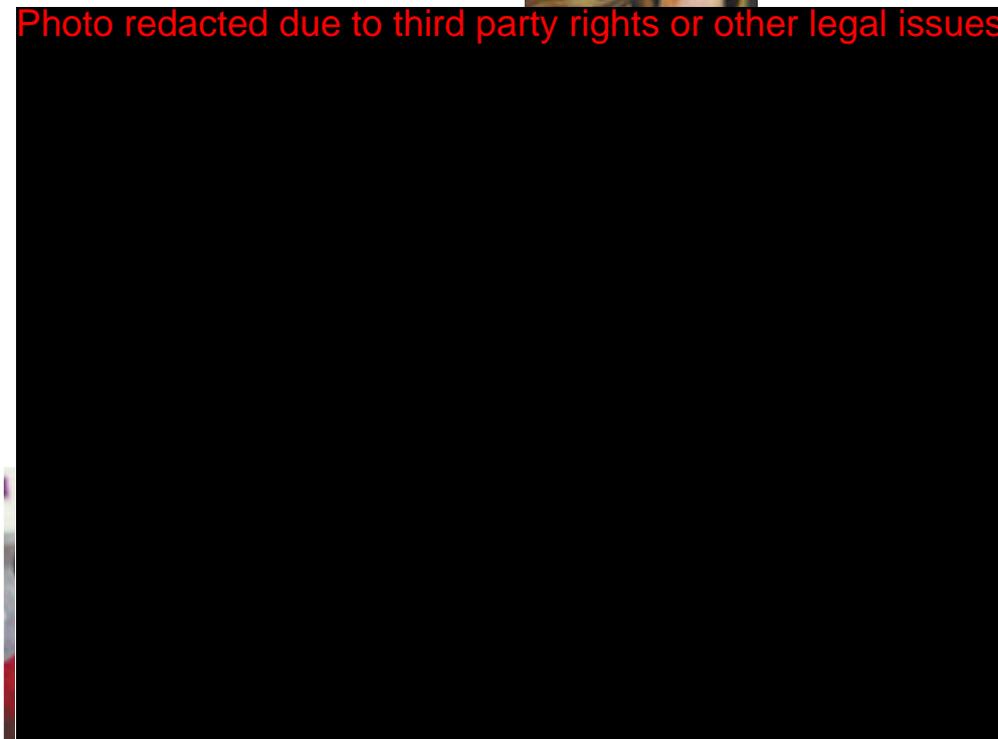


Multi-agency working Toolkit for Practitioners

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Every Child Matters
Change For Children

department for
education and skills
creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

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This text has been taken directly from the Toolkit for Practitioners available online at <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/>. Where the text contains a hyperlink to another section of this toolkit, the text is in blue and has been numbered where possible, to indicate that a link exists. Where the text contains a hyperlink to an external web page, the full URL is provided in the footnotes so you can look it up if you want to. The text was extracted from the website on 28th September 2005.

Introduction

This section is for practitioners who have not worked in a multi-agency setting before, or who want to find out more about some of the specific issues around preventive and early intervention support for children and families with additional needs.

If you have just joined a multi-agency service, you might be wondering what it's going to be like and how it will influence your career development. Here are some of the benefits identified by practitioners in research and evaluations:

- High levels of job satisfaction compared with their previous jobs
- A sense of liberation from bureaucratic or cultural constraints
- Stimulating opportunities to share learning and skills - as long as the start-up phase is well-managed
- Good opportunity to take a more holistic approach to meeting children's needs and to provide preventive and early intervention services.
- Good opportunity to provide services in a positive and creative way, which helps de-stigmatise services traditionally seen as inaccessible

Being part of a multi-agency service can also be challenging. These challenges may be different, depending on the type of multi-agency service you are working in.

- If you are part of a multi-agency team or work in an integrated setting such as a children's centre or extended school, the challenges may include:
 - defining roles and responsibilities
 - developing the skills required for collaborative working

- working with people from a range of social and professional 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.
- If your multi-agency work involves being part of a panel or network that meets regularly to discuss different cases, but you are still employed by your home agency and do most of your work for them, the challenges may include:
 - maintaining a workable caseload, balancing the requirements of the panel with the requirements 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.

This section of the website has information on many of these different aspects. You can select from the following sections:

1. [What does it mean for me and my role?](#)
2. [What skills and training will I need?](#)
3. [Using the Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People](#)
4. [Being a lead professional](#)
5. [Working with people from other agencies](#)
6. [Frequently asked questions](#)

You might also want to read more on the [benefits of multi-agency working](#)¹ or the [different service models](#)² for delivering multi-agency work in and around schools and early years settings.

