Team Around the Child (TAC) and Common Assessment Framework (CAF) guidance

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Author Laura Corben
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Overview

As of 1 October 2006, the Children’s Workforce Development Council (CWDC) took over responsibility from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), now the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), for developing toolkits and guidance that supports the implementation of integrated working. The CWDC covers information sharing, the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the role of the lead professional and multi-agency working. The policy for integrated working is still covered by the DCSF. The three guidance documents highlighted in this policy briefing were originally published by the DfES in 2006 and reprinted in September 2007. The CWDC have updated this earlier guidance to reflect policy developments and include revisions identified in consultation with practitioners and managers across the children and young people’s workforce.

The guidance covered in this briefing and the previous DfES guidance they have replaced includes:

- **The Team Around the Child (TAC) and the lead professional: Co-ordinating and delivering integrated services for children and young people** has replaced ‘The lead professional: managers’ guide’. It provides guidance for strategic and operational managers on the lead professionals’ functions and the team around the child (TAC).
- **Early identification, assessment of needs and intervention** has replaced the ‘Common Assessment Framework for children and young people: managers’ guide’ and provides guidance for managers on the CAF.
- **Early identification, assessment of needs and intervention** has replaced the ‘Common Assessment Framework for children and young people: practitioners’ guide’ and provides guidance for practitioners on the CAF.

Briefing in full

Background – the CAF and the Lead Professional at a glance

The common assessment framework (CAF) for children and young people is one element of integrated frontline service delivery. The CAF is a standardised multi-agency approach to assessing children’s and young people’s additional needs for services and planning how these needs are best met through early identification and support. All local authorities (LAs) and other relevant partners have to take account of the CAF as outlined by the statutory guidance of sections 10 and 11 of the **Children Act 2004**. Every practitioner in the children and young people’s workforce should know about the CAF and how to undertake one. Every manager offering services to children and young people should ensure that at least some of their staff are able to carry out a common assessment. The CAF can be used in conjunction with universal checks and specialist assessments that still remain in place after the introduction of the CAF.

https://member.lgiu.org.uk/csn/briefings/2009/Pages/200900392.aspx 18/01/2010
A common assessment is completed in four stages:

- identifying needs early (pre-assessment checklist)
- assessing those needs (undertake common assessment)
- delivering integrated services that address those needs (act on result)
- reviewing progress (delivery plan and review form).

The lead professional contributes to the integrated delivery of frontline services to children, young people and families. One practitioner must take the lead when more than one agency is delivering services to a target group of children and young people that have additional and complex needs. The lead practitioner ensures that meetings between all concerned practitioners are held and that service delivery is integrated, consistent and achieving all intended outcomes.

The lead professional has three core functions to carry out:

- act as a single point of contact for the child, young person or family
- co-ordinate the delivery of agreed actions
- reduce overlap and inconsistency in the services delivered.

**The ‘TAC and the lead professional: Co-ordinating and delivering integrated services for children and young people’ updated guidance for managers**

**The lead professional and integrated working**

Integrated working of the children and young people’s workforce underpins the successful delivery of frontline services. Integrated working is not a new concept but new tools have been developed to facilitate integration more fully across the children and young people’s workforce. The journey a practitioner may follow when putting early intervention support into place can be broken down into six stages. In the first stage, the practitioner uses integrated tools and processes to identify and assess the needs and put in place support for practitioners working together to tackle those needs as early as possible. The second and third stages involve using the CAF to assess what the family and services can do jointly to address the needs of the child or young person. The fourth stage arises when a multi-agency response is required. This occurrence requires that a TAC is formed and brings together practitioners with different skills and knowledge. During the fifth stage the practitioner that undertakes the common assessment must convene the first TAC meeting where a lead professional will be agreed. The lead professional will then be the main point of contact for all involved. The final stage of the integrated working process involves reviewing the progress of the common assessment and the service delivery plan. This will call for further multi-agency and TAC member meetings.

IT tools, ContactPoint and National eCAF, are being introduced to support the need for more extensive and effective information sharing. ContactPoint is a contact list of those working with children and young people. It allows practitioners to see who else is working with the same child or young person. The National eCAF will be a national system that allows practitioners to electronically create, store and share CAF information securely. This will improve both geographical and organisational information sharing. This single national system will generate a consistent working approach for all practitioners. It is proposed that eCAF will feed into ContactPoint to ensure that common assessments are not duplicated.
The updated guidance identifies five core principles that managers should focus on when ensuring successful implementation of the lead professional role and integrated working. These principles include:

- **Building commitment and ownership** – All professionals need to understand and embrace the lead professional role and TAC process. Lead professional functions should be incorporated into job descriptions and be seen as a way of working rather than just being another task to carry out.

- **Developing structures for service delivery** – Developing CAF and lead professional centred service models that deliver early intervention support. No one model is correct, local areas are expected to develop various models that are tailored to the needs of the local population.

- **Clarifying lines of accountability** – Each lead professional is accountable to their home agency; they are not responsible for the delivery of services from other agencies. A clear line of accountability for lead professionals will run from the practitioner, through line management in their home agency, through co-ordinated arrangements in the Children’s Trust, and ultimately to the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) on behalf of the local authority.

- **Developing a robust management framework and infrastructure** – At strategic level, robust management structures consist of; a multi-agency steering group which controls resources; a review of lead professional implementation and protocols developed for TAC and lead professional working. At operational level, effective management structures are needed to open channels of communication and ensure staff development through joint training.

- **Developing support structures for the lead professional** – Many practitioners stated that they felt they lacked the skills, experience and confidence needed to carry out the functions of a lead professional. A combination of effective management structures, increased joint agency training and greater commitment from senior management to monitor and address workload issues should address these worries.

