Speech, language and communication needs

Tools for commissioning better outcomes: introduction

Commissioning Support Programme

Type of paper	Commissioning Support Programme paper exploring ways of improving speech, language and communication outcomes for children and young people
Primary audience	Lead members, directors of children's services, strategic commissioning teams, children's partnership boards, head teachers, GP commissioners, health and well-being boards, service providers, children's centres, schools and colleges, parents, carers and young people
Date of publication	February 2011

Cover images are copyright Carlos Santa Maria, Ema Vader and Kim Gunkel / istockphoto.com

Commissioning Support Programme

Commissioning Support Programme

web: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk

email: info@commissioningsupport.org.uk

Contents

1. The need for better commissioning of services to meet speech, language and communication needs 1

2. The policy and commissioning context 2

The policy context 2

Speech, language and communication commissioning pathfinders 2

3. The purpose and use of the tools 3

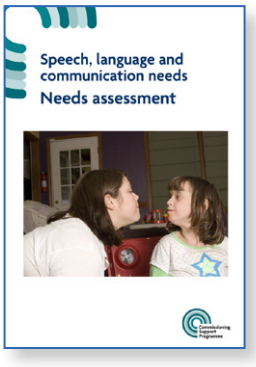
Guiding principles 3

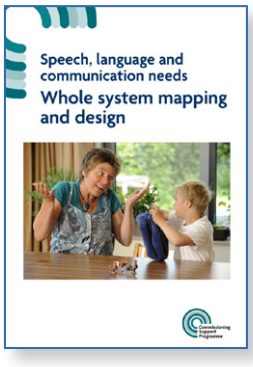
About commissioning 4

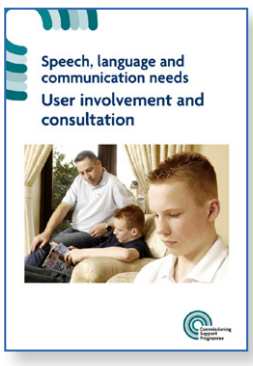
4. The five tools 5

5. Other help and resources 7

The tools in this suite:







1. The need for better commissioning of services to meet speech, language and communication needs

There is little or no point in commissioning unless there is a prior commitment to change things. There is plenty of evidence that we are not doing well enough to reduce the incidence and the adverse affects of children and young people's speech, language and communication problems and this contributes to the pressure for change across the system.

Speech, language and communication difficulties represent a substantial problem in the community. Nationally, one in six children have difficulty in learning to talk and understand, according to a 2009 You Gov poll of parents of children aged 1-7; amongst boys this figure rises to 22 per cent. Seven per cent of five year olds nationally – on average two or three in every classroom – have specific difficulties in speech, language and communication which are not associated with environmental or demographic factors. In addition, there will children with speech, language and communication needs that are secondary to other impairments or disabilities.

In areas of high social deprivation the percentage of children with difficulties is considerably higher than this. More than half of children starting nursery school in socially deprived areas of England have delayed language – while their general cognitive abilities are in the average range for their age, their language skills are well behind.

Speech, language and communication is the most common type of need in primary-aged children with statements of special educational need. Almost a quarter of all mainstream-educated, statemented children in this age group have speech, language and communication as their primary need.

Those who struggle to communicate are at high risk of poor outcomes. This includes educational achievement, behaviour and vulnerability, mental health, employability and criminality.

Educational achievement[1]

- Vocabulary at age five is a very strong predictor of the qualifications achieved at school leaving age and beyond.
- Of children with persistent speech, language and communication needs, 50–90 per cent go on to have reading difficulties.

Behaviour and vulnerability

- Two thirds of 7–14 year olds with serious behaviour problems have language impairment.
- Children with speech and language difficulties experience more frequent bullying, partly because of the way they speak but also because they often lack the skills to negotiate social situations.
- Victims of bullying and those who are both bullies and victims are more likely to have had limited early language skills than other children.

Mental health

- Forty per cent of 7 to 14 year olds referred to child psychiatric services had a language impairment that had never been suspected.

Employability

- '... communication skills and numeracy are the most important employability skills and a lack of them in a candidate is a 'deal breaker' for many employers'[2]
- Forty-seven per cent of employers in England report difficulty in finding employees with an appropriate level of oral communication skills.
- A recent study of unemployed men found that over 88 per cent were described as language impaired, having some degree of difficulty with spoken language.