1 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/benefitsofmultiagency/>

2 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/deliverymodels/>

What does it mean for me and my role?

Being part of a multi-agency service gives you the opportunity to apply 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 skills in collaboration with others to provide more effective services for children and young people. Along the way, you will develop new skills and perhaps have new ideas about the way you want your career to develop, but it is certainly not about discarding everything you have already learnt.

"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

But clarifying your role and responsibilities can be difficult when lots of people from different backgrounds get together. The following sections have advice and background information to help you address these challenges:

1. Different professional cultures and languages
2. Working within a common vision
3. A team building model
4. Working with change
5. Working out roles and responsibilities
6. The practicalities: terms and conditions, line management and supervision

1.1 DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL CULTURES AND LANGUAGES

Multi-agency working is not about trying to homogenise all the professional backgrounds represented in the service. Difference can be a good thing - it allows for creativity and alternatives.

Your own professional and organisational culture will have an impact on the dynamics of the whole group, influencing the way you and colleagues function as an integrated service. Because of their different backgrounds and expectations, members of the group may have different perceptions about the service, for example:

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

Existing practice suggests that the most effective way to address this situation is through strong leadership and the willingness of all service members to engage in a robust debate to explore and resolve issues, and promote a common understanding and a shared purpose.

Making sense of your role

Imagine you are working in a foreign country, experiencing a new culture. You have to begin to understand what is acceptable behaviour and the written and unwritten rules of personal engagement.

The same can be true for working with people from a range of different backgrounds, all with different ideas about what this new work will involve. You can feel out of your 'comfort zone'.

It is necessary to try to recognise differences in expectations, language and ethos in order to work effectively alongside partners from different agencies. But this does not mean you have to put your own perspectives and expectations to one side. You may have different - and better! - ideas for your colleagues to consider. An open discussion of all these can help the different perspectives to be assimilated within the service.

Developing a shared identity

Perhaps the key starting point in developing a shared understanding is for all service members to sign up to a common vision for your work with children and young people; one in which your particular role and contribution is clear. Click for more on working within a common vision.

This provides a fixed point for your service, which people can always return to if different theories, perspectives or time pressures start to pull you in different directions again. Over time - particularly if you are working in a team or in a co-located, integrated service - you will develop your own, shared, cultural identity, with your own norms and ethos. This process 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 practice, experience and personalities in the team
- Be open about your own perspectives and practices
- Have the resilience to challenge other perspectives and practices, but in a constructive way
- Question, reflect and suggest possible alternatives

Click to read about one team building model if you want to think about how this applies to the way you and your colleagues are developing as a group.

Once your service has developed its own norms and practices, you should still feel able to challenge expectations and go against the norm if justified. This is not a bad thing - in a learning environment you should be encouraged to offer alternative solutions and to creatively evolve new methods and processes that work.

Suggested tools and techniques

- Ensure that you have a clear understanding of the culture of the service, its role and its values. If you are unsure, ask!
- Know yourself - your strengths, weaknesses and preferred interpersonal style.
- Know your colleagues - their strengths, weaknesses, personalities and style so that you can effectively work 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 interagency working - ensuring a positive contribution, keeping to deadlines and coming up with the goods.
- Use the glossary for [multi-agency working](#)³ if you need a starting point for understanding others and creating your own common language.

1.2 WORKING WITHIN A COMMON VISION

There is a strong national vision that drives the whole Change for Children programme. This is that children and young people can all achieve the five outcomes that they have told us are key to well-being in childhood and later life:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving

³ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/glossary/>

- Making a positive contribution
- Achieving economic well-being

Our shared ambition is to improve those outcomes for all children and to narrow the gap in outcomes between those who do well and those who do not. This overarching vision will be translated by local services into meaningful aims and objectives to meet the needs of children and young people in your area.

A vision can be communicated most effectively when it is encapsulated in a broad statement that defines what your 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.

To accompany the vision for your service, your manager will probably also have developed a statement of purpose or a set of goals that describe what your 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 is to discuss how your skills and knowledge can contribute to the overall vision and purpose of the 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, you could suggest that you develop one as part of a team building exercise.

1.3 A TEAM BUILDING MODEL

There are lots of ways of conceptualising the way a team is developed, but a model developed in 1965 by Bruce Tuckman provides a simple and effective starting point in relation to multi-agency services. 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.

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.

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

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

Click for information on the [Tuckman model and other models of team building](#)⁴.

Click for information on [theories of action](#)⁵, as developed by organisational psychologist Chris Argyris.

