

the lead professional role and schools Fact sheet



The lead professional is a key element of integrated support. It is an important role that enables an individual to take the lead to co-ordinate provision and act as a single point of contact for a child and their family when a range of services are involved and an integrated response is required.

Understanding the lead professional role

All children and young people who require integrated support from more than one practitioner should experience a seamless and effective service. This is delivered most effectively when one practitioner – a lead professional – ensures that front-line services are co-ordinated, coherent and achieving intended outcomes.

When putting together a package of support for a particular child and their family, representatives from the various agencies involved will agree who would be the most appropriate to act as lead professional. This will typically be as a result of using the Common Assessment Framework.

The lead professional may be based in any occupation within the children's workforce, depending on the issues involved and the individual relationship with the child.

The role of a lead professional

The lead professional is not a new role, but a set of core functions which help deliver effective integrated support. The lead professional will:

- act as a single point of contact for the child or family
- co-ordinate the delivery of the actions agreed by the practitioners involved
- reduce overlap and inconsistency in the services offered to families.

A lead professional will be required to carry out a number of tasks which might include:

- building a trusting relationship with the child and family or other carers, to secure their involvement in the process
- being the single point of contact for the family and a sounding board for them to ask questions and discuss concerns
- being the single point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering services to the child
- co-ordinating the effective delivery of a package of 'solution-focused' actions and establishing a process by which this will be reviewed regularly.

The lead professional and schools

The circumstances of each child or young person's case will determine who the most appropriate person is to take on the role of the lead professional. It may be appropriate for a member of school staff to be the lead professional, particularly if they have built a close, personal relationship with a child whose additional needs are substantially educational. The lead professional could be anyone on the school staff. School-based staff who have commonly taken on the role are special education needs co-ordinators (or teaching assistants supporting the SENCO) and education welfare officers. There are also occasions when learning mentors, school nurses, teachers and head teachers have acted as a lead professional.

Any member of staff taking on the lead professional role will naturally need strongly developed communication skills.

If the child is young or developmentally young, they are likely to need skills around:

- communicating with the child using forms of communication appropriate to their age and level of understanding
- engaging parents and carers
- understanding key transition points in a child's life, for example moving into the next key stage at school.

If they are working with young people, school staff will draw on their skills of:

- gaining their trust and respect
- being able to challenge the young person when necessary and helping them move on in their thinking
- ensuring an effective transition to adult services if necessary.

Benefits for the child, young person or school

School staff have reported a number of benefits from being a lead professional.

- The role has helped them to access services for the child or young person in a swift and timely manner, thus allowing intervention before problems escalate.
- Many have welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with the child's parents or carers in a different way.
- They have been able to develop valuable skills for their own career development.

Working with lead professionals who are not members of the school staff

It is important that all members of the school staff have a good understanding of the lead professional role and know which children and young people in their school are receiving multi-agency support at any one time.

As the lead professional provides the single point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering services to the child, it is important school staff are able to maintain clear communication with the lead professional regardless of whether they are based in the school or not.

Line management and supervision

Managers of lead professionals benefit from being fully aware of the lead professional functions and the time and workload commitment. Lead professionals will need supervision and their training needs should be supported. Training should be accessed through your local authority via the workforce lead.

Some practical considerations

One of the factors to be taken into account when agreeing the lead professional role will be any administrative support that might be needed in a particular case. This may be provided within the lead professional's home agency, or from support provided elsewhere within the multi-agency team.

Another factor to take into account is the availability of the lead professional. For example, a school-based lead professional is not available in school holidays and should plan ahead with other agencies to ensure that there is formally agreed 'cover' to support the family.

For more information about the lead professional role and integrated working, visit the Children's Workforce Development Council website:
www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/lead-professional
or the Every Child Matters website:
www.ecm.gov.uk/delivering-services/lead-professional