Criminality

- Sixty per cent of young people in young offender institutions have communication difficulties.

The commissioning process supports good decision making about the changes needed so that outcomes for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs improve. This document contains five specific tools which will help commissioners and service providers to improve both the system and services and therefore the outcomes for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties. These tools are:

- Needs Assessment
- Whole System Mapping and Design
- User Involvement and Consultation
- Workforce Planning
- Evaluating Outcomes.

1 Data sources are given in the final section of this tool.

2 UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2009)

2. The policy and commissioning context

The policy context

The context for commissioning services is changing. More than ever local partners will need to work together to establish a clear understanding of local needs and develop the most effective ways of responding to those needs.

For speech, language and communication this means that there will be an even greater need for local understanding of the importance of effective work with children with these needs, so those responsible for local commissioning have a clear focus on this across the whole system. Many local partners are more accustomed to responding to central government priorities rather than understanding and responding to local needs.

This will call for very strong and clear local leadership and mutually respectful partnership working; the experience from the Commissioning Support Programme shows that this is a prerequisite for effective and sustainable change.

In the best places local partners already use information about local needs, apply evidence of what works, take into account the views and experiences of service users and the cost and value of everything and are planning fundamental system wide change.

The tools developed through the SLCN Pathfinder programme will be relevant to both the new partners and partnerships coming into the commissioning process and will provide practical help in securing the best outcomes for children in the challenging financial climate.

Speech, language and communication commissioning pathfinders

In 2007, the government commissioned John Bercow MP to conduct a review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The Bercow Report[3], which was published in July 2008, included 40 recommendations covering a broad range of areas.

The review called on the government to raise the profile of children with SLCN amongst local authorities and PCTs. In addition, the report made a number of recommendations for better commissioning of services, including the development of a joint framework for commissioners. The report recommended that this framework should be developed through a programme of pathfinders, to identify best practice and provide evidence to show how joint commissioning works well in a range of local areas.

Sixteen pathfinders were established in October 2009 to find out about and test ways in which services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs may be commissioned and provided effectively to achieve improved outcomes. In 2009 the DfE and DoH asked the Commissioning Support Programme to provide consultancy support to the pathfinders, evaluate their impact, and develop a series of tools that commissioners can use to improve the commissioning of systems and services to improve speech, language and communication outcomes.

The pathfinder programme, originally intended to run until March 2011, was brought to a close in August 2010 by the new government – although many local pathfinder areas have subsequently elected to continue their work. There was a commitment from government, moreover, to ensure that important learning from the pathfinders was made available to others. The DfE and DoH asked the Commissioning Support Programme to work closely with the Communication Champion to complete work on the five tools described in this document. CSP is grateful for their support.

3 Bercow J (2008) *The Bercow Report. A Review of Services for Children and Young People (0–19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*. DCSF. http://publications.education.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00632-2008&

3. The purpose and use of the tools

Based as far as possible on evidence of what works, the tools are intended to provide commissioners and others with practical help and advice. They are not intended to be prescriptive.

The tools will be useful to people wanting to understand how the whole system needs to be changed in order to improve speech, language and communication outcomes, as well as those concerned to secure the optimal future for specialist services including speech and language therapy:

- Strategic commissioners (lead members, directors of children's services, strategic commissioning teams, children's partnership boards, head teachers, GP commissioners and health and well-being boards) – who will find a restatement of best practice in commissioning and clear explanations of how this can be applied to improving children's speech, language and communication.
- Service providers who work with children and young people with high levels of continuing need as children with disabilities and sometimes as looked after children or youth offenders.
- Service providers who are part of the preventative services, offering coordinated targeted and additional support to around 20 per cent of the population with a view to preventing problems from getting out of hand and helping children and young people with speech, language and communication needs to thrive in mainstream education, home and community settings. This is particularly important for the many different practitioners who will be working as lead professionals and need to know how best to ensure that children's speech, language and communication needs are met.
- Children's centres, schools and colleges who want to improve the way they work with children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties and those working with them in other parts of the system.
- Parents, carers and young people who want to influence decision makers to reform the system as active citizens, advocates and expert users of services.

The Whole System Mapping and Design tool includes a table which shows how different people in the system can influence decision makers at key stages in the commissioning cycle.