4 <http://www.chimaeraconsulting.com/tuckman.htm>

5 <http://www.infed.org/thinkers/argyris.htm>

1.4 WORKING WITH CHANGE

Handling periods of change and uncertainty is becoming increasingly common for practitioners in all organisations, but it is particularly the case for people moving towards more integrated ways of working.

Theorists have tried to identify and describe these, for example Myers (1986) suggests that 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 leader or manager is likely to be focused on helping all service members manage the transition smoothly. But it also helps to understand a bit about the main processes and the kind of skills that can help you manage the transition yourself. The following may be helpful:

- Try to 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 explain why certain behaviours might be emerging in your group. This in turn can help you to 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 that 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 - and sometimes this resistance will be your own. This is a common phase. Being open and patient and keeping sight of the common vision of your service can help to get through it.

- Communication skills are critical. These include the ability to ask for information, impart it, consult and negotiate. It helps to be sensitive to whether you are being required to advise, provide consultation, teach or to just to listen and hear what is being said.
- Avoid jumping to conclusions or recommending solutions before you have explored all the issues. At times you will need to help other 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 is little coincidence that they are also required in multi-agency settings, as this work involves developing a holistic understanding of children and families.

READING AND RESOURCES

C Myers. 1986. *Teaching Students to Think Critically: - A Guide to Faculty in all Disciplines*. London: Jossey-Bass.

1.5 WORKING OUT ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

It is common shorthand to describe people's roles within a multi-agency service in relation to their professional background - for example 'the social worker', 'the mental health worker' or 'the health visitor'. This can certainly be helpful for getting a quick overview of what a service can offer.

However, if you are trying to break down barriers and understand the individual skills that people can bring to bear in support of individual children and their families, it is not always the most helpful way for colleagues to think about each other. This may be particularly so in a multi-agency team like a behaviour and education support team (BEST) or an integrated service like a children's centre, which tend to focus on developing a shared identity as members of a multi-agency service, albeit with individual skills and strengths.

And sometimes it is not the best way of describing the work of your service to families, who may hold preconceptions of 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.

When you join, try to 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:

1. The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the [Children's Workforce](#)⁶ - which provides a map for you to look at to see which generic skills for working with children you feel competent and comfortable with.
2. Your previous job description or other professional description which describe the things that are distinctive or specialist about your role. For example, the ability to provide solution-focused therapy, or to offer parenting skills programmes, or provide specific interventions with young people with behavioural problems.

1.6 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 and ensure you have a network of support.

This will be easier for some staff than others, and will probably be influenced by whether you have been seconded or recruited. Ways that people have maintained links with their home agency include:

⁶ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/>

- Being line managed by the team leader but having professional supervision with their home agency
- Attending meetings of the home agency to keep up to speed with developments
- Joining a local network of practitioners from the same agency
- Ensuring the home agency is represented on the steering group or other governance arrangements for the team
- Having a mentor from the home agency

This is unlikely to be such 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.

Unfortunately, issues like this can get in the way of people working effectively together. There is not an easy short-term solution, but there are some things that can help. For example:

- Make sure that the things you are doing and learning are being recorded as part of your performance appraisal so that you maximise your own personal development.
- Speak to the manager/coordinator about how you feel. There may be opportunities to focus people's work more effectively according to their skills, and also for different staff to have the opportunity to 'cascade' their learning from different experiences or training programmes to colleagues.

- Find out what is going on in your home agency in response to the [Government's workforce strategy](#)⁷. This includes a commitment to develop a common standards and qualifications route for the children's workforce, which over the longer term should 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 and continue to view themselves as members of that agency, rather than a new multi-agency organisation.

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

Line management and supervision

Good line management and supervision are critical when you are new to a multi-agency service. They can help you feel more confident and competent in your role, by ensuring you are clear about what you are doing, that your caseload is appropriate and that 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.

In multi-agency teams it is most common for staff to report into the team leader, though in some cases there may be dual line management arrangements, with an

⁷ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/childrensworkforcestrategy/>

additional reporting line into the manager in the home agency. This can be helpful in terms of maintaining links with your home agency, but can lead to tensions if there is not absolute clarity in the arrangements. It is helpful to make sure the arrangements are documented and that there is a regular three-way dialogue between the parties.

In multi-agency panels it is most common for panel members to continue to report into their line managers in the home agency. Sometimes, it may be necessary for the panel coordinator to liaise with the home agency on certain line management issues, such as workload or performance monitoring.

