



Getting it right for every child

## **Practice Guidance 3**

# **Role of the lead professional 2022**

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## Practice Guidance – The role of the lead professional

This is the third of a Practice Guidance series to support practitioners and managers embed and implement **Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)** into their everyday practice. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Scottish Government's **GIRFEC Policy Statement**, which refreshes our GIRFEC Values and Principles, and the Core Components of the approach.

The Guidance series is designed to provide further information on the key roles of GIRFEC, **Assessment of Wellbeing**, how to use the **National Practice Model** and to guide our practice and provide clarity and confidence in **Information sharing**.

### The Practice Guidance

Practice Guidance 1. Using the **National Practice Model**

- Improving outcomes using the **Wellbeing Indicators (SHANARRI)**
- Gathering information with the **My World Triangle**
- Analysing information with the **Resilience Matrix**

Practice Guidance 2. The role of the **named person**

Practice Guidance 3. The role of the **lead professional**

Practice Guidance 4. Information sharing

### The Statutory Guidance

Assessment of Wellbeing – Part 18 (section 96) of Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

## 1. Background

Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) (see [glossary](#)) is the Scottish Government's commitment to provide all children, young people and their families (for definition of child or young person and family see [glossary](#)) with the right support at the right time – so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.

This guidance on the role of the lead professional (see [glossary](#)) is intended for practitioners and service leads working together with children, young people and families.

This guidance aims to clarify who would be the appropriate practitioner to fulfill this role and the responsibilities in the management of a child's plan (see [glossary](#)).

It seeks to reassure leaders, managers and practitioners about how GIRFEC should be delivered within the current legislative and policy framework of rights, information sharing, and delivery of supports and services to children, young people and their families.

## 2. Overview of key changes

The refreshed role of the lead professional contains a number of key changes throughout the document:

- The guidance is non-legislative and policy-based;
- Clarity is provided regarding function and flexibility of the role;
- Further clarity regarding who can be a lead professional for the child, young person and family;
- There is an increased emphasis on the voice of the child or young person, including enabling full participation within decision-making; and
- Greater clarity regarding a lead professional's responsibilities in regard to the child's plan.

### 3. Introduction

With the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) (see [glossary](#)) as its foundation, GIRFEC provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of all children and young people. GIRFEC is based on evidence, is internationally recognised and is an example of a child rights-based approach. It is locally embedded and positively embraced by practitioners across children's services, changing cultures, systems and practice for the benefit of children, young people and their families. However, more needs to be achieved as we work towards [Keeping The Promise](#) to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of all children in Scotland.

The refreshed values and principles of GIRFEC we want to fully embed and implement are:

- Placing the child or young person and their family at the heart, and promoting choice, with full participation in decisions that affect them;
- Working together with families to enable a rights-respecting, strengths-based, inclusive approach;
- Understanding wellbeing as being about all areas of life including family, community and society;
- Valuing difference and ensuring everyone is treated fairly;
- Considering and addressing inequalities;
- Providing support for children, young people and families when they need it, until things get better, to help them to reach their full potential; and
- Everyone working together in local areas and across Scotland to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families.

## 4. The lead professional

During childhood there may be circumstances where children, young people and families require the support of a child's plan. This is where a lead professional will be needed. The lead professional is an agreed, identified person within the network of practitioners who are working alongside the child or young person and their family (examples are given at [section 7](#)). In most cases, the professional who has the greatest responsibility in coordinating and reviewing the child's plan will undertake this role. Throughout a child or young person's journey, this person may change depending on the child or young person's needs, but there should always be a lead professional identified when there is a multi-agency (see [glossary](#)) child's plan. All decision-making about support and the child's plan should seek and act on the views of the child or young person and their family, where appropriate, in accordance with their best interests and in consideration with their full spectrum of rights.

## 5. Who should be the lead professional?

Any practitioner or professional providing support to the child or young person could be identified as the lead professional. This includes any person working across the universal services of health, social work and education (including early years), as well as a person from a third sector organisation or specialist service. The named person (see [glossary](#)) (please see [Practice Guidance 2](#)) who may have previously overseen a single agency plan for the child or young person and their family may become the lead professional if they are the most suitable person to fulfil that role. The lead professional should remain in this role for as long as it is appropriate and this should be reviewed regularly.



