

Lead Professional

The introduction of the Lead Professional role is a central strand of the Change for Children programme. The information here is taken from [national guidance](#). It is intended to improve the coordination of multi agency activity following a common assessment, undertaken to improve outcomes for children with unmet needs. Implementing the role is aimed at reducing families' experience of repeated lengthy meetings, conflicting or confusing advice and uncertainty about who to approach for up to date information.

This should not be considered a new role, as in many cases practitioners are already fulfilling these functions. These are a minimum set of requirements which need to be carried out to deliver an effective coherent service to all children with additional needs requiring an integrated response. The role ensures that children, young people, parents/carers have access to a named practitioner who supports them in obtaining the help they need; problem solving if required and ensuring they receive the right help at the right time, delivered by the most appropriate agencies.

How to nominate the professional nominated

A lead professional is not required where children have no additional needs or where their needs require a response from just one practitioner/agency.

Where a common assessment *has* identified that a child has additional needs requiring an integrated response, a relevant practitioner from among those supporting the child is identified to carry out the role of the lead professional.

A lead professional can be any appropriate practitioner from any agency with their line manager's agreement, whether they are a trained CAF assessor or not.

The Lead professional will be nominated at the **Multi-Agency meeting** following a common assessment. A multi agency meeting is held to co-ordinate activity and facilitate support for a child/young person/family where more than one agency is working to meet similar or related needs.

The Lead professional should be chosen from amongst the group of practitioners working with the child, young person or family, through a process of discussion resulting in agreement between the family and the practitioners involved. The Lead Professional should be present at meeting unless it is explicitly agreed beforehand that they are willing to act as lead professional

When deciding who should be the lead professional the following criteria should be considered:

- The predominant needs of the child or family
- Which agency has main responsibility for addressing those needs
- Which practitioner has a previous or ongoing relationship with the child or young person

- If a specific professional have an ongoing responsibility to carry out such a role
- Who has the skills and knowledge to provide a coordinating role in relation to all the practitioners involved with this child
- Who has the ability to draw in and influence universal and specialist services
- Who has an understanding of the surrounding support systems available to manage and sustain the necessary multi agency work
- Who has capacity to take on this role

Where it is not clear who is best placed to take on the lead professional role, practitioners should discuss the situation with service managers in partner agencies to agree a strategic approach. Integrated Processes Coordinators (IPCs) can facilitate this process and offer support to engage senior managers through Children Leeds executive and its subgroups.

It is vital that lead professionals have access to professional supervision and management support, and where appropriate, additional training. This should enable them to acquire the appropriate knowledge skills and understanding needed for the role, including the ability to assess the needs of the child, their own skills to intervene, the need for additional support from other practitioners and the need for specialist referral.

In some cases a child's needs may be more complex and they may receive a specialist assessment through frameworks such as Asset, the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families, the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs or specialist mental health assessments. In these cases, statute or good practice requires that someone takes a lead role in linking up with other services and being a single point of contact for child and family. Where this is effective, this practitioner carries out the functions of the lead professional.

Examples include:

- named social worker for looked after children
- named social worker for child subject to child protection plan
- key worker for children with complex disabilities or complex health needs
- personal advisor or social worker for care leaver

There will be times when only two agencies working with the family identify the need for a Lead Professional. Discussions would then need to take place between the agencies and the family to agree who should be the Lead Professional.

Roles and responsibilities of the Lead Professional

A lead professional is not responsible for the work of other practitioners as identified in the multi-agency plan. They are only responsible for their own work in relation to the plan. They are not responsible for line management or supervision of other practitioners who have a responsibility for delivering services as part of the plan. Their role is one of coordination and advocacy which includes:

- Acting as a single point of contact for the child/young person/family
- Coordinating the delivery of agreed actions by the practitioners involved

- Reducing overlap and inconsistency in the services received

Examples of activities allocated to a lead professional following their nomination:

