



**The British
Psychological Society**
Promoting excellence in psychology



Guide for commissioners of educational psychology services



Division of Educational and Child Psychology
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Introduction

Educational psychology services are now offered by a wide range of organisations, for example local authorities, private companies and by sole traders. There are also an increasing number of commissioners. While it is still mostly schools commissioning services, others may also choose to purchase the services of an educational psychologist (EP), e.g. health, social care and other professionals, and parents or carers. This is a guide for **all** commissioners of educational psychology services. It is intended to provide information that will make it easier for commissioners to choose the right service and get the best out of the service they have chosen.

What can educational psychology services offer?

Educational psychologists (EPs) apply their knowledge and understanding of psychological theory and research to promote inclusion, learning, social and behavioural development and the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, and the adults who care for and work with them. They work with individuals, groups and communities and at organisational levels usually within schools but sometimes elsewhere with individuals.

EPs can help to promote the development of school staff knowledge and understanding and their capacity for reflective practice, thus improving the quality of teaching and pupil support. They can also support parents, carers and other adults working with children and young people. EPs can help all pupils, and particularly those with special educational needs, to achieve more and develop good psychological health.

How do I know if I am getting the best out of my educational psychology service provider?

Educational psychology services are usually delivered through a local authority; however services can also be provided by sole traders and private organisations and businesses. Local authorities may also ‘trade’ some of their services, where schools, and sometimes others, can purchase services directly rather than receive them ‘free at the point of delivery’ and paid for by the local authority. Commissioners, whoever they are, should discuss what they might expect and how the service will be delivered before agreeing a provider. Some suggested questions are given below. Most of these are relevant to all types of providers but some are more relevant to local authorities or individual private EPs and businesses.

1. How can I find out what range of the work at individual, group and organisational levels a psychological service offers?

- If it is local authority (LA) provider, there is likely to be some form of service level agreement (SLA).
- Information can be found online on the local authority’s ‘local offer’.
- The service or provider may publish brochures/leaflets about the types of work they deliver or provide information on its website.
- You can speak directly to a member of the service/provider by email or phone beforehand.

2. How do I know if the EP service does what I think I need?

- Most commissioners will have some idea of what they are hoping to gain from engaging an EP. They should discuss this with the EP they are considering using. If it is a highly specialised requirement it is possible that not all EPs are competent in the area. The EP may also be able to advise whether what the commissioner thinks they need is actually the best solution to the problem with which they are struggling.

3. How do I know the beginning and end points for the start and finish of work?

- Schools and other commissioners should ask about expected time frames. This should be negotiated and agreed with the EP service provider before the work begins.
- The EP provider should provide clear information about beginning and end points of the planned work and what the work will entail. If during the course of the work it becomes apparent that more is needed then this should also be made clear and agreed beforehand.

4. What should I expect after the work is finished?

- The EP service provider should set out the extent and general content of written feedback that can be expected before the work begins.
- They should send any written feedback within an agreed timescale.
- Any review arrangements and next steps should also be agreed.

5. How does the EP service provider gain consent?

- EP service providers must have permission from parents and carers and young people (if over 16) for their involvement before work begins. It is also good practice to discuss with children under 16 what they can expect and that they are comfortable with this.
- The EP service provider will usually supply a request for involvement form, or similar, that includes informed and signed consent
- The school and other commissioners should ensure permission has been given before work is agreed with the EP service provider.

6. How should EP service providers explain their role and nature of involvement to parents, carers and young people?

- Children or young people should be given information appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Parents and carers should always be given clear information on what to expect and usually be provided with a means of contacting the service provider should they wish to ask more questions.

7. How can I use what work the EP service provider has done to consider any patterns so that themes that emerge at different levels can be explored? (of particular relevance to schools)

- The EP service provider can carry out an analysis of work undertaken.
- They can have a yearly discussion about the balance and types of work and patterns of work (e.g. area of need, year group, gender, ethnicity, etc.).
- They can then devise a clear plan to address any imbalances and evaluate future use of the service.
- This can be a helpful way of considering whether organisational factors are influencing individual casework. There may be some work that could be done at a class or school level that would be more efficient and effective at resolving a problem than multiple individual requests.

8. How do I find out about how much EP services cost?

- For local authority services clear information should be provided in the SLA.
- The EP service provider may have a traded service business unit, brochure or online service where information can be found.
- Schools and other commissioners should ask their EP service provider for information, e.g. hourly or daily rate, reduced rate packages, etc. It is important, as a commissioner, to understand how charges are calculated and what is included in the charge.

9. How can I expect the EP service provider to liaise with other professionals?

- The commissioner should ask the provider how they liaise with other professionals and clarify if liaison time is included in the costs. The EP service provider should be clear and transparent about how they liaise with other professionals and if liaison time is additional to or included in their costs.
- Good communication with other professionals who may be involved with the child or young person is essential to achieve good outcomes.

9. How do I know what I am buying is good quality?

- The EP service provider demonstrates evidence-based approaches to improving outcomes and making a difference.
- They can provide evaluations of effectiveness, e.g. for training and whether individuals have met the targets set for them.
- They can show that they have regular supervision and keep up to date with professional development (see below).
- The EP Service has been peer reviewed and rated good or better related to National Quality Standards for EP Services.
- If the EP service provider is an LA one the commissioner may wish to consider the LA's Ofsted rating for special educational needs provision and support and any specific reference to the educational psychology service in the Ofsted report.
- Commissioners can talk to others who have engaged the EP service provider.