## 6. What is the role of the lead professional?

The lead professional should have the appropriate skills and experience to coordinate all agencies involved in supporting a child and young person's wellbeing, taking a cohesive approach in the coordination and management of the multi-agency plan for the child or young person. They should:

- support children, young people and families to fully participate in discussions about what is happening in a child or young person's world, where this is in their best interests and in consideration with their full spectrum of rights;
- ensure as far as possible, that the child or young person and their family understand what is happening at all times and support them to participate in decisions being made;
- act as a main point of contact for all, particularly to ensure the child or young person and their family are not required to tell their story multiple times to multiple professionals;
- oversee the implementation of the child's plan and check that it is reviewed, accurate and kept up-to-date;
- ensure that targeted support is helping to improve agreed outcomes for the child or young person;
- promote teamwork between agencies, and work in partnership with the named person;
- support the child or young person and their family during key transition points (see [glossary](#)), particularly any transfer to a new lead professional; and,
- have an awareness and understanding of the working practices of other agencies.

The lead professional is accountable to their own agency for:

- meeting individual professional tasks; and,
- achieving the responsibilities which the lead professional role entails as above.

The lead professional is responsible to make sure other practitioners are clear about the different roles they have and the contributions they make to implement the child's plan; they are not responsible for the actions of other practitioners or services. Practitioners taking on the role of lead professional should be provided with appropriate support and professional development.

**Disagreement between practitioners supporting the child, young person or family:** In some cases there will be statutory processes in place. Where there are no statutory requirements, if there is disagreement among practitioners supporting the child, young person or their family, the lead professional should seek to achieve a consensus that gives due consideration to the views of the child or young person, in accordance with their age and capacity, and in full consideration of their best interests, and wider rights.

**Failure to make progress:** In some cases there will be statutory requirements and escalation processes in place. Where there are no statutory requirements, if practitioners involved are not fulfilling their professional role as part of the child's plan, this should be escalated in line with local procedures.

In some circumstances, the preparation of a record of a child or young person's needs and how these will be met is required to comply with legislation. Where this applies, the lead professional should be familiar with the relevant statutory requirements. For example:

- under the [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) for school education authorities to prepare a coordinated support plan. This applies in respect of children and young people who have enduring additional support needs that have a significant adverse effect on their education, who require support from services outside education;
- under [The Looked After Children \(Scotland\) Regulations 2009](#) for local authorities to prepare a child's plan in respect of any child or young person who is, or is about to be, looked after in terms of section 17(6) of the [Children \(Scotland\) Act 1995](#) ("the 1995 Act");
- under section 23(3) of the 1995 Act for a local authority to prepare, on request, an assessment of a child, or of any other person in the child's family, to determine the child's needs in so far as attributable to their or the other person's disability; and,
- for a responsible authority to prepare a young carer's statement under section 12 of the [Carers \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#).

There may be situations where a child, young person and/or family no longer wish to continue to work with the individual who has been identified as the lead professional and will seek someone else for that role. While circumstances will vary, the child, young person and family could approach their named person to discuss this and reasonable steps to identify and offer another suitable individual should be taken. The child or young person, in accordance with their evolving capacity, and their family should be supported to fully participate in discussions and decision-making to identify an appropriate new lead professional.

## 7. Choosing the most appropriate lead professional

A lead professional should be able to provide confident leadership and should be familiar with the remit of different agencies to be able to coordinate the help needed. It is important that, as far as possible, children, young people and families are supported and enabled to fully participate in any decisions about who is to be the lead professional. An example of a lead professional could be a Health Visitor, Community Children's Nurse, Pupil Support Teacher, Head Teacher, Social Worker, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Professional, Community Child Health Professional, Allied Health Professional, Family Nurse, Youth Worker, Early Years practitioner, Young Carer Support Worker or Third Sector practitioner. This list is not exhaustive.

Therefore, choosing the lead professional should be influenced by:

- the child, young person and/or family's needs;
- the best interests of the child or young person;
- the child, young person and family's full participation in decision-making;
- previous contact or positive relationship with the child, young person and family; and
- any statutory obligation defined in law towards a child or young person, for example when a child or young person needs a Coordinated Support Plan under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.

Once it has been agreed that there is a need for a lead professional, choosing the lead professional should be influenced by the type of support being offered; the strength of existing relationships; and any statutory responsibility to coordinate support, for the child, young person or their family. Where no agreement can be reached on who should assume the role, it should be escalated to the GIRFEC lead officer for the local authority or Children's Services Planning Partnership.

