



Setting up multi-agency services

Toolkit for practitioners

Supported by



Setting up multi-agency services: Toolkit for practitioners

Contents list

<u>Introduction</u>	02
<u>Where multi-agency approaches are already working</u>	04
<u>What will multi-agency working mean for you?</u>	05
<u>Starting multi-agency working – some advice:</u>	06
• <u>Different professional cultures and languages</u>	06
• <u>Working within a common vision</u>	08
• <u>A model for team building</u>	09
• <u>Working with change</u>	11
• <u>Working out roles and responsibilities</u>	12
• <u>The practicalities</u>	14
• <u>Line management</u>	15
• <u>Supervision</u>	16

Introduction

This toolkit has been designed for practitioners who have never worked in a multi-agency setting. It will also help anyone who wants to learn more about specific issues surrounding prevention and early intervention for children and families with additional needs.

The benefits of multi-agency working

All over England, people are working positively and productively in multi-agency teams. They say there are some great benefits to multi-agency working, including:

- High levels of job satisfaction.
- Improved opportunities to share learning and skills.
- Opportunities to take a more holistic approach to meeting children and young people's needs.
- The ability to develop services creatively, and to engage and gain access to other services which have previously been hard to reach.

The challenges of multi-agency working

Any new way of working can present challenges. These challenges may be different depending on the type of multi-agency service you are working in.

Integrated settings

If you work in an integrated setting like a children's centre or extended school, your challenges may include:

- Defining roles and responsibilities.
- Developing skills for collaborative working.
- Working with people from a range of cultures and backgrounds.
- Working with people on a range of different terms and conditions.
- Adapting to a new organisational culture.
- Working with new systems and processes.

Panels and networks

If you are part of a panel or network that meets regularly to discuss different cases, but are still employed by your home agency and do most of your work for them, your challenges might be:

- Maintaining a workable caseload, balancing the requirements of the panel with those of your primary role.
- Working with people from different social and professional cultures, even though you may not have much time to develop together as a team.
- Maintaining effective links with co-workers in between your regular meetings.

Introduction

Team Around the Child (TAC)

If your multi-agency work involves potentially being part of a Team Around the Child¹ (TAC) from time to time, challenges may also include:

- Balancing potentially different objectives and priorities between the TAC members and your home agency.
- Maintaining a workable caseload, balancing the requirements of the TAC with those of your primary role.
- Working with people from different cultures, even though you may not have much time to develop as a team.
- Working in different ways, and to different standards, than in your home agency.
- Maintaining effective links with co-workers in the TAC between your regular meetings.

This toolkit has information that will help you to know what to expect, and to deal positively with any challenges.

¹ Also known as a Team Around the Young Person (TAYP).

Where multi-agency approaches are already working

Many different ways of multi-agency working have been tried and adopted across the country. You can read about them at www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/cwdc-share

These case studies highlight how integrated working really improves the lives of children, young people and their families. They also outline the issues and barriers that some organisations have come across, and the ways they have dealt with them.

New research on the team around the child

In addition in 2009, CWDC completed research into the Team Around The Child (TAC) model of multi-agency working which included detailed case studies of how local areas are working within this model. These are available to read at www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/multi-agency/team-around-the-child

What will multi-agency working mean for you?

Being part of a multi-agency service will give you opportunities to use your skills in a new context, or to use skills that may have been dormant or under-used in your previous role.

It is not about becoming a generic multi-agency worker, but about using your specialist skills and knowledge in collaboration with others. Along the way, you will develop new skills and perhaps have new ideas about the way you want your career to develop. You'll build on your existing role and enhance your previous learning.

“I took the job because I thought Sure Start would achieve what my organisation, with its formal thresholds and rationing procedures, seems to be failing at: finding the people who fall through the cracks.”
Practitioner, Sure Start evaluation, 2005

However, clarifying your role and responsibilities can be difficult when lots of people from different backgrounds are brought together. You'll find helpful advice on this in the following pages.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Different professional cultures and languages

Multi-agency working is not about trying to make everything and everyone the same. Difference can be a good thing because it allows for creativity and alternatives.

The dynamics of a multi-agency group can be interesting. Everyone brings different specialist skills and knowledge – and everyone is used to different professional cultures. Because of this, people may have differing perceptions, including:

- The ‘status’ of different members of the service.
- Expectations about how you should work with children and families.
- Who should carry out the work?

Making sense of your role

Everyone comes to a multi-agency team with different ideas about what this new work will involve. One thing is certain – your new role will very probably involve working in new ways.

When you join a multi-agency team, it can take time to adjust to how everyone else works, and to make adaptations. You may feel out of your ‘comfort zone’.

You need to recognise what your partners from different agencies expect, and the standards they work to. But that doesn’t mean putting your own thoughts and perspectives to one side.

