

ContactPoint Q& A August 2008

What is ContactPoint¹?

ContactPoint will be the quick way to find out who else is working with the same child or young person, making it easier to deliver more coordinated support. This basic online directory will be available to authorised practitioners who need it to do their jobs. It is a key part of the Every Child Matters programme to improve outcomes for children.

What information will be held on ContactPoint?

ContactPoint will only contain the following basic information:

- Name, address, gender, date of birth and an identifying number of all children in England (up to their 18th birthday).
- Name and contact details for:
 - parents or carers
 - educational setting (e.g. school)
 - primary medical practitioner (e.g. GP practice)
 - other services.

There will also be the facility to indicate if a practitioner is a lead professional* for a child and/or if he/she has completed an assessment under the Common Assessment Framework* (the assessment itself will not be held on ContactPoint).

The information that can be held on ContactPoint is set out in law - Section 12 of the Children Act 2004 and the supporting Regulations specify what information can be held on ContactPoint.

Will ContactPoint have medical histories, exam results etc on it?

No. ContactPoint cannot hold any case information. It will not contain any information such as case notes or details of any assessments, medical data or exam results. It will not hold subjective observations about a child or their family.

Section 12 of the Children Act 2004 and the supporting Regulations specifically prohibit the inclusion of any case information. ContactPoint can only hold the information specified in Regulations.

Why do we need ContactPoint; what are the benefits?

Providing a quick way for practitioners to find out who else is working with the same child will provide key benefits such as:

- Improved service experience for children, young people and families through more coordinated service delivery, more timely response to their needs and reduced number of unnecessary repeat assessments and referrals.
- Faster and more effective intervention before problems become serious because practitioners can build a fuller picture of children and young people's needs.
- Less unproductive time spent by practitioners trying to find out which other

¹ ContactPoint was previously known by the working title of the 'Information Sharing Index'.

* Fact sheets and further information on these and other elements of Every Child Matters are available from www.ecm.gov.uk

services are involved with a child and then trying to contact the right person. This is conservatively estimated to be worth five million practitioner hours a year. This means that practitioners can spend more time working directly with children and young people.

- As ContactPoint will be national, it will also benefit children and young people who access services in different local authority areas or move between areas.

These benefits have been drawn from the experiences of the 'Trailblazer'^{*} local authorities and consultations with frontline practitioners and children, young people and families.

The need for appropriate information sharing[†] and holistic working that is focused around the needs of a child is clear. ContactPoint will build on existing good practice, helping to ensure all children receive the services and support to which they are entitled – this is a key aim of the Every Child Matters agenda.

Who will use ContactPoint?

Access to ContactPoint will be strictly limited to those who need it as part of their work and subject to stringent security controls. Authorised users will include those working in health, education, youth justice, social care and voluntary organisations to help ensure more coordinated service provision for children and young people.

Everyone with access will have completed relevant mandatory training, have security clearance (including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure) and have a user name, a password, a PIN and a security token to access ContactPoint.

All users will be made aware that all use of ContactPoint will be closely monitored and that misuse will result in disciplinary action or criminal procedures.

How will ContactPoint affect existing rules about confidentiality and information sharing?

ContactPoint will not change any rules governing confidentiality or sharing information when practitioners discuss a child's needs. Everyone who works with children and young people should ensure that they follow established guidelines on information sharing and exercise professional judgement.

'Information Sharing: Practitioners' guide' was published in April 2006 to provide clear, comprehensive guidance to practitioners across agencies on how to appropriately share information within the existing legal framework.

Training for ContactPoint users will include the importance of compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Human Rights Act 1998 and the appropriate use of the system. ContactPoint users should also undertake additional relevant training such as information sharing more generally.

How will you be certain that ContactPoint will be secure? How will you ensure it is not misused?

Security is of paramount importance in the development of ContactPoint. A number of measures will be in place to ensure security:

- ContactPoint security has been audited and approved, at all stages, by relevant security bodies. All data supplied to ContactPoint will be strongly encrypted and extensive measures are being taken to ensure that the data will be transmitted securely.
- Assessments and rigorous testing has been, and will continue to be, undertaken by independent security experts during build and before the

system goes live. ContactPoint will not go live until it has passed these tests. Auditing will continue during operation.

- Access will be limited to those who need it as part of their work. Everyone with access will be subject to stringent security checks including enhanced Criminal Records Bureau disclosure, and all users will need a user name, a password, a PIN and a security token to access ContactPoint. The vast majority of users will only be able to view child data on screen – they will not be able to extract or download data in a personally identifiable form.
- Before being granted access, all users will complete mandatory training, including safe and secure use of ContactPoint and the importance of compliance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and Human Rights Act 1998.
- All users will have to state clear reasons in order to gain access to a child's record and all use of the system will be monitored and audited. Users will be made aware that any misuse will lead to appropriate sanctions. These sanctions can include, if appropriate, fines or imprisonment under the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and Computer Misuse Act 1990.

How has the concept been developed?