## 8. The lead professional and putting together the child's plan

The lead professional should have a pivotal role in coordinating and collating the information that informs the child's plan, working alongside the child, young person and their family. This information should be gathered from the child, young person and their family and provided by the other agencies involved with the child or young person, in accordance with the requirements set out in the information sharing guidance (please see [Practice Guidance 4](#)). Information can also be drawn from any other plans a child or young person may already have in place, provided it is lawful and proportionate to do so.

Using the National Practice Model (please see [Practice Guidance 1](#)), the lead professional should coordinate the wellbeing assessment required, including information from any specialist assessments, make sense of that information and lead on constructing the child's plan. All agencies involved have a joint accountability to ensure the plan is progressed and reviewed to meet the needs of the child or young person and agreed outcomes.

## 9. Roles and tasks of the lead professional in planning and taking action to help a child or young person

When the child's plan has been agreed, the lead professional should:

- be a point of contact with the child or young person and their family in relation to the plan to ensure it is working well and achieving the agreed outcomes, ensuring they have accessible information relating to their plan;
- be a point of contact for all practitioners who are delivering support for the child or young person to feedback progress on the plan or raise any issues;
- ensure that the support provided is consistent with the child's plan, aligning with the outcomes and the outcomes that the child, young person, family and practitioners have agreed;
- promote team work between agencies, to avoid duplication and drift;
- work with the child, young person and family and the practitioner network to make sure that the child, young person and family's rights are respected, they are able to fully participate in the plan, and, when necessary, link the child or young person and family with specialist advocacy services;
- ensure the plan is informed by an awareness that children and young people can experience multiple and overlapping inequalities and address these in a child-focussed manner;
- support the child or young person and their family to make use of support from practitioners and agencies;
- monitor how well the child's plan is working and whether it is improving the child or young person's wellbeing and achieving agreed outcomes;
- coordinate the provision of other help or specialist assessments which may be needed, with advice from other practitioners where necessary, and make arrangements for these to take place;
- arrange a joint review including the child or young person and their family, all agencies involved, and amend the child's plan, when required; and
- support the child or young person and their family through key transition points and ensure a careful and planned transfer of responsibility where roles change. For example, children, young people and families should be supported to fully participate when another practitioner is to become the lead professional and when a multi-agency child's plan is no longer needed, meaning that the lead professional role is no longer required.

The child's plan should be based on an assessment of strengths, needs and risks, and should incorporate the actions from any existing single agency plan, if this existed before the need for more agencies was identified. The plan should signify when a review is needed and the lead professional should arrange for the production of materials for the review. Materials should be circulated to everyone involved, including children, young people and families. The lead professional will have no responsibility, accountability or authority over other partners for their work unless this is through their substantive role, e.g. line management or commissioning.

All practitioners involved share responsibility for supporting the child, young person or family, coordinated by the lead professional. The lead professional will not be responsible for all of the work with the child or young person and their family; nor do they replace other practitioners who have specific roles or who are carrying out direct work or specialist assessments.

**The relationship between lead professionals and others in contact with the child or young person and their family:** It is the lead professional's responsibility to make sure everyone is clear about the different roles they have and the contributions they make to implement the child's plan. In some cases, much of the day-to-day work with the child, young person or family may be carried out by practitioners other than the lead professional. The lead professional should have sufficient direct contact with the child or young person and their family to ensure that they are well-informed and fully involved in decision-making, and that the child's plan is working properly and to good effect.

Over time, circumstances may change and it may be appropriate for a different practitioner to take over the role of lead professional. Whenever this happens, the child, young person and family should be supported to fully participate in any decisions and changes that affect them, and fully supported with transition to a new lead professional.

## Annex A – Glossary of Terms

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy can mean different things in different contexts. In this context, advocacy is empowering children and young people to make sure that their rights are respected and that their views and wishes are fully considered and reflected in decision making about their own lives.

### **Agency/agencies**

In this suite of documents the term ‘agency/agencies’ means an organisation or business providing a particular service.

### **Child or young person**

An individual who has not yet attained the age of 18 years.

### **Child protection**

The processes involved in consideration, assessment and planning of required action, together with the actions themselves, where there are concerns that a child or young person may be at risk of harm from abuse, neglect or exploitation.