The key is being able to discuss your ideas openly with colleagues, and for information and thoughts to be shared. In this way, innovative and more effective ways of working can be discovered.

Developing a shared identity

The very nature of multi-agency working means that everyone comes from different backgrounds. But for teams to be successful they need to develop a common vision and a shared way of working.

There is more information about developing a common vision in the next section – working within a common vision – but working productively together will be easier if you:

- Value the views of others and take them seriously.
- Treat all other team members with respect.
- Celebrate the diversity of your team’s practice, experience and personalities.
- Remain open about your own perspectives and practices.
- Challenge other perspectives and practices in a constructive way.
- Question, reflect and suggest possible alternatives.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Different professional cultures and languages

Even when your service has developed its own norms and practices, you should still feel comfortable challenging, and suggesting improvements. In a learning environment you should be encouraged to suggest alternative solutions, think creatively and continuously evolve new processes and methods.

Tools and techniques

Ensure you have a clear understanding of the culture and purpose of the multi-agency service, its role and its values. If you're unsure, ask!

Know yourself – your strengths, weaknesses and preferred interpersonal style.

Know your colleagues – their strengths, weaknesses, personalities and style – so that you can work effectively with them.

Consider the organisational culture of your home agency. Does your practice reflect the overall culture of your organisation, or does it match with a particular sub-culture?

Ensure that in all your interactions with others you are building up, not tearing down.

Behave as a role model for inter-agency working, making a positive contribution, keeping to deadlines and coming up with the goods.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Working within a common vision

The Every Child Matters agenda is driven by a strong national vision – that all children and young people can achieve five outcomes they have told us are key to well-being in childhood and later life. These are:

- Being healthy.
- Staying safe.
- Enjoying and achieving.
- Making a positive contribution.
- Achieving economic well-being.

All agencies working with children and young people support this vision and work towards making it a reality. At local level, this vision is translated into meaningful aims and objectives to meet the needs of children and young people in the local area. This provides a common vision when setting up multi-agency teams.

A vision can be communicated most effectively when it is encapsulated in a broad statement that defines what a service is aiming to achieve for children and young people. It can be an important unifying force, helping everyone to focus on why they are there and helping to inspire and motivate them. The vision is often supported by a statement of purpose or a set of goals that describe what a service actually does and what it is contributing to the health and well-being of the community it serves.

One of the early activities that you are likely to be engaged in when setting up a multi-agency team, is to discuss how your skills and knowledge can contribute to the overall vision and purpose of the multi-agency service. This may need to be followed up with discussions about how your role sits alongside others, particularly in relation to any overlaps or gaps in the skills-base.

If you do not know what the vision or goals are for your service, speak to your manager. If there is no vision in place for your multi-agency team, you could suggest that you develop one as part of a team building exercise.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

A model for team building

There are many different ways to build a team – but you may find this four-stage model helpful. It was developed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965. He identified four stages that teams go through on their route to maximum effectiveness.

Stage 1: Forming

The group is not yet a group but a set of individuals. Their behaviour is driven by a desire to be accepted by the others, and avoid controversy or conflict. Serious issues and feelings are avoided, and people focus on being busy with routines, such as team organisation, who does what and when to meet. They may talk about the purpose of the group, its definition or its composition.

Individuals are also gathering information and impressions – about each other, and about the scope of the task and how to approach it. This is a comfortable stage to be in, but the avoidance of conflict and threat can mean that not much gets done.

Stage 2: Storming

As the work of the team and the real issues start to be addressed, it will become more difficult for team members to avoid conflict.

It is normal for groups to go through a conflict stage when the consensus on purpose, leadership and behaviour is challenged and re-established. Personal agendas will be revealed and in some cases hostility may be generated.

Some individuals will be glad to be getting into the real issues, while others will wish for the comfort and security of Stage 1.

If successfully handled, this period of storming leads to a new and more realistic setting of objectives, procedures and norms. This stage is particularly important for testing the norms of trust in the group.

Stage 3: Norming

Individuals feel they are part of a cohesive, effective group as they establish norms and practice – in effect, their own multi-agency organisational culture with established ‘rules of engagement’.

These ‘rules of engagement’ influence how the team will operate, as well as what is appropriate in terms of behaviour, level of work and degree of openness and trust. Individuals may push the boundaries to gauge the level of commitment that is expected.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

A model for team building

Team members now understand each other better, and can appreciate each other's skills and experience. They listen, appreciate and support, and are prepared to change pre-conceived views. Individuals have had to work hard to attain this stage, and may resist any pressure to change, for fear of reverting to the 'storming' stage.

Stage 4: Performing

This stage is characterised by interdependence and flexibility. Team members know each other well enough to be able to work together, and trust each other enough to allow independent activity. Roles and responsibilities can change according to need. The energy of the group is directed towards the task in hand, and this is when it is likely to be most productive.