Guiding principles

In developing the tools we have been guided by the following principles:

- Early intervention and prevention – both are particularly important for children with speech, language and communication needs. Prevention (invest to save) is also central to government policy, as outlined in the Government White Paper, Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS[4].
- Focusing on outcomes – producing better outcomes lies at the heart of good commissioning.
- Applying evidence of what works to improve outcomes for children with SLCN[5]. This evidence can come from a number of sources: strategic reviews, local service evaluations, national research evidence and the feedback from children, young people and families.
- Integrated commissioning – commissioners within a local area need to collaborate through joint commissioning to ensure that a continuum of provision (whether NHS-funded, local authority or school-funded, or funded through pooled budgets) is in place to meet the needs of children and young people with SLCN.
- Adopting a whole system approach – commissioners need to commission whole system improvements such as the training of the whole workforce and also redesign the whole system to ensure integrated working, to meet the needs of children, young people and families in a more holistic way.
- Placing children, young people and families at the centre of commissioning processes and service provision at all levels in the system.
- Developing sustained capacity in the system, including the workforce, to deliver better outcomes for children with speech, language and communication needs.

4 *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS*: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_117353

5 There is now a wealth of robust evidence on websites such as C4EO, ICAN, RCSLT and Afasic. See also *Grasping the Nettle* (C4EO, 2010) which identifies SLCN as one of five 'golden threads'.

About commissioning

The Commissioning Support Programme has reviewed a range of definitions of commissioning and developed the following definition which is now widely accepted and in regular use:

> **'Commissioning is the process for deciding how to use the total resource available for families in order to improve outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way.'** [6]

Commissioners are not just those with 'commissioning' in their job title, but include all those who work within the children's services system and actively contribute to the commissioning process. They might be in a strategic role, helping to develop a local commissioning framework for SLCN services, in a procurement role as a local resource holder, or in a role shaping the strategy for the children's services workforce.

Good commissioning can:

- ensure that all services are working to implement an agreed plan for change to achieve better outcomes for children and young people and their families
- ensure that different services, professionals and practitioners work together to improve services for children with speech, language and communication needs
- ensure that money is well spent, waste is avoided, and effort is not duplicated
- ensure that service providers deliver improved outcomes based on sound evidence of local needs and what works.

There are four stages in the commissioning process:

- Understand – understand needs, resources and priorities and agree outcomes
- Plan – map and plan sustainable and diverse services to deliver outcomes
- Do – procure and develop services based on the plan
- Review – monitor service delivery of outcomes and take remedial action if necessary.

The tools are linked to these four stages in commissioning. They describe how speech, language and communication work can be promoted and included at each stage. There are practical tips for commissioners, providers and families seeking to influence decision makers at each step. These are summarised in the table in the Whole System Mapping and Design tool.