### **Children’s human rights and UNCRC**

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms which we all have in order to live with dignity, equality and fairness, and to develop and reach our potential. Human rights are a list of things that all people – including children and young people – need in order to live a safe, healthy and happy life.

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) has been incorporated into UK domestic law through the Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA). Everyone, including children and young people, has these rights, no matter what their circumstances. Under international law, States/Governments are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. Those delivering public services should respect human rights when they make decisions, plan services and make policies.

Children’s human rights span the entire spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights. Children and young people also have additional rights that recognise that childhood is a special, protected time, in which children and young people must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop and flourish with dignity. Specific human rights for children are set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community. By recognising children’s rights in this way, the Convention firmly sets the focus on the child as a whole and multi-faceted person. It is important to be clear that all rights are equal, there is no hierarchy of human rights.

We know that children and young people face unique barriers to realising their rights. Their future often depends on the action taken by adults to implement their rights in practice. As children their voices can be unheard, or more easily dismissed. For that reason, the UNCRC recognises that children and young people are human beings with fundamental rights that are written into international law. It also makes clear that special action needs to be taken to ensure those rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. As one of the core United Nations (UN) human rights treaties, the UNCRC helps to safeguard the dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all children and young people. It does this by making sure that important rights set out in other international human rights treaties are applied in a way that is relevant and appropriate to the needs of all children and young people.

## **Child's Plan**

A personalised child's plan is developed when those working with the child or young person and family identify that a child or young person needs a range of extra support planned, delivered and co-ordinated. The child's plan should reflect the child or young person's voice and explain what should be improved for the child or young person, the actions to be taken and why the plan has been created.

## **Family/families**

Not all family units look the same. In this suite of documents the term 'families/family' can mean adoptive, biological, foster, kinship, extended, composite and others; for example, settings and homes that have felt like family. Some children and young people may belong to more than one family.

## **Getting it right for every child**

This is Scotland's national approach to promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of all children and young people. It provides a consistent framework, shared language and common understanding of wellbeing. GIRFEC puts the child or young person at the heart and helps children and young people get the right support from the right people at the right time.

## **Lead professional**

When children, young people and families require the help and support of a child's plan, a lead professional will be needed. The lead professional is an agreed, identified person within the network of practitioners who is working alongside the child or young person and family. In most cases, the professional who has the greatest responsibility in coordinating and reviewing the child's plan will undertake this role.

## **Named person**

This is a clear point of contact for times when children, young people and families require information, advice or help. The named person is mainly provided by health and education services and is usually someone who is known to the child, young person and family and who is well placed to develop a supportive relationship with them. Local arrangements and the term used to describe this role or function may vary from area to area. A named person can help children, young people and families access relevant support for a child or young person's wellbeing. Where there is a child's plan in place, the named person will work alongside the lead professional, continuing to provide general advice or support, while the lead professional will be the point of contact in relation to the plan. In some cases the named person will also be the lead professional.

## **Parent**

This document uses the term 'parent' within the meaning of section 15 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. The term 'parent' includes a person who is a genetic parent of a child, a parent by adoption, and those who are parents by virtue of Human Fertilisation and Embryology legislation. In this document, the term also embraces a person who has parental responsibilities in relation to the child or young person, who has care of the child or young person, or who is a guardian of the child or young person whether appointed by parents or the court.



## **Practitioner**

In this guidance, practitioner means any person involved in working with children, young people and/or families, whether on a voluntary basis or through paid work. In addition to roles typically thought of as working with children and young people such as health visitors and teachers; this includes wider activities that work with children, young people and families, such as housing services or police.

## **Transition**

A transition is **a change, from one stage to another**. Most children and young people will experience transitions as they move into an early learning and childcare (ELC) setting, from there to primary, from stage to stage, from primary to secondary, between schools and from secondary to further education and beyond.

## **Wellbeing**

For the purposes of these guidance documents, wellbeing is a measure of how a child or young person is doing at a point in time and if there is any need for support. The eight wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI) provide a framework for assessment and planning in relation to wellbeing.

### **Wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI)**

Any assessment of a child or young person's wellbeing should be founded on the 8 wellbeing indicators: Safe, Healthy, Active, Nurtured, Achieving, Respected, Responsible, Included, sometimes referred to as SHANARRI. The wellbeing indicators (SHANARRI) are informed by the UNCRC. They are overlapping and connect areas that are fundamental to understanding what children and young people need in order to grow, develop and thrive.



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