

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).

"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 schools?

More than ever, schools are at the heart of their communities and a crucial part of the vision for children's services. In order to carry out this role as effectively as possible, it's important that a practitioner can quickly find out if a child is already receiving support from other agencies.

Practitioners working with children and young people across education, health, social care, youth offending and the voluntary and community sector will need access to ContactPoint. The key people in schools are likely to be education welfare officers, headteachers, deputy headteachers, school nurses and those with pastoral responsibilities.

Trailblazers found that in a primary school, only one or two members of staff needed access; in secondary schools, the number was slightly higher, reflecting the higher student population.



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 system is being built now and will be rolled-out from late 2008, starting in the north west and two national children's charities.

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. Local authorities will be contacting your organisation to identify the practitioners who need to have access to ContactPoint.

"I work with a lot of schools and families, so our local system has been invaluable in finding out who, if anyone, is working with a child, and in what role. Previously, families could have had different services asking them the same questions over and over, which can be very distressing for them. It's now so much easier to call a multi-agency meeting and decide who are the most appropriate people to work with a child. This has helped to reduce duplication, which is a huge benefit to families and practitioners.

I was worried about using it at first. I thought it would be time consuming and hard to use, but the reality has been the complete opposite. It fits in with everything else we're doing and it's definitely freeing up time. It's helping us to provide a better response to children's needs."

Julie Townend, a Senior Inclusion Officer, works with secondary and primary schools in Sheffield (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

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'.

✗ ContactPoint will NOT hold any case information about a child or young person (such as 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.