6 Commissioning Support Programme (2010), *Good Commissioning: Principles and Practice*

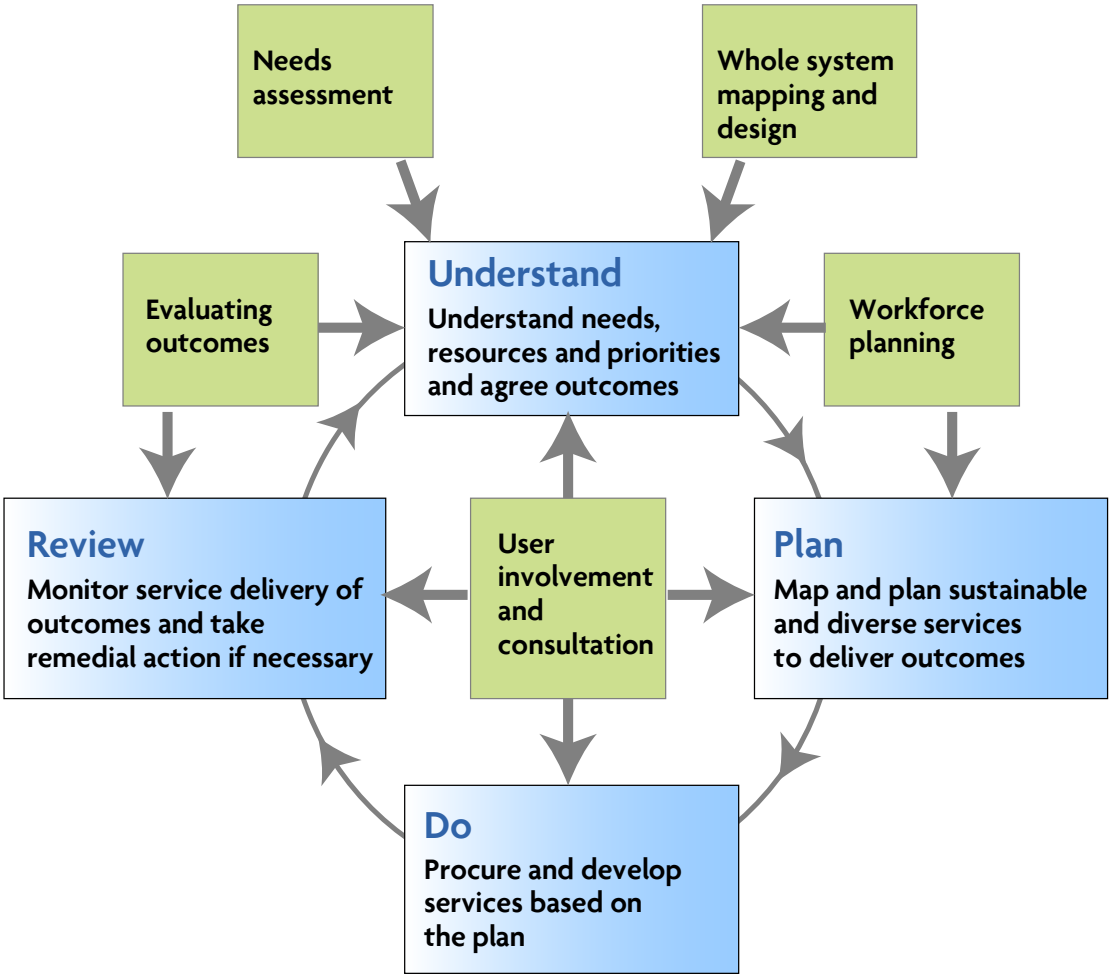
4. The five tools

There are five tools, each providing guidance and information in relation to important components of the commissioning process. The tools can be read separately, although because of the inherent links between them, we recommend that they should be read as a complete set.

- Needs Assessment – This tool has been designed to help commissioners analyse needs for universal, targeted and specialist services. It includes definitions and descriptions of the main categories of speech, language and communication needs, and how to use existing evidence to establish levels of prevalence for the main categories of needs.
- Whole System Mapping and Design – This tool is designed to help commissioners of speech, language and communication needs services and others who contribute to whole system mapping and design activities. Whole system mapping is a crucial first step in developing whole-service design options capable of meeting the needs of children and young people in a more holistic way.
- User Involvement and Consultation – This tool is designed to provide commissioners with guidance on why, when and how to involve users in the planning and review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. It looks at the issues and challenges related to involving children, young people and their parents and suggests ways to help overcome them. It also shows how user involvement can contribute at the various points in the commissioning cycle.
- Workforce Planning – This tool is aimed at those with a responsibility for commissioning the workforce that supports children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. The tool is intended to help commissioners carry out a whole system mapping of the skills mix and competency levels required in their area to meet speech, language and communication needs across the spectrum of universal, targeted and specialist levels of need.
- Evaluating Outcomes – This tool provides examples of outcome and impact measures that can be used when developing service specifications. It also aims to help commissioners understand the role played by evaluation within the commissioning process and how good evaluation can inform better decision making and help achieve improved outcomes.

Figure 1, on the next page, shows at which stage(s) in the commissioning cycle these tools are particularly relevant. Most of the tools have a contribution to make at several points in the cycle, and these links are detailed in the tools themselves.

Figure 1: The tools and the commissioning cycle



5. Other help and resources

References to information and resources relating to the topics covered in the five tools are given at the end of each tool. Here we signpost some general resources about speech, language and communication needs and commissioning.

