



Every Child Matters
Change For Children

E-enablement of the Common Assessment Framework (eCAF):

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers: Release 1

January 2008

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

1. What is the ECM Programme?

The Every Child Matters (ECM) Programme sets out the national framework for local change programmes to build services around the needs of children and young people in an effort to maximise opportunities and minimise risks. The services that reach every child and young person have a crucial role to play in shifting the focus from dealing with the consequences of difficulties in children's lives to preventing things from going wrong in the first place. The transformation can only be achieved through local leaders working together in strong partnership with local communities on a programme of change.

The ECM Programme aims to integrate services with agencies working across professional boundaries and to co-ordinate support around the needs of children and young people. In addition, common processes and language should be used, focusing on early intervention in an effort to provide better support to parents and families.

2. What is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF)?

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) for children and young people is a standardised approach to conducting an assessment of a child's additional needs. CAF is a key part of delivering frontline services that are integrated and focused around the needs of children and young people. It can be used by practitioners across children's services in England.

The CAF has been designed to help practitioners assess needs at an earlier stage and then work with families, alongside other practitioners and agencies, to meet them.

The CAF consists of:

- A common process to enable practitioners to undertake a common assessment and then act on the result

More information regarding CAF can be found on the following websites:
www.cwdcouncil.org.uk/projects/commonassessmentframework.htm
<http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/caf/>

3. What is the national eCAF system?

On the 25th July 2007, the Government announced that it would provide assistance to front-line professionals in children's services by implementing a single national IT system to support the Common Assessment Framework. The national eCAF system is the e-enablement of this framework.

The current DCSF CAF Form is not the most appropriate mechanism for practitioners to access and share data quickly and easily. The national eCAF system will allow a practitioner to electronically create, store and share a CAF securely.

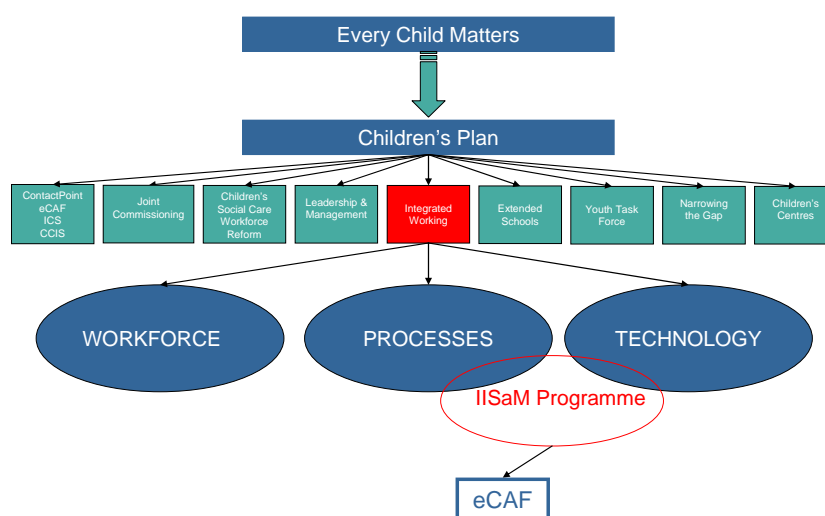
The national eCAF system will give practitioners from different sectors appropriate access (following explicit consent) to key information concerning the assessment to allow them to participate in the delivery of the most appropriate services.

4. How does the eCAF project fit into the wider Integrated Working agenda?

Both CAF and the eCAF project are core components of the Government's Integrated Working agenda, which is an initiative under the ECM programme. The eCAF project is currently being managed under the Improving Information Sharing and Management (IISaM) programme.

The IISaM Programme will enable the alignment of delivery across the technological and process components of Integrated Working and includes the following projects: Information Sharing, eCAF, ContactPoint, the Integrated Children's System (ICS) and the Client Caseload Information System (CCIS).

The diagram below shows the links described above:



A communication with this information was sent to the Local Authorities and National Partners at the end of 2007.

5. What are the links between eCAF and ContactPoint?

eCAF and ContactPoint are both intended to support improved integrated working in children's services, but they are both separate systems which exist for different and specific purposes.