In integrated services the line management arrangements depend on the basis by which the staff are brought into the service. In most cases they will be recruited or seconded and will therefore tend to be line managed by someone within the service, who may be from the same agency as them - for example a team of family support workers being managed by a social worker who is also a deputy within the centre. 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 - the line management arrangements will probably remain with the home agency, though there will need to be clear lines of communication and relevant agreements between the agency and the centre manager.

Not sure what kind of service you work in? Click for more information on [service models](#)⁸.

Supervision

This refers to a process of working through the practice issues that arise in the course of everyday work. A good supervisor will enable 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 require professional supervision through their home agency.

⁸ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/deliverymodels/>

Professional supervision: in some disciplines - for example nursing, midwifery, health visiting and clinical and educational psychology - there is a requirement for professional supervision by someone from the same discipline. The process of supervision will still involve working through everyday practice issues in a reflective way, but will be provided through the practitioner's home agency.

What skills and training will I need?

Organisational and cultural change can have major implications for practitioners, for example the need to work across professional boundaries, with new concepts and new terminology. There are skills and training that can help you adjust to these demands, and these can be developed through three main routes (see below for more information):

1. **Your personal development: the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce** defines a set of skills and knowledge associated with multi-agency working
2. **Team training opportunities: focusing on team building** to help people from different backgrounds understand each other and work effectively together
3. **Professional development opportunities: increasingly there will be opportunities open to you as a member of the children's workforce**

2.1 COMMON CORE

The Common Core sets out the areas of expertise that everyone working with children, young people and families (including those who work as volunteers) should be able to demonstrate. These are grouped into six areas. Click on each one to find out the underpinning skills and competencies:

- [Effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families](#)⁹
- [Child and young person development](#)¹⁰

9 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/communication/>

10 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/development/>

- Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child¹¹
- Supporting transitions¹²
- Multi-agency working¹³
- Sharing information¹⁴

Or you can click for the full [Common Core](#)¹⁵.

2.2 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

When you join a multi-agency team, panel or service, you are likely to have the opportunity to take part in a number of training events. These can help you to understand the context for the work, and help you integrate with colleagues and forge a sense of team identity. Key opportunities are induction and team training events.

Induction

A good induction programme offers you the opportunity to get to know a wide range of aspects of the business. It will have been carefully planned by your managers, and may be supported by an induction pack which will document which aspects of the work you have been introduced to, and which people you have met.

Typically, it will include:

- Time with the line manager
- Time with colleagues to discuss what they do

11 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/safeguarding/>

12 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/transitions/>

13 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/multiagencyworking/>

14 <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/sharing/>

15 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/commoncore/>

- HR topics to be covered (eg workplace policies, learning and development)
- Systems and processes
- Opportunity to work shadow
- Other topics which are relevant to the work of the service and which you need to know about, but which you might not be directly involved in, for example working with Jobcentre Plus or working with primary schools

It may even include the opportunity to do a placement or to work shadow with a partner agency to understand more about how they work.

A good programme will offer the opportunity for you to reflect on your progress during the induction period with your line manager. This could run in conjunction with regular supervision meetings.

Team building

Training and development can take a number of forms, and achieve a range of objectives. It can be focused on team building, with the aim of tackling some of the cultural barriers and challenges facing people who come together to work in a multi-agency team.

It can also be more skills-focused, with the aim of cascading information and developing new areas of work, for example different approaches to working with children and young people; family support or recording and information sharing.

Team building opportunities can be formal or informal, for example:

- Team meetings
- Team lunches
- Team away days

- A regular slot once or twice a year where all practitioners get together for a few days for a set programme of training which they have agreed upon
- Opportunities to do specialist training, which you then cascade to colleagues

The precise balance of training will reflect the needs of everyone in the service and the availability of local training.

2.3 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

A new single qualifications framework is being developed to help people progress more easily in their chosen roles and support their retention in the children's workforce.

It will build on the Common Core and is a method of modernising the sector and creating a workforce which is flexible and fluid. It will ultimately enable those working in one sector to develop in their individual roles and move easily to other sectors within the children's workforce. The impact of this will be that individuals will be able to train to any given level to fit their precise needs and help improve recruitment and retention rates within the sector.

Click to read more about the Government's proposals for [workforce reform and professional development](#)¹⁶, including the Children's Workforce Strategy.

¹⁶ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/>

CAF in practice

This section is based on the [Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People: Guide for Service Managers and Practitioners](#)¹⁷. It focuses on the issues relevant to practitioners and has been tailored to meet the specific needs of practitioners working in a multi-agency service.