Reading and resources

Tuckman, B., 'Developmental sequence in small groups', *Psychological Bulletin* (vol. 63, 1965), pp. 384-399

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Working with change

Many organisations have to handle periods of change. And if you're moving towards integrated ways of working, change is something you'll almost certainly experience.

Myers (1986) suggests the competencies that allow a professional to change include:

- A strong sense of their own professional competence.
- The ability to be comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty.
- The ability to reason critically.

Your multi-agency team leader or manager is likely to be focused on helping all team members manage the transition smoothly. But it also helps to be aware of the kind of skills that can help you manage your own transition.

- Reflect on your past performance and ways of working. Is there anything you would like to do differently or think you should do differently? The more reflective and willing to learn from experience you are, the more adaptive you will be within the group.
- Understanding group dynamics can help you see why certain behaviours might be emerging in your group. This in turn can help you decide how to behave in response. Click to read about a [team building model](#) that explains some of these issues.
- Take responsibility for your own behaviour and learning. Remember you will only be able to understand each other if you all take time to talk about your own starting points and backgrounds.

- Remember you may have to work with resistance – sometimes your own. This is a common phase. Being open and patient and keeping sight of the common vision can help you through.
- Communication skills are critical. You need to be able to ask for information and help, impart information and knowledge, consult and negotiate. Be sensitive to what you are being asked to do – are you being asked to advise, provide consultation, teach or to just to listen and hear what is being said?
- Avoid jumping to conclusions or making recommendations before you have explored all the issues. Sometimes you will need to help colleagues reach their own conclusions or solutions.

Fortunately, these are the same attributes that are so important in working with children, young people and families. It's no coincidence they are also needed in multi-agency settings, as this work involves developing a holistic understanding of children and families.

Reading and resources

Myers, C., Teaching students to think critically: A guide to faculty in all disciplines (1986), London: Jossey-Bass

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Working out roles and responsibilities

Although it's common to describe colleagues within a multi-agency service in relation to their professional background, for example as 'the social worker' or 'the health visitor,' it isn't always helpful in promoting an understanding of the skills and knowledge people bring to a team.

It can also be a limiting way of describing the work of your service to families, who may have preconceptions about different practitioner groups that relate more to their statutory role than their role in the multi-agency service.

Because of this, it is sometimes better to think about the individual skills you bring and how these complement other skills available within the service, so that together there is a comprehensive skills base for working with children and young people.

Impact on future professional identity

Staff often worry about the impact of working in a multi-agency service on their future professional identity. However, evaluations of Sure Start and Children's Trusts found no signs that multi-agency working led to the development of a generic all-purpose practitioner. While there is a need for certain shared knowledge and skills, there is also a need for understanding of, sensitivity to, and respect for others' professional roles and responsibilities.

When you join a multi-agency service, think clearly about the skills, knowledge and perspectives you bring, particularly in relation to the vision and purpose of the service.

Two helpful starting points might be:

- The common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce provides a map where you can see which generic skills for working with children you feel competent and comfortable with.
- Your previous job description, or other professional description, will describe the things that are distinctive or specialist about your role. These might include the ability to provide solution-focused therapy, or to offer parenting skills programmes, or provide specific interventions with young people with behavioural problems.

“What we need to do though is bring the skills together in a better mix and in a better way, so don't be concerned for your professional identity, because we'll always need it. We'll always need you to do the job; we just might need you to do it slightly differently.”

Strategic Manager quoted in national evaluation of Children's Trusts

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Working out roles and responsibilities

Being a lead professional

When a range of practitioners are involved in addressing multiple additional needs of a child or young person, a lead professional will oversee and coordinate all activity.

The lead professional is not a job title or a new role. Rather, it's a set of functions that are carried out to deliver effective integrated support.

The lead professional acts as a single point of contact for the child, young person and family or carer to ensure support is delivered effectively, and to reduce overlap and inconsistency.

The lead professional is an important part of making sure children, young people and their families have a better experience and better outcomes.

As a member of a multi-agency service delivering integrated support to children and young people with additional needs, it is likely that at some point you will take a lead role for some of your cases.

You can find out more about what this means in practice, the skills and knowledge you'll need, and the level of support you'll get, at www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/lead-professional

In 2009, CWDC commissioned research examining the Team Around the Child approach to multi-agency working in the 11–14 group. For a full copy of this research and supporting case studies, visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/multi-agency/team-around-the-child

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

The practicalities

Links with your home agency

Maintaining links with your home agency can help you stay in touch with the latest good practice developments in your specialism, as well as a network of support.

This will be easier for some staff than others, and will probably be influenced by whether you have been seconded, recruited, or are part of a case specific intervention, such as a TAC.