It is the intention that, in the future, when a common assessment has been logged in the eCAF system, it will automatically notify ContactPoint that a common assessment has been carried out, along with contact details for the practitioner who completed or updated it. There will be no access to the CAF itself via ContactPoint.

ContactPoint will display the contact details so that another practitioner looking up the child will discover immediately whether a common assessment has already been carried out and, if it has, who to contact regarding the assessment. This will speed up communications, avoid duplication and facilitate contact between practitioners across a range of organisational and geographical boundaries.

6. Why was a national eCAF system chosen over the implementation of local eCAF models?

After completing a detailed eCAF Business Case, it was agreed that a single, nationally run eCAF solution represented the best available option. This recommendation was reached after a comprehensive analysis of eight options covering variants of devolved responsibility and a central approach. Key reasons for choosing the national eCAF system over the implementation of local eCAF models were as follows:

- A single national eCAF system will meet the needs of CAF most effectively by removing the complexities of cross-border working and promoting a consistent working approach between all practitioners.
- It will provide an overarching layer, supporting practitioners working in different agencies and locations to deliver a coordinated service effectively and efficiently.
- It avoids the danger of diversification of local eCAF systems and the associated problems of different implementation timetables and cross-system compatibility. This best supports the single, standard national CAF process.

7. What are the benefits of a national eCAF system?

The national eCAF system will provide a number of organisational, practitioner and children's benefits.

From an organisational perspective:

- The national eCAF system will facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of a coordinated service
- The national eCAF system will promote multi-agency and cross-border working and early interventions
- The costs of design, build, hosting and software are covered by the DCSF – Local Authorities and Partners will make substantial cost savings when moving from local systems to the national eCAF system
- CAF (supported by the national eCAF system) will also help organisations involved in the delivery of children's services, to meet their statutory duties under Section's 10 and 11 of the Children Act, 2004.

From a practitioner perspective, eCAF will:

- Facilitate cross-border working
- Increase the transparency of work performed by other agencies
- Free up practitioner time by implementing a consistent approach and more efficient working practices.

From a child's perspective, eCAF will:

- Reduce the need for multiple assessments
- Create a holistic view of the their needs
- Encourage early identification and response to their needs.

8. Will the use of the national eCAF system be compulsory?

No, the use of the national eCAF system is not mandatory. However, Local Authorities and other organisations working with children are strongly encouraged to adopt the national eCAF system due to the significant proposed benefits – particularly the removal of organisational and geographical barriers.

9. Who will be the primary users of the national eCAF system?

It is anticipated that the majority of common assessments will be undertaken or arranged by practitioners in universal services such as *early year's settings* (e.g. children's centres), schools and health settings. These services are best equipped to identify possible children's needs in their early stages. Therefore, it is likely that these practitioners will be the primary users of the national eCAF system.

Access to the national eCAF system will only be granted to authorised users who have undergone appropriate checks, including those provided by the Criminal Records Bureau. In addition, these users will be required to undergo training prior to the use of the national eCAF system and will need to be in possession of the necessary security hardware token.

10. How much will it cost to implement eCAF?

At a national level, one-off implementation costs are estimated to be £44.5 million over the next 6 financial years – this includes funding to rollout the system nationally and to ensure that practitioners are trained to use the system.

Operating costs thereafter are estimated to be £6.4 million per year. Both set-up and running costs will be funded by central Government.

The availability of direct funding to Local Authorities for implementation will become clearer once a supplier for the national eCAF system has been chosen.

11. When will the national eCAF system be available?

The eCAF Project Team is working to the following proposed delivery dates (as outlined by the eCAF timeline below):

- Aim to sign a contract with a supplier for a national eCAF system by the end of autumn 2008
- Development and testing of the system is expected to take approximately a year
- Aim to start implementation of the national eCAF system in 2009

12. What should we do in the interim period while waiting for the national eCAF system?

Prior to the implementation of the national eCAF system, organisations should continue to follow the current published CAF guidance (available on the CWDC website) in conjunction with the *Interim eCAF Guidance Document* which is due to be published in early 2008.

Those organisations under pressure to implement an electronic system could consider renting an interim eCAF solution until the national eCAF system becomes available. If this is the case, contract lengths should be set with local eCAF suppliers that support longer term plans – for example, 2 – 3 years at most.

