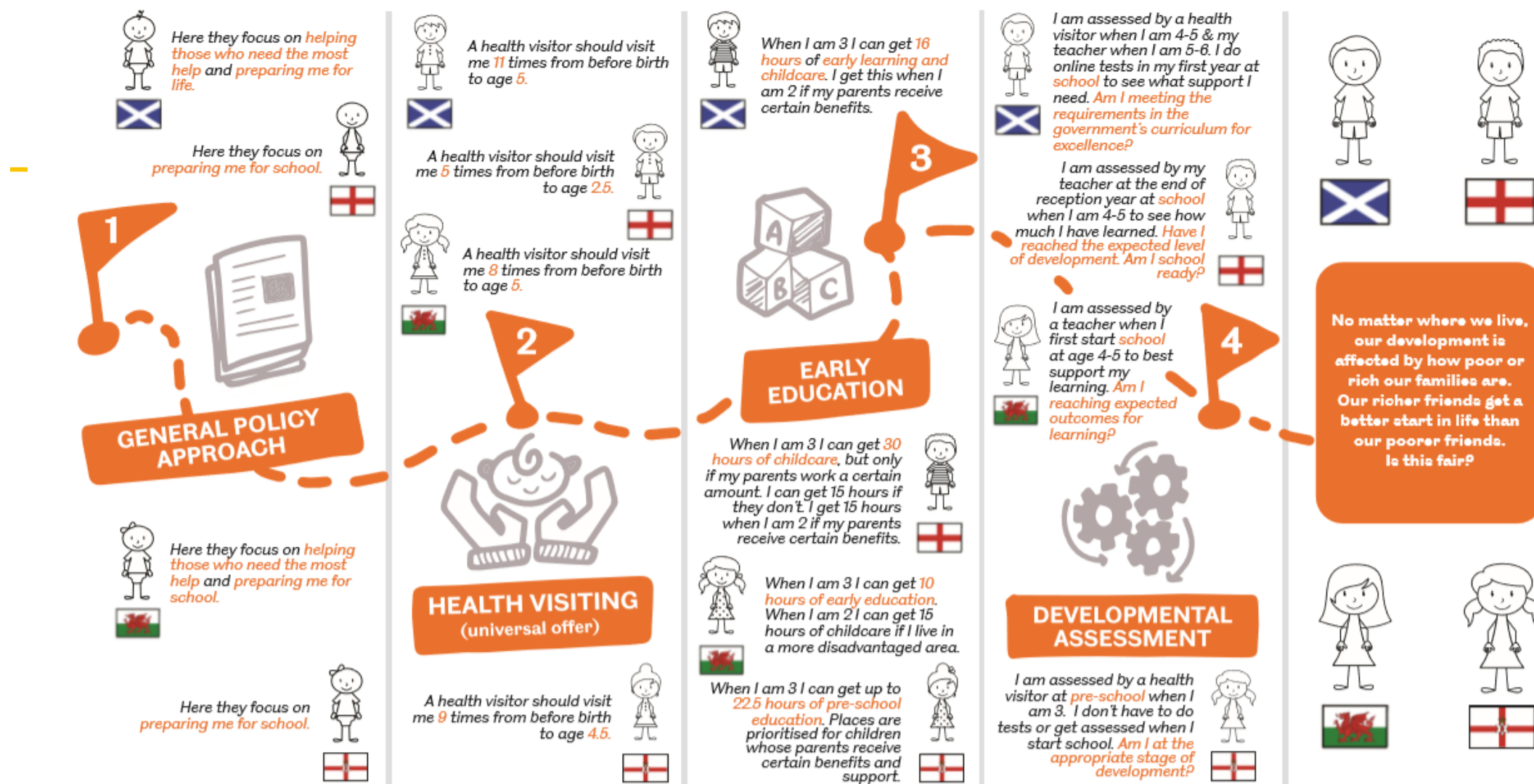


Results of the Review of Literature

Country of focus	Type of evidence				Totals
	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-peer reviewed reports (evaluation, research, audit, statistical)	Policy, legal or guidance documents	Other (e.g. briefing note)	
England	22	9	7	1	39
Northern Ireland	3	8	4	2	17
Scotland	4	14	9	3	30
Wales	5	6	12	2	25
UK	4	1	0	0	5
England, Scotland and Wales	1	0	0	0	1
England and Scotland	0	1	0	0	1
Totals	39	39	32	8	118

Early Years Policy in the UK - from the child's perspective

National devolution enables countries to do some things differently. What does this mean for policy to support early child development?



Results cont.

- “The devolved countries face challenges in tackling determinants, as there are limits to the extent of devolution in the areas of welfare provision, employment support and macroeconomics. This hinders their ability to redress poverty, one of the main influencing factors for children’s outcomes across the life course.”



Publication

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ABSTRACT

Background Giving children the best start in life is critical for their future health and wellbeing. Political devolution in the UK provides a natural experiment to explore how public health systems contribute to children's early developmental outcomes across four countries.

Method A systematic literature review and input from a stakeholder group was used to develop a public health systems framework. This framework then informed analysis of public health policy approaches to early child development.

Results A total of 118 studies met the inclusion criteria. All national policies championed a 'prevention approach' to early child development. Political factors shaped divergence, with variation in national conceptualizations of child development ('preparing for life' versus 'preparing for school') and pre-school provision ('universal entitlement' or 'earned benefit'). Poverty and resourcing were identified as key system factors that influenced outcomes. Scotland and Wales have enacted distinctive legislation focusing on wider determinants. However, this is limited by the extent of devolved powers.

Conclusion The systems framework clarifies policy complexity relating to early child development. The divergence of child development policies in the four countries and, particularly, the explicit recognition in Scottish and Welsh policy of wider determinants, creates scope for this topic to be a tracer area to compare UK public health systems longer term.

Keywords child development, devolution, early years, policy, public health systems, systematic review

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