1. What is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?
2. How does the CAF work in practice?

3.1 WHAT IS THE CAF?

- The CAF is a new, more standardised approach to assessing a child or young person's need for services.
- It is for children with 'additional needs' (ie those at risk of poor outcomes).
- It has been developed for practitioners in all agencies so that they can communicate and work together more effectively.
- It is particularly suitable for use in universal services, to tackle problems before they become serious.
- It helps practitioners identify the issues facing a child or young person who may have additional needs, in order to take appropriate action to provide them with the right kind of support.

17 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/cafinpractice/?asset=document&id=16919>

As part of the wider programme to deliver more integrated services, CAF seeks to:

- Support earlier intervention
- Improve multi-agency working
- Reduce bureaucracy for families

The CAF aims to help you undertake assessments in a more consistent way. In many cases it will formalise existing practice. With the right attributes and/or training, it is expected that practitioners in any agency will be capable of undertaking a common assessment.

The CAF consists of:

- A simple pre-assessment checklist to help you identify children who would benefit from a common assessment. The checklist can be used on its own or alongside universal assessments, such as those done by midwives and health visitors
- A process for undertaking a common assessment, to help you gather and understand information about the needs and strengths of the child, based on discussions with the child, their family and other practitioners as appropriate
- A standard form to help you record and, where appropriate, share with others the findings from the assessment in terms that are helpful in working with the family to find a response to unmet needs

In many cases, a common assessment or the pre-assessment checklist will have been completed as the basis for making a referral to your service. You will need access to the information gathered in this process to help inform your planning and support for the child or young person. You may also need to follow up with further, more specialist assessments to provide more detailed information on specific areas of need.

However, in some instances, particularly in the case of multi-agency services working in or with schools, the CAF may not have been completed before a referral is made, and therefore someone in your service may need to do this. In all instances, it is important for practitioners to be familiar with the CAF and how it is used.

3.2 HOW DOES THE CAF WORK IN PRACTICE?

3.2.1 *Purpose and principles of assessment*

The purpose of assessment is to gain an holistic understanding of a child's strengths and needs, so that effective interventions can be made, if required, to support their development. It is particularly important in a multi-agency context, where you may be addressing a range of needs and require input from a range of practitioners, who need to share a common understanding of the issues they are working to address.

The principles of effective assessment are that:

- It looks at the whole child or young person, not just the policy focus and statutory obligations of a particular service.
- It takes account of strengths as well as needs and understands the role of parents/carers and a wide range of family and environmental factors on child development.
- It is simple to use and geared towards the practical delivery of support to children, young people and their family members.
- It is empowering for families, completed in partnership with children and families at all stages, where possible enabling them to take the lead, and ensuring they have a copy of all the relevant documentation.
- It enables and encourages information held by agencies to follow the child, for example as they get older, change schools or move house, subject to controls to protect confidentiality.
- It is a tool to support practice; is not used mechanistically or when it adds little value; and supports and enhances ongoing and effective communication within and between agencies. Communication should not end with the completion and forwarding of the common assessment.

As set out in [Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People: Guide for Service Managers and Practitioners](#)¹⁸, page 7.

3.2.2 How the CAF is structured

Assessing the needs of a child or young person benefits from a systematic approach which uses the same framework or conceptual map for gathering and analysing information about all children, young people and their families, but discriminates effectively between different types and levels of need. The CAF has been developed from combining the underlying model of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families with the main factors used in other assessment frameworks. The elements covered by the CAF have been grouped into three domains:

- Development of the child or young person
- Parents and carers
- Family and environmental

Click to read more about the elements to be assessed in each of these domains.

Elements to be assessed

This information is taken from the [Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People: Guide for Service Managers and Practitioners](#)¹⁹, May 2005, page 7.

In undertaking a common assessment, we want practitioners to consider each of three themes or 'domains':

18 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/cafinpractice/?asset=document&id=16919>

19 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/cafinpractice/elementstobeassessed/?asset=document&id=16919>

- How well a child is developing, including in their health and progress in learning
- How well parents or carers are able to support their child's development and respond appropriately to any needs
- The impact of wider family and environmental elements on the child's development and on the capacity of their parents and carers

Within each of these domains, we want practitioners to consider the elements set out below. They have been developed by combining the underlying model of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families with the main elements used in other assessment frameworks, including the Connexions APIR.