It is important that all local eCAF systems adhere to a set of nationally consistent eCAF standards. This will facilitate migration to the national eCAF system. These standards are currently under revision and will be made available as soon as possible.

13. We already own an eCAF system. Should we adopt the national eCAF system?

The benefits of the national eCAF system will increase as more organisations use it and we would therefore encourage all organisations who have implemented local eCAF solutions to migrate to the national eCAF system.

Functionality will be provided as part of the national eCAF system to aid the migration for authorities with existing CAFs. You will find that you will benefit financially by being able to decommission your local solution. You will also find that operationally, your practitioners will find it easier to manage common assessments that cross geographical and organisational boundaries.

14. We want to develop / buy our own eCAF system – what are the implications if we decide to go down this route?

From a financial point of view, your organisation will be responsible for funding all aspects of the implementation of your local eCAF system.

Operationally, practitioners in your authority, neighbouring authorities and partner organisations will potentially find it harder to co-operate in cases where a child's additional needs are met across organisational and geographic boundaries.

15. What security measures have been put in place to ensure the appropriate and secure use of the national eCAF system?

Security measures are a fundamental component of the national eCAF system design. The key security aspects regarding the national eCAF system are outlined below:

- Access to the national eCAF system will be granted only to authorised users who have undergone appropriate checks, including those provided by the Criminal Records Bureau.
- Access to the system will also be controlled by two forms of authentication: a password and a one-time-code generated by a security hardware token which itself is protected by a PIN number.
- System administrators will be subject to the very strict controls and protocols required to operate a level 3 secure system (as per the standards set out in the eEnvoy's eGovernment Security Framework).

Practitioners will only be given access to the details of children they are working with following the informed, explicit consent of the child or young person (or their parent / carer where appropriate).

Without appropriate consent and agreement to continue, a common assessment should not

be carried out and nothing should be stored on the national eCAF system

16. Who can look at a common assessment for a particular child?

Practitioners will only be given access to the assessment information of children they are working with following the informed, explicit consent of the child or young person (or their parent / carer where appropriate). Without appropriate consent and agreement to continue, a common assessment should not be carried out and nothing should be stored on the national eCAF system.

17. Who will own the data on the national eCAF system?

The eCAF Project Team has adopted the following recommendation from the Information Commissioners Office regarding the ownership of data: In the context of the Data Protection Act (1998), each organisation involved in a common assessment will be a 'data controller in common' which means that they each have a responsibility for the accuracy of the data that they have added to the common assessment.

The Department (DCSF) will also act as a data controller in common, thereby allowing the Department to provide input to the policy of what information should be held in a common assessment.

18. Have the views of practitioners been taken into account when designing the eCAF system?

Yes, practitioner input is vital to ensuring the successful design of the eCAF system. From the outset, practitioners were involved in the original design and procedures of the Common Assessment Framework and made recommendations for appropriate IT support. Practitioners will have ongoing involvement and opportunities to contribute to the system design during the detailed design phase.

With this in mind, the national eCAF system User Group was established to bring together key stakeholders from across the eCAF user base. The primary responsibilities of this group are to:

- effectively address the eCAF requirements,
- provide insight from their own agency or sector, as well as giving full consideration to the needs of the wider eCAF audience,
- ensure that the delivered system builds upon the experience gained from the current use of CAF and other local eCAF system experience,
- ensure that the project remains aligned and contributes to the overall aims and objectives of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme.

19. How will the supplier of the national eCAF system be chosen?

Commissioning for the national eCAF system will be subject to impartial tender, in accordance with the normal departmental tendering process. We expect to invite suppliers to tender for the work in 2008.

20. Where can I find out more information about the national eCAF system?

Communications will happen at a national and local level through a number of dedicated channels. This will include direct engagement through meetings and events, and also articles in relevant trade and specialist channels.

The ECM website (www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/caf/ecaf/) will be updated regularly to provide information to a wider audience. LARA, a web-based readiness assessment tool, will be used as a key communications channel to provide regular updates to Local Authorities and partner organisations.

The eCAF Project Team can also be contacted directly via the email address: eCAF.admin@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk.