Who safeguards children's culture?

Leadership and accountability across five international care systems

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Cultural care for multicultural children is widely valued in principle and thinly supported in structure.

"When there are cuts, the things that are not urgent or not perceived to be critical in a crisis get shelved. Cultural conversations and experiences are often in that second group."

Participant, Agency 4

Three strands, one rope



Children's care experiences

Identity, belonging and continuity of connection

Teams and practice

What practitioners notice, ask, record and carry

Organisational systems architecture

Leadership, governance, data and learning







Accountability for respecting children's rights to cultural identity, care and connection.

Karatasas, K., Grace, R., & Higgins, D. J. (2026). Social Sciences, 15(6), 351.

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CulturalWorks Elevating how services approach cultural connection

Three strands, one rope

Cultural care holds when all three are held together. Take one out and the other two lose tension.

1

Leadership sets the frame

Culture becomes foundational or discretionary through what leaders resource, name and measure — especially under fiscal and political pressure.

2

Recording is the foundation

What is not recorded is not seen, and what is not seen is not acted upon. Data, oversight and indicators make cultural care auditable.

3

Learning keeps it honest

Reflective supervision, cultural humility and partnership with knowledge holders prevent drift into symbolism.

The evidence base

39
leaders, 27 agencies

154
participants, 11 sessions

5
national systems

18
months to follow-up

United States · England · Scotland · Northern Ireland · Norway

Required, or endorsed?

What the system requires, it records. What it merely endorses, it records unevenly or not at all.

Required

- Named in policy or procedure
- Has an owner and a review cycle
- Appears in reporting to leadership
- Non-completion is visible

Endorsed

- Encouraged, not mandated
- No owner or review cycle
- Invisible in reporting
- Quietly dropped under pressure

The test

If the person who cares most about this left tomorrow, would it still happen?

So what needs to change

- Make cultural identity a mandated, quality-checked field — not a free-text afterthought.
- Give cultural care a named owner, a review cycle, and a line in board reporting.
- Protect reflective supervision structurally, so it is not the first thing lost in a crisis.

The question is not whether your organisation values culture.

It is about making every child's right to cultural connection and wellbeing a non-negotiable *element of all care services.*

The A–Z accountability prompts

Twenty-six reflective prompts across three mechanisms — for supervision, executive review, training and Communities of Practice.

Twenty-six prompts, three mechanisms

Eight prompts sit with leadership. Most of the work sits in governance and learning — which is where organisations most often have intent but no mechanism.

Each prompt is tested the same way: where is this written down, and who is accountable if it does not happen?

Leadership framing

Does the organisation position cultural care as foundational, or as discretionary?

- **A** Advocacy
- **E** Ethical attentiveness
- **J** Justice
- **L** Leadership modelling
- **O** Organisational narrative
- **R** Resource allocation
- **W** Workforce capability
- **Z** Zero tolerance

Governance and structural embedding

What is not recorded is not seen, and what is not seen is not acted upon.

- **C** Continuity
- **D** Documentation & data
- **G** Governance & indicators
- **I** Implementation integrity
- **M** Monitoring
- **P** Practitioner support
- **Q** Quality assurance
- **S** Systems alignment
- **V** Visibility

Organisational learning

Reflection is often the first thing to go in a crisis, and often the most important time to use it.

- **B** Bias awareness
- **F** Feedback loops
- **H** Humility
- **K** Knowledge mobilisation
- **N** Navigating uncertainty
- **T** Training & development
- **U** Understanding children's perspective
- **X** eXamination of practice
- **Y** Yielding to lived experience