

ContactPoint Explained

A new online directory, set to go live across England from the end of 2008, aims to help and support the kind of cross-sector working that's at the heart of the vision for children's services. But how will it work?

Every Child Matters

Effective communication and appropriate sharing of information is crucial to ensure children and young people get the best services possible. These principles are at the heart of the Children's Plan, which builds on the aims set out in Every Child Matters, to improve the lives of all children and young people. However, simply trying to find out if anyone else is involved and how to reach them can be hugely time-consuming.

This is where ContactPoint will help. Currently in development, this online directory will provide a quick way to find out who else is working with the same child or young person.

Why we need ContactPoint

- ContactPoint will help save time and prevent duplication of work, so that practitioners can respond quickly and appropriately to a child's needs.
- It will help to reduce the number of repeat assessments and referrals, which can be distressing for a child and their family.
- As a national system, ContactPoint will help to ensure continuity of service delivery for children and young people who access services in, or move between, different local authority areas.
- It will also help to identify children missing education.
- The expected benefits have been demonstrated by local authority 'Trailblazer' areas who piloted local systems (known as indexes).

ContactPoint will only hold the following information:

- Name, contact details, gender, date of birth and an identifying number for every child or young person in England up to their 18th birthday.
- Name and contact details for each child's:
 - Parents / carers;
 - Education setting (e.g. school) and health provider (e.g. GP);
 - Other services (e.g. social worker, youth worker); and
 - Lead professional (where appointed).
- Indicator that a CAF has been undertaken, and contact details for the CAF 'holder'.

"Our local system (LISA) has demonstrated what we can do to help the children we're working with. It has made it easier to coordinate meetings and we've seen people work together more frequently. By doing so we're able to nip any potential issues in the bud early on.*

It has highlighted the limitations of trying to do everything as individual organisations - GPs investigating the case on their own, then teachers doing the same thing. And we've experienced a growing understanding of how different professionals work.

The children and families we've worked with think LISA has had a positive effect across the school and they feel that something is being done to help them. It's vital to them that practitioners are working with each other as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Matthew Britt, Headteacher, St Mary's Primary School, Lewisham (Trailblazer area)

*Lewisham Information Sharing and Assessment

What does it mean for local government?

Local authorities are key to the vision for children's services, which places families at the centre of integrated services that put their needs first. Translating this into structural and cultural change is no small challenge. New tools and processes are being introduced to support those working on the frontline and also at a strategic level to help ensure that resources can be targeted even more effectively. Children, young people and families are already seeing the benefits.

ContactPoint will enable practitioners to find out quickly if a child is receiving support from other agencies, helping to ensure work is not duplicated. It will also help to ensure that children do not get 'lost' when they move between areas. Additionally, it will provide management information to aid service planning and will help local authorities meet their duty to identify and support children missing education.

Practitioners working with children and young people across education, health, social care, justice and the voluntary and community sector will need access to ContactPoint.

✗ ContactPoint will NOT hold any case information about a child or young person (such as case notes, school records or medical notes).

✓ Every child in England will be on ContactPoint to ensure they receive support as early as possible if and when they need it.



Security is vital

Assessments and rigorous testing of ContactPoint has and will continue to be undertaken by independent security experts throughout development. ContactPoint will not go live until it has passed these tests.

Before being given access, each and every user MUST:

- have security clearance (including enhanced CRB);
- have completed mandatory training; and
- have a user name, a password, a PIN and a security token.

So how will it work?

- ContactPoint has been designed to fit conveniently into a practitioner's daily work and not impose additional burdens.
- It will support other measures being introduced across children's services (such as the Common Assessment Framework and the lead professional role).
- Where possible it will be updated automatically from existing systems (national and local) so that information only has to be entered once.
- Authorised users will be able to access ContactPoint through their existing case management system, a secure weblink, or another authorised user (e.g. if they do not have access to a computer).
- A wide range of organisations, practitioners and children, young people and families have been and continue to be involved in all aspects of ContactPoint's development, to ensure that it is a practical, effective tool.

What happens next?

The development of ContactPoint is being led by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), working in partnership with local authorities. Every local authority in England is legally required to implement ContactPoint, which includes managing the data of children resident in their area, and setting up and training users.

Work continues nationally and locally with a range of organisations and individuals on all aspects of ContactPoint, from design and policy, through to guidance and training. The system is being built now and will be rolled-out from late 2008, starting in the north west and two national children's charities.

"I use our local index at least once a day. It makes my job much easier and more enjoyable as it reduces excess admin work. This means I have more time to dedicate to a child and their family. I've found that the families I work with are very positive as they can see activity being carried out on a reduced timescale and with less hassle.

In one particular example, I was given a referral of a child in need. Once the parent's permission was granted, I was able to contact all of the practitioners involved in the child's case by simply looking on our index. A multi-agency meeting was organised quickly and easily. We were able to assess the child's situation and agree the appropriate course of action to take, which resulted in a drastic improvement in the child's situation."

Annele Nel, Social Worker, East Sussex (Trailblazer area)

Want more information?

Visit the Every Child Matters website www.everychildmatters.gov.uk for further information on:

ContactPoint Information Sharing Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and lead professional

Also visit the Children's Workforce Development Council website at: www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

www.everychildmatters.gov.uk