Speech, language and communication needs – essential reading and data sources

- Bercow J (2008) *The Bercow Report: A review of services for children and young people (0-19) with speech, language and communication needs*. Nottingham: DCSF www.dcsf.gov.uk/bercowreview/docs/7771-DCSF-BERCOW.PDF
- ICAN www.ican.org.uk

  I CAN Talk 1–8: This is a series of papers exploring contemporary issues in children's communication development and speech, language and communication needs. I CAN Talk papers review current research and literature and offer practical evidence-based solutions to inform debate and to support practitioners, parents and policy makers. They are free resources which can be downloaded from the ICAN website:

  - Issue 1 – *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Literacy Difficulties*
  - Issue 2 – *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication*
  - Issue 3 – *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication* (Scotland Edition)
  - Issue 4 – *Language and Social Exclusion*
  - Issue 5 – *Speech, Language and Communication and the Children's Workforce*
  - Issue 6 – *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Primary School-aged Children*
  - Issue 7 – *Speech, Language and Communication Needs and the Early Years*
  - Issue 8 – *Skills for work, Skills for life*
  - A further paper, *Children with Severe and Complex SLCN*, is under development
- Lindsay G, Desforges M, Dockrell J, Law J, Peacey N and Beecham J (2008) Research Report No DCSF-RW053 *Effective and Efficient Use of Resources in Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs*. University of Warwick: DCSF www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RBW053.pdf
- Royal College for Speech and Language Therapists *Resource Manual for Commissioning and Planning Services for Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)*. This is part of a range of RCSLT tools that can support leaders with the planning, commissioning and delivery of services in line with government and local priorities. The manual has sections on: aphasia; autistic spectrum disorders; cleft lip and palate; dementia; dysarthria; dysphagia; fluency; learning disabilities; speech and language impairment; voice. Each section provides succinct information covering the key areas to inform the factual content for any tendering/service planning activity and can be accessed at: www.rcslt.org/speech_and_language_therapy/intro/resource_manual_for_commissioning_and_planning_services
- The Office of the Communication Champion and Council. Further advice on commissioning better outcomes for children and young people with speech, language and communication difficulties including case studies illustrating quality, productivity and value for money, can be found at www.thecommunicationcouncil.org
- C4EO. Case studies of locally commissioned early intervention services for children with speech, language and communication difficulties can be found at www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyintervention/localpractice.aspx?themeid=12
- Talking Point. Talking Point is a useful data source and provides parents and carers the information they need to help their children develop speech, language and communication skills. www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Commissioning

- *Good Commissioning: Principles and Practice* (2010) introduces the essential characteristics of good commissioning in children's services. Available from www.commissioningsupport.org.uk
- Department of Health (2009) *Transforming Community Services and World Class Commissioning: Resource Pack for Commissioners of Community Services*. Forming part of the World Class Commissioning Assurance Framework, this resource pack sets out the principles of good practice when commissioning community services, and signposts commissioners to the most pertinent and relevant information. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_093194

- The Commissioning Support Programme is here to help at least until the end of March 2011. We offer different types of support to children and young people's partnership boards, children's services and their partners and commissioners, including:
  - training and skills development
  - leadership development opportunities
  - events, conferences and networks
  - an online community where people can share learning and experiences, and access resources such as case studies, tools and ideas
  - bespoke support to all 152 children's authorities and their partners.

  More information about the Commissioning Support Programme can be found at: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk
- *The A–Z of Commissioning* is a suite of training materials designed to help all stakeholders in children's services understand commissioning better. The following modules are directly relevant to needs assessment and analysis activity:

  A3 – Strategies and plans: This has been designed for anybody involved in the commissioning process, to help them understand the importance of establishing a locally shared framework and plans/strategies for commissioning, and how these fit into wider strategies locally.

  B3 – Whole system design: This is aimed at leaders and commissioners who are responsible for designing new systems and gives a practical starting point for service transformation to achieve efficiencies.

  B5 – Data and intelligence: This module aims to help to explain the requirements for organisations involved in children's services to use and apply data; it introduces key concepts in using data effectively (recognising the advantages and limitations of data) and it explores options to use data efficiently and effectively to support sustainable improvements for children and young people's outcomes.

  The modules can be downloaded from: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk/events--training/csp-events--training/development-programme.aspx
- OPM (2009) *The Budget Holding Lead Professional* reports: www.commissioningsupport.org.uk. (These are also available on a CD, available from OPM). These reports outline findings and draw upon OPM's experience of work with budget holding lead professional pilot sites.