- Building a trusting relationship with the child and family to secure their engagement in the process and ensuring that they feel empowered and remain central to any decision making.
- Being a single point of contact for the family and for other practitioners identified on the CAF database.
- Coordinating the effective delivery of an agreed set of actions, which provide a solution focused package of support.
- Supporting the involvement of other services by making referrals and co-ordinating multi-agency meetings.
- Implementing an agreed process by which the multi-agency plan will be regularly reviewed and monitored, taking into account:
 - the changing circumstances and needs of the child over time
 - progress made towards the intended outcomes
 - the child, young person / families satisfaction with services
 - the views of other practitioners on the effectiveness of support provided
 - the need to adapt and amend the plan to take account of developments
 - the need to signpost to local services or refer to more specialist services
 - an appropriate exit strategy back to mainstream services
 - work taking place within an appropriate timescale
- Continuing to support the child or family, if more specialist services are involved.
- Supporting the child through key transition points encountered during an "episode".
- Ensuring a careful and planned "handover" to other agencies, or subsequently appointed lead professionals
- Ensuring the CAF Database is up-to-date with current activity

Support and development of the Lead Professional

Managers have the responsibility for identifying practitioners within their own agencies, services or teams, to undertake the lead professional role. They should ensure that practitioners already have or will acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding as well as the capacity within their workload to successfully carry out the role.

It is also important that they have personal and professional development opportunities in line with the requirements of the “**Common core of skills and knowledge for the children's workforce**”, to ensure they have the opportunity to develop the skills they need.

Core competencies include:

Effective Communication and Engagement with Children and Young People

- Develop strong communication skills, diplomacy and sensitivity.
- Establish positive, successful and trusting relationships.
- Empower children /families to make decisions and challenge when appropriate.
- Support and enable children and families to achieve their potential.

Child and Young Person Development

- Understand appropriate child development
- Recognise possible developmental delay
- Recognise the important role of play and recreation
- Interact with children in a way that supports their thinking and learning
- Behave in a way that is appropriate to the child's level of development

Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of the Child

- Understand the different forms of abuse, and their impact on child development
- Have awareness and knowledge of current legislation
- Have awareness and knowledge of local policies, procedures and practice guidance
- Be aware of own and their agency's roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and promoting welfare of children and young people
- Understand the implications of assessment in relation to risk and protective factors.
- Be able to discuss concerns with parents/carers and children and young people

Supporting Transitions

- Manage the process of transition in a timely way
- Ensure the timely transfer of transition information
- Be aware of the likely impact of transitions such as divorce, bereavement, puberty

Multi-agency Working

- Work effectively with practitioners from a range of services.
- Convene meetings and initiate discussions with relevant practitioners.
- Acquire knowledge of local and regional services.
- Understand own boundaries and skills.
- Have the confidence to challenge practice including one's own

Sharing Information

- Make good use of available information and be able to identify gaps
- Record, summarise, share and feed back information using IT when appropriate
- Understand the importance of and limits to confidentiality, including the application of policies and procedures around information sharing.

Clear and transparent systems should be developed and agreed at a strategic level in relation to the line management, accountability, professional support and dispute resolution and should be implemented across all agencies. It will be each Agency's responsibility to draw up their own Guidance in relation to how they support and

develop their own Lead Professionals. However, any guidance should relate directly to and support the **Children Leeds Interagency Practice Guidance for Practitioner Undertaking Common Assessments**.

Management and supervision should address:

- Clarify roles and responsibilities of the lead professional
- Promote good quality services to children, young people and families
- Provide a positive environment to discuss and review practice
- Share decision making and accountability
- Identify appropriate resources and support access to them
- Encourage and support continuous professional development
- Ensure participation and involvement of children young people and families
- Adhere to relevant policy and procedure, including data protection, equal opportunities, and child protection.

Monitoring and evaluation of Lead Professional role

Lead professionals should receive professional support, supervision and access to continuous professional development within their own agency. They will be accountable in the first instance to their own agency for their performance as a lead professional. The nature of multi agency working also requires agreed routes for all partners to escalate issues or concerns arising from joint working. This will, in the first instance, be individual practitioner's line managers. If issues remain unresolved they can be escalated via the wedge leadership teams.