ContactPoint is a key element of the Every Child Matters programme. From the outset we have been consulting and working with a wide range of stakeholder groups, including frontline practitioners and children and young people, to get their valuable input into the development of ContactPoint.

Consultations and workshops have been held on a range of issues, from the initial design stage and the development of the business requirements, to most recent work on the draft guidance and best practice processes that will support the operation of ContactPoint.

We have drawn substantially on the lessons and experience of the 'Trailblazers' – nine local authority areas who have piloted local systems (known as 'Indexes'). They demonstrated that this type of tool does provide effective support to practitioners and managers and contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people.

One of the key requirements identified was that a national approach is essential as many children access services in different local authority areas or move between areas.

We are taking a very steady, staged approach to this work, drawing in the appropriate expertise. Stakeholder involvement and consultation is vital and will continue throughout the development of ContactPoint.

Why do we need a national system? Why can't you just use local indexes?

As a national system, ContactPoint will provide benefits that local indexes cannot. One of the key requirements identified from the initial discussions and through the work of the Trailblazer local authorities was that a national approach is essential as many children access services in different local authority areas or move between local authority areas.

A national system will enable a practitioner to identify other practitioners working with a child or young person, regardless of local authority boundaries. Additionally, when a child or young person moves areas, ContactPoint will help to ensure his/her needs for services are identified quickly, by enabling practitioners in their new areas to see which services were being delivered to the child in his or her old area and to contact the relevant practitioners as necessary.

Local authorities will be responsible for the records of children resident in their area.

Responsibilities will include service management, systems administration, data management, professional support and administration of local access. Local authorities are being closely supported by the national project team to help them prepare for ContactPoint.

Why is it necessary for all children to be on ContactPoint? Wouldn't it be better to list only children at risk?

ContactPoint isn't just about child protection; it is also about supporting early intervention for children and young people to ensure they achieve good outcomes. It is not possible to predict which children will need additional services or indeed when - estimates show that 3-4 million children and young people will need additional services at any one point in time.

It is proportionate to hold a very limited amount of information on all children rather than having to establish thresholds and continually make decisions about which children to put on the directory and which to take off. An advantage of ContactPoint is that it will facilitate communication as soon as a first sign of need is noticed, rather than when situations become critical.

All children have a right to the universal services of education and primary health care. ContactPoint will show whether or not they are receiving those services.

How will users access ContactPoint?

The aim is that ContactPoint should not impose additional burdens on frontline practitioners and that its use should fit conveniently into their daily work. Wherever possible, authorised users will be able to access ContactPoint through their existing case management system (CMS). Where the CMS is not suitable, they will be able to access it through a secure web link.

For authorised users who do not have appropriate IT, they will be able to access it through another authorised user (mediated access).

It will not be possible to access any case management system or case data held by another agency from ContactPoint.

Will all service involvements be recorded on ContactPoint?

Explicit, informed consent of the child or young person (or parent if acting on their behalf) will be required to record contact details for sensitive services (defined as sexual/mental health and substance abuse). Where they are recorded, only an indication of an unspecified sensitive service would be visible to the majority of users.

Lack of consent to place sensitive service practitioner details on ContactPoint may be over-riden in circumstances where there are genuine child protection concerns.

The Regulations set out those that are required and those that are permitted to supply information to ContactPoint.

How will you ensure ContactPoint is accurate and up-to-date?

Wherever possible, ContactPoint will be automatically updated from existing systems (e.g. practitioners' case management systems) so that practitioners will not need to enter the same information twice. When information has been updated in these systems it will be sent automatically to ContactPoint as an update.

ContactPoint will only be able to receive the basic information as set out in Section 12 of the Children Act 2004 and the supporting Regulations, which specifically prohibit the inclusion of any case information.

Those required or permitted to supply information to ContactPoint must take reasonable steps to ensure the information is accurate; they already have obligations for data accuracy under the Data Protection Act 1998.

If a local authority considers that there are inaccuracies or omitted information in a record for which it is responsible, the authority must take reasonable steps to correct the inaccuracy or to complete the record.

It will not be possible to access any case management system or case data held by another agency from ContactPoint.

Will children and young people be able to see their data?

Yes. Children and young people, and parents when acting on a child's behalf, have rights under the Data Protection Act 1998 to see the information that is held about them and, if any data is found to be incorrect, to request that it be corrected. Local authorities will be required to publicise the mechanisms for making a request and these will be managed locally. Further advice will be available in the ContactPoint Guidance.

What will happen to the record when a young person turns 18?

In most cases, a record will be removed from ContactPoint when a person turns 18. There is a facility for the records of some young adults to stay on ContactPoint until they are 25, but only for very limited reasons and only with explicit consent.

When a record is removed from ContactPoint it will be held in a secure archive for six years and then destroyed. The archive can only be accessed for the limited reasons which are set out in Regulations (this includes a Local Safeguarding Children Board serious case review or investigation into a child death).

When will ContactPoint be available?

Deployment of ContactPoint will start from early 2009.