CAF ASSESSMENT ELEMENTS AND DOMAINS

Development of child

- Health - general health, physical development and speech, language and communications development
- Emotional and social development
- Behavioural development
- Identity, including self-esteem, self-image and social presentation
- Family and social relationships
- Self-care skills and independence
- Learning understanding, reasoning and problem solving, participation in learning, education and employment, progress and achievement in learning, aspirations

Parents and carers

- Basic care, ensuring safety and protection
- Emotional warmth and stability
- Guidance, boundaries and stimulation

Family and environmental

- Family history, functioning and well-being
- Wider family
- Housing, employment and financial considerations
- Social and community elements and resources, including education

Use of the CAF does not mean that each element needs to be assessed to the same level of detail or that the elements should be followed mechanistically. Practitioners should always consider the possibility of needs and strengths within each element to the extent it is relevant to the child at the time. The level of detail and the questions asked will vary according to the child's circumstances and the skills and knowledge of the practitioner. It will not always be appropriate for practitioners to assess all areas but they should consider the whole child, not just their own agency focus.

As with other frameworks, the CAF relies on practitioner judgement and will only work if practitioners use it as tool to support practice rather than as an administrative process.

Click to access the complete guidance and forms for the [Common Assessment Framework](#)²⁰.

3.2.3 A cycle of assessing, planning, delivering and reviewing

The CAF stresses that assessment is not an end in itself but a key part of the wider process of effective case working that includes planning and delivering support, as well as monitoring and review.

A cycle of assessment, planning, delivering and reviewing underpins all effective casework with children and young people with additional needs. The CAF is an important element of this, but is not an end in itself - its value lies in the way it informs your subsequent work with children, young people and families. This section has more information on this cycle of support:

²⁰ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf/>

- Assessment
 - when and why
 - completing a common assessment
 - consent and confidentiality
- Planning and delivering support
- Review

Assessment

When and why

There are a number of situations that might lead to a common assessment. These include:

- Where a practitioner has observed a significant change or worrying feature in a child or young person's appearance, demeanour or behaviour
- Where a practitioner knows of a significant event in the child or young person's life or where there are concerns about the parents/carers or home
- Where the child or young person, parent/carer or another practitioner has requested an assessment

Page 14 of the [CAF Guide for Service Managers and Practitioners](#)²¹ has more information on when an assessment might be initiated. Note that all children or young people who are considered at risk of significant harm should be referred directly to social services or the police in accordance with the local procedures laid down by the area child protection committee (ACPC) or local safeguarding children board (LSCB). There is no change to this procedure.

21 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/cafinpractice/cycleofsupport/?asset=document&id=16919>

Completing a common assessment

In some cases, the common assessment will have already been carried out before the child or young person is referred to your service. In these cases, you should ensure that you have details of the assessment as the basis for moving onto the planning and delivery of support.

If a common assessment has not been carried out, the CAF guidance provides the following suggestions for carrying out an assessment:

- Seek to build a working partnership with the child, young person or family, being clear about the nature and goals of the assessment and issues of consent and confidentiality.
- Be aware that families (including those members who have parental responsibility) may not agree between themselves about the child's needs and solutions.
- Work with the child/young person and parents/carers to understand the issues and develop solutions.
- Conduct the interview in a child-centred way, for example
 - in an environment which helps people feel more secure and confident and where you have a more direct opportunity to observe behaviour in context
 - listening to and taking into account the range of views from the child/young person and parents/carers
 - observing responses
 - focusing on areas of strength as well as need.
- Seek advice if you are worried about a child/young person's welfare or their own safety.

The common assessment discussion is divided into six areas:

1. **Explanation** of the purpose of the assessment, what information will be recorded and why, issues of consent and confidentiality
2. **Collection** of basic information about the child or young person including both personal and contact details
3. **Assessment** of the three domains and their component elements - not in a mechanistic way, but concentrating on areas where needs and strengths are identified and looking at the 'whole child' not just the issues which are the main focus of their home agency
4. **Recording** overall conclusions and the evidence behind them. This should be agreed with the child/young person or parent/carer, and any major differences of opinion recorded
5. **Identification** of solutions and actions, working with the child/young person and family to identify what assistance is needed and focusing where possible on what the child/young person and family can do for themselves
6. **Agreement** of who will do what and when progress will be reviewed

You do not need to be an expert to do a common assessment. If there are areas you do not feel equipped to assess, record what you can and ask others to add to it later if necessary. Additional or specialist assessments may also be necessary.

Consent and confidentiality

Sharing information is vital in a multi-agency setting where practitioners need to act jointly on behalf of a child, young person or their family.

In most circumstances, common assessment information should be held and shared only with the informed consent of the child/young person or their parent/carer. This is unlikely to be a significant barrier if the practitioner is working in partnership with

child their family, perhaps addressing the issue of consent in a friendly, informal way through home visits or other face-to-face meetings.