The ‘Early identification, assessment of needs and intervention’ updated guidance for managers

Managers need to have knowledge of the CAF and a clear understanding of how the CAF is embedded into varying services offered to children, young people and their families. The guidance emphasises that successful integrated working is underpinned by Information sharing, the Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the children and young people’s workforce framework, the Championing Children framework, multi-agency working and the CWDC Share! framework.

**Lessons learnt for effective management of integrated working – roles and responsibilities of managers**

Managers are expected to:

- lead from the front by offering clear leadership for CAF implementation
- provide effective supervision of staff by providing guidance on well structured line management supervision in integrated settings
- establish or provide access to CAF co-ordinators so that practitioners can get extra guidance and support
- encourage and develop the skills of practitioners to broaden their knowledge of local service provision and to increase confidence in undertaking their role(s)
• develop a common vision and shared aims for integrated working. They should emphasise the benefits of a joined up approach to service provision
• emphasise the importance of changing ways of working rather than just giving practitioners a different workload to deal with.

Developing an effective local operational system

Managers need to ensure that the following structures are in place:

• a clear local delivery model for CAF implementation
• a designated CAF co-ordinator (or system of co-ordination)
• locality based CAF delivery/implementation teams
• clear regular processes for practitioners to review needs, outcomes and progress
• account taken of the workload demands
• effective consultation processes with children, young people and families about the way the CAF is carried out.

Operational managers should meet up with each of their practitioners and discuss what their role will be in relation to the CAF, what training they will need to fulfil their role and how/when they will receive this appropriate training. In the beginning stages of CAF implementation, practitioners may feel that the process is an extra burden on their shoulders. Managers will need to provide extra supervision and support for their staff to ease the transition into regularly undertaking CAFs. A useful tool for accomplishing this may be introducing a mentoring scheme where practitioners that are more experienced with using CAF could ‘buddy up’ with those practitioners struggling to adapt to the new process. Managers should also ensure that practitioners are aware of how to use ContactPoint to assess whether a common assessment for a particular child or young person is up to date and has not been duplicated. Practitioners must also be able to use ContactPoint to find out whether other practitioners are working with the same child or young person and to successfully store and share CAF information with these other practitioners.

Managers should ensure that the practitioners that need to carry out a common assessment have the necessary skills and knowledge to do so. Practitioners should have CAF specific training available to them. Managers should also consider their own training needs. The Championing Children – Skills and knowledge for managers of integrated services framework establishes a shared set of skills, knowledge and behaviours for those managing and leading integrated children’s services. It highlights the particular abilities required by leaders.

The ‘Early identification, assessment of needs and intervention’ updated guidance for practitioners

The common assessment is a generic and holistic assessment that can be carried out by any practitioner or manager. It is used to gain a wider picture of a child’s or young person’s needs at an early stage and uses integrated working between practitioners to provide a more targeted support service for the child or young person and their family. The specialist assessment is usually carried out by people from a particular occupational or professional group. This assessment has a more specific purpose of determining whether a child or young person is a ‘child in need’, whether the child or young person, or their family require services or whether there is a risk of the child or young person offending.
Using a CAF to inform a specialist assessment – questions to ask:

- **Collecting information from the CAF** – Is any information in the CAF new to me? Do I need to seek further clarification/information? Do I understand the limits to any consent to share the information?

- **Analysing information from the CAF** – What does the CAF add to my understanding of the child or young person’s circumstances? What strengths does the CAF identify that could help the child or young person to address their current issues/difficulties? How will this information help me to better respond to the child or young person?

- **Recording information from the CAF** – Which sections of my assessment does the CAF information relate to? What is the best way of linking the information of the CAF with my assessment?

**Information sharing, consent and confidentiality**

The CAF aims to enable and support good practice in information sharing as part of preventative services. As part of this, all sharing and storing of information should be done lawfully and comply with the *Data Protection Act 1998*. The National eCAF will enable completed CAF information to be stored securely and shared with practitioners. Information shared outside of the National eCAF system needs to be shared securely. The CAF is a voluntary assessment process and, as such, a child or young person and/or their parent/carer must give their consent at the start of the process in the full knowledge of what will happen to this information. Once the assessment has been started their consent must be given again with regards to the information being stored or shared with other services. A child above 12 years of age is generally thought to have enough understanding to give their consent or refusal to sharing information. Consent should still be considered on a case-by-case basis. Where parental consent is required, one parent’s consent is sufficient. Confidential information should only be recorded on the CAF form if the child or young person, or parent/carer explicitly agrees to this. However, all information should be stored in the practitioner’s confidential case records. In some circumstances sharing confidential information without consent is permitted. These are:

- where there is evidence that the child or young person is suffering, or is at risk of significant harm
- where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or young person may be at risk of significant harm
- to prevent significant harm arising to children and young people, or serious harm to adults, including through the prevention, detection and prosecution of serious crime.

**Comment**

The updated guidance is important for anyone engaged in the delivery of integrated services for children and young people. The tools of integrated working are at the heart of the Every Child Matters Change for Children Programme. Nevertheless we know that the implementation of earlier guidance in this area has been patchy with some local authorities and their partners doing better than others. Delays with the implementation of eCAF have not helped this situation. Local authority children’s services should promote and implement this guidance to promote better working together to improve services for children. Results of serious case reviews up and down the country have shown that when it comes to safeguarding, better information sharing is still required. This coupled with the
current economic situation and the likelihood of 10 percent cuts in public services provides the children’s workforce with an incentive to not lose its nerve. We need to keep going and make sure that integrated working doesn’t become an easy target for cuts in services so that the real benefits of joint working can be realised and outcomes for children and young people are really improved.

External links

The TAC and Lead Professional guide
  The CAF guide for managers
  The CAF guide for practitioners

Downloads

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