These are some ways of keeping in touch with your home agency:

- Keep your professional supervision with your home agency going.
- Attend your home agency's meetings to keep up to speed with developments.
- Join a local network of practitioners from the same agency.
- Make sure your home agency is represented on the steering group or other governance arrangements for the team.
- Have a mentor from the home agency.

This is unlikely to be an issue if you are working in a multi-agency panel such as a youth inclusion and support panel (YISP), as you will remain employed by your home agency and still spend a proportion of your time working there.

Terms and conditions

In a multi-agency service where people come from a range of different agencies, you are likely to find that your terms and conditions are different to those of your colleagues.

Some may be paid more, some less. Some may be on term-time-only contracts, others may have to work through the year. Some will have more annual leave, others less.

There is no easy short-term solution, but you may want to consider doing these things:

- Make sure the things you are doing and learning are recorded as part of your performance appraisal.
- Speak to the manager or coordinator about how you feel. There may be opportunities to focus people's work according to their skills, or for them to pass their skills and knowledge on to colleagues.
- Find out what your home agency is planning in response to the government's commitment to developing a common standards and qualifications route for the children's workforce. In the longer term, this will provide opportunities for moving up and across the workforce.

If you work for a multi-agency panel, you will probably find that terms and conditions tend not to be such an issue, as staff remain employed by their home agency.

If you have a concern about your terms and conditions, the best starting point is to speak to your line manager in your home agency.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Line management

Good line management and supervision are critical when you are new to a multi-agency service.

It can help you feel more confident and competent in your role, by making sure you are clear about what you are doing, that your caseload is appropriate and you are adjusting to the demands of a new environment. Management and supervision arrangements vary from service to service, though they share some common elements which are described below:

Line management

This involves managing day-to-day issues like planning and monitoring workload, ensuring quality of work, ensuring health and safety, time management, team building, motivating, administration and record keeping. Your line management arrangements will vary according to the structure of your service.

- Being a member of the **Team Around the Child** should have no impact on your normal reporting lines, although the lead professional for the TAC will expect reports of progress against agreed actions. Your normal line manager will remain your first point of contact for any workload or practice issues.
- In **multi-agency teams** staff usually report into the team leader, though in some cases there may be dual line management. This can help you maintain links with your home agency, but can lead to tensions if there is not absolute clarity about the arrangements. It is helpful to make sure the arrangements are documented and that there is a regular three-way dialogue.
- In **multi-agency panels** members usually continue to report into their line managers in their home agency. Sometimes, it may be necessary for the panel coordinator to liaise with the home agency about things like workload or performance monitoring.
- In **integrated services**, line management depends on how staff are brought into the service. In most cases they will have been recruited or seconded and will be line managed by someone in the service. However, where services are commissioned or 'contracted out' – for example, a voluntary sector programme being offered after school as part of an extended schools programme – line management would probably remain with the home agency. In this case there would need to be clear lines of communication and relevant agreements between the agency and the centre manager.

Starting multi-agency working – some advice

Supervision

Supervision

This is the process of working through any practice issues that come up in the course of your everyday work. A good supervisor will help you to reflect on your practice, to support and challenge it as appropriate, to discuss skills needs, and to help you work through situations where you may be experiencing resistance. Your line manager may be your supervisor. However, some disciplines need to have professional supervision through their home agency.

Professional supervision

In some disciplines – for example nursing, midwifery, health visiting and clinical and educational psychology – there is a requirement for professional supervision to be by someone from the same discipline. Supervision will still involve working through everyday practice issues in a reflective way, but it will be provided through your home agency.

Training on integrated working processes and tools

A number of processes and tools have been developed to support the work of multi-agency services. These include information sharing, ContactPoint, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), National eCAF (when available), and the lead professional.

If you are working in a multi-agency team and working with children and young people with additional needs, you're likely to need priority training in these areas. You should speak to your line manager in your home agency about it.

For more information or to access guidance and training materials on information sharing, Common Assessment Framework and lead professional, ContactPoint and National eCAF visit www.integratedworking.com or www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/iw/

The Children's Workforce Development Council leads change so that the thousands of people working with children and young people across England are able to do the best job they possibly can.

We want England's children and young people's workforce to be respected by peers and valued for the positive difference it makes to children, young people and their families.

We advise and work in partnership with lots of different organisations and people who all want the lives of all children and young people to be healthy, happy and fulfilling.

For more information please call **0113 244 6311**
or visit www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Or write to CWDC, 2nd Floor, City Exchange
11 Albion Street, Leeds LS1 5ES
email info@cwdcouncil.org.uk
or fax us on 0113 390 7744

Contact us to receive this information in a different language or format, such as large print or audio tape.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Children's Workforce Development Council work together to support integrated working. Visit www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/integratedworking for more information.

© This publication is the copyright of the Children's Workforce Development Council 2010.

IW129/0310