The CAF guidance provides information on the legal issues around consent and confidentiality, including the issue of when parental consent should be sought and alternatively when a child might be judged to be 'Fraser competent'.²² See page 15 of the *CAF Guide for Service Managers and Practitioners*²³. Your service manager should be able to provide further information on the consent and confidentiality policy that applies within your service, and any supporting documentation that may be required.

What do I do if consent is withheld?

Children/young people and their parents/carers can choose to refuse a common assessment, refuse any services on offer and refuse to consent to their information being shared. In these circumstances, their views must be respected. If this happens, you may wish to explore opportunities for supporting them in universal settings, perhaps as a stepping stone to encouraging them to take up the more targeted support on offer. Or there may be opportunities to engage their parents/carers, for example through drop-in centres, information services or parenting support.

Planning and delivering support

The purpose of the common assessment process is simply to lead on to the next stage, which may be any of the following:

- No further action - the practitioner's concerns have been resolved and no further concerns have been identified which require further assessment
- Single agency support - the identified concerns require action by one agency or practitioner

22 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/glossary/>

23 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/cafinpractice/cycleofsupport/?asset=document&id=16919>

- Multi-agency support - the identified concerns require multi-agency intervention

If the assessment has already been completed before a child or young person is referred to your service, this is the point that you will first come into contact with them. Or you may have already been involved in completing the common assessment.

In either case, if a need is identified for support from one or more practitioners in your service, this is the point where the service will need to plan what that support should look like, in conjunction with the child and family.

For children and young people with multiple additional needs, it will also be appropriate at this stage for practitioners to agree who is best placed to be the [lead professional](#)²⁴. The person who carries out the common assessment does not necessarily need to be the lead professional.

24 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/practitionerstoolkit/leadprofessional/>

PLANNING

Once the child or young person's circumstances have been explored and analysed through a common assessment, work can begin on planning appropriate action. Some of the tasks for the person leading on that particular case - the lead professional - will be to:

- Discuss with the child or young person and, if appropriate, their parent/carer the outcomes of the assessment process.
- Work with them to identify in detail what assistance is required and what action needs to be taken, for example what action is needed and available to address identified needs.
- Match the child or young person's needs to available support within the multi-agency service.
- Identify and agree with the child, young person or their parent/carer what will be provided through the multi-agency service and where support from specialist services may be required.
- Work with the child, young person, parent/carer, specialist practitioners and partner agencies as appropriate to determine overall roles and responsibilities.
- Agree what happens next in terms of contact and support for the child or young person.
- Deliver the actions agreed to be their responsibility.
- Obtain appropriate support from their own or other agencies.

If you are providing support, but not taking on the lead professional role, you will need to:

- Be aware of what the child/young person/family wants.
- Be involved in discussions about how that can be achieved.

- Be clear about your contribution.
- Understand the role of others.
- Know the timescales involved.

Delivering support

This refers to the actual process of working with the child/young person and their family in line with the actions agreed during the planning phase. The aim of this phase is to deliver the relevant aspects of the plan and achieve the best outcomes for the child/young person.

The choice of service to be provided is likely to be influenced by:

- Knowledge of what works in relation to the level and type of need experienced by the child or young person
- Knowledge of what has been tried in the past with the young person
- Knowledge of what is available locally

If you are providing a service, but are not the lead professional, you should ensure that you have mechanisms in place for keeping in close contact with the lead professional and letting them know how the intervention is progressing.

Review

Working with children, young people and families is not a one-off exercise, but an evolving process where assessments and interventions are monitored and, if necessary, followed by a review of progress. The outcome of this may be the need for further assessment or revised planning.

If you are not the lead professional, you will be asked by the lead professional to contribute to this process and to undertake any follow-up actions that may be appropriate.

This may require a reassessment of all CAF elements or may simply entail a progress review to ensure agreed actions have taken place. The more complex or serious a child or young person's situation, the more time it may take to understand what progress has been made. There will probably also be more agencies involved. Where there are concerns about a child or young person's safety, decisions to safeguard the child or young person may have to be made quickly pending greater understanding of the child or young person's circumstances.

The review is an ongoing process which will evaluate progress and highlight next steps, such as a different intervention, a specialist assessment or closing the case. It may require updates to the child/ young person's support plan.

As such, assessment, service delivery and review are iterative processes which will continue throughout work with the child/young person and the family.

This does not mean that assessments should be repeated unnecessarily, or that service delivery should be continued without any clear purpose or outcome. However, reviewing progress has an important role in preventing drift and keeping the child or young person's well-being central to the process.

The information you gather will also provide important monitoring data for identifying how the service is performing and evaluating its impact.

Click to access the complete guidance and forms for the [Common Assessment Framework](#)²⁵.

²⁵ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf/>

Being a lead professional

A lead professional is someone who takes a lead role in working with a child or young person with multiple additional needs who is involved with a range of practitioners. They act as a single point of contact, ensure that support is effectively delivered and reduce overlap and inconsistency in the work that is being done.

The lead professional is an important aspect of the Change for Children programme, which wants to ensure that children, young people and their families who have multiple needs achieve better outcomes and have a better experience of services through the provision of integrated support.

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, what skills and knowledge are required, and what managerial support is helpful, by clicking to go to the [lead professional²⁶](#) area of the website.

²⁶ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/leadprofessional/>

Working with people from other agencies

Multi-agency working is essentially about bringing together practitioners with a range of skills to work across their traditional service boundaries.

To help people understand more about the background and remits of others, our [Agency A to Z](#)²⁷ gives basic factual information on the roles and responsibilities of a wide range of agencies.

We also include case studies of a number of practitioners working in multi-agency settings, to find out what [multi-agency working](#) means to them²⁸. Or you can get advice about [working with universal services](#)²⁹ across health and education. These are key partners in the delivery of a preventive approach to improving outcomes for children and young people, and understanding their expectations and how they operate can make your work more effective.

You can use this information to support your staff development programme, for example as a starting point for thinking about some of the pressures and issues facing other agencies, or for exploring how the information here mirrors or differs from people's own experiences.

27 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/workingwithothers/agencyatoz/>

28 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/workingwithothers/whatitmeansforme/>

29 <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/multiagencyworking/workingwithothers/workingwithuniversalservices/>

Frequently asked questions

I get paid less than most other people in the multi-agency service I'm working with. It doesn't seem fair. Why don't we all get paid the same?

One of the challenges of bringing people from different backgrounds together is that, historically, professions have developed different qualifying routes and different rates of pay. Sometimes this reflects the length of time people have had to train for, or the level of skill they bring to particular situations. But this is not always the case and sometimes it can seem that you are doing the same work for different levels of pay.

There is not an easy short-term solution, but there are some things that can help. For example:

- Make sure that the things you are doing and learning are being recorded as part of your performance appraisal so that you maximise your own personal development.
- Speak to the manager/coordinator about how you feel. There may be opportunities to focus people's work more effectively according to their skills, and also for different staff to have the opportunity to 'cascade' their learning from different experiences or training programmes to colleagues.
- Find out what is going on in your home agency in response to the Government's commitment to develop a common standards and qualifications route for the [children's workforce](#)³⁰ which, over the longer term, should provide opportunities for moving up and across the workforce.

³⁰ <http://www.ecm.gov.uk/deliveringservices/workforcereform/childrensworkforcestrategy/>

I'm missing out on my continuing professional development (CPD) while I'm working in a multi-agency team. What should I do about it?

There are a few things you can do:

- Try to keep close links with your home agency. If you are on a secondment, you may still be able to access their training programmes. Even if you have been recruited into the new service, you still may be able to join in some training or networking meetings which can help keep your skills up to date.
- Draw up a personal development plan jointly with your line manager in the multi-agency service and your supervisor in your home agency (if you have one).
- Try to make sure that all the things you are learning and doing in the new service are recorded in your performance appraisal.
- Ask about the training being offered by other services and agencies and find out whether you could access this as a way of extending your repertoire and continuing your professional development.

I feel really cut off from my home agency even though I'm only on secondment for a year. What can I do about it?

This can be difficult, particularly when you are busy finding your feet in a new service. Keep in contact with your home agency as much as you can, both socially and professionally. Some suggestions include:

- Ask your team leader if it would be possible for regular meetings with your home agency, for example once a fortnight or each month. This could take the form of feedback at staff meetings to explain how your professional and personal skills are being used within the multi-agency service and the benefits of working in this particular way.
- Attend meetings, briefings and other events being held by your home agency to keep up to date with what is happening in your field.

- Keep in touch with colleagues informally, for example by arranging a regular lunch with them and going to other staff functions.
- Check whether your line management/supervision arrangements can be changed to help you to feel more in touch.
- Make sure that you are invited to all whole-service training and events and negotiate with your team leader how many of these you can attend in a given time period.
- There may be online networks where you can talk to people about what is happening.
- Find out how colleagues are keeping in touch with what is happening in their agencies.

OTHER QUESTIONS?

Please email us (**mail to:multi-agency.toolkit@dfes.gsi.gov.uk**) with other questions you have and we will try to find some solutions from colleagues who have been in similar situations, and post these on the site.