10. How do I know the service is operating or working ethically?

- All EPs must be registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (see below) and adhere to its ethical guidance and code of professional conduct.
- There is evidence of an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.
- There is evidence that the EP provider will be sensitive to diverse cultures, values, attitudes, behaviours and beliefs.
- If the EP service comes from the LA it will respect cross border agreements i.e. the arrangements that have been agreed for children living and at school in different local authorities.
- The EP service will have a framework in place for consulting with other involved professionals.
- If the EP Service is a LA provider the SLA will specify details of its core service, which is free at the point of delivery to the neediest families, services and children to ensure they have access to a psychological service.

11. How do I know I am getting value for money?

- EP services are competitively priced compared to neighbouring and other services.
- The EP service's SLA or contract details what is included in the costs (e.g. written feedback, appropriate management/admin support costs, etc.).
- The EP service can demonstrate that it achieves good outcomes for children and young people.

- If an LA EP service provider it can demonstrate how to ensure value for money on behalf of the LA in the future (e.g. out of borough placements, reducing the need for Children in Care, transport costs, etc.).
- The EP service provider can suggest how to reinvest money to the benefit of children and young people.

12. How do I know the EP service provider is appropriately qualified?

- The EP is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (www.hcpc.org) as a practitioner psychologist (educational). Please see below for more information.
- The EP can provide professional qualification certificates.
- The EP can provide DBS (Disclosure Barring Service) certificate or the school and other commissioner can check the online DBS database: www.gov.uk/dbs-update-service.

13. How do I check the EP service provider is appropriately supervised?

- Supervision is regarded as best practice for EPs (see below). Ask if the EP receives professional supervision from someone who is suitably qualified. If the EP works for an EP service this is likely to be another member of that service. However if the EP is a sole trader they will need to seek supervision independently.
- If EP service provider is an LA worker, ask if they receive a formal appraisal.

14. What do I do if there is a conflict of interest/ethical dilemma?

- The commissioner should discuss this openly with the EP service provider and negotiate ways of working. This may involve passing work on to another party.
- EPs are bound by the HCPC's and, for members, the British Psychological Society's codes of conduct and so, rarely, they may need to terminate a contract should the matter become very serious. Please see page 6 for more information on the HCPC.
- The EP service provider is an LA one they should supply the school or other commissioner with the LA's complaints procedure. This may be an appropriate way forward if the issue cannot be resolved.
- A more detailed discussion of conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas from the perspective of the EP can be found in the British Psychological Society's (BPS) *Ethical Trading: Guidelines for Practice for Educational Psychologists* (2nd edition) (2018).

15. What should I do if I am unhappy with my EP service provider?

- In the first instance the school or other commissioner should talk directly to their individual EP service provider to see if matters can be resolved at this level.
- If difficulties are not resolved the commissioner should contact the manager of the service.
- If the matter is serious and the commissioner is concerned that the EP may have violated their code of conduct they should contact the HCPC to complain.

Other considerations and information for commissioners

Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) and Assistant (Educational) Psychologists

Some educational psychology services may have TEPs on placement or employ assistant (educational) psychologists. TEPs and assistant psychologists are fully supervised and will not be asked to carry out work unless they are competent to do so. The service they provide will, therefore, be on a par with other members of the service.

Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) registration: Commissioning educational psychologists for safe and effective practice

All qualified educational psychologists must be registered with the HCPC in order to practice using the protected title 'Educational Psychologist'. They must adhere to the standards in the following 10 areas:

1. Promote and protect the best interests of service users and carers, for example:
 - a. Treat with respect
 - b. Make sure they have consent
 - c. Challenge discrimination
 - d. Maintain appropriate boundaries.
2. Communicate appropriately and effectively, for example:
 - a. With service users and carers
 - b. Work with colleagues
 - c. On social media and networking websites.
3. Work within the limits of their knowledge and skills, for example:
 - a. Keep within their scope of practice
 - b. Maintain and develop their knowledge and skills.
4. Delegate appropriately
5. Respect confidentiality
6. Manage risk
7. Report concerns about safety
8. Be open when things go wrong
9. Be honest and trustworthy
10. Keep records of their work

HCPC *Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics* (Revised 2016) can be found here: www.hpc-uk.org/publications/standards/index.asp?id=38

Supervision

Good quality supervision is considered to be best practice and an important underpinning to a good quality service delivery. Supervision helps to ensure safe and effective practice. For EPs working in a wide range of settings, and with a range of commissioners, supervision is a core component of their continuing professional development (CPD).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD is both a professional expectation and an individual responsibility to taking a structured and self-managed approach to further learning. This includes:

- Actively engaging in a range of CPD
- Maintaining a record of CPD
- Applying learning from CPD to professional practice.

From a commissioner's perspective evidence of CPD is important for judging the quality of an EP service.

Knowledge of evidence base

A commissioner should clarify the details of the areas of work that an EP can deliver. The commissioner needs to make explicit the expected outcomes of this work and to determine whether the EP has the required knowledge of the evidence base. EPs are responsible for ensuring they are sufficiently competent and expert in offering an opinion. Commissioners may wish to consider the following indications of competence in respect of knowledge: qualifications; number of years' post-qualification experience; publications and current, applied experience in the area of expertise.

Safeguarding and communication

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect (Care Quality Commission 2016 www.cqc.org.uk/content/safeguarding-people)

EPs are in a particularly relevant position to identify interactions or circumstances that affect health and development. Commissioners may wish to have regard to *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (DfE/HM Gov, 2018), to support them in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Commissioners should be aware that there may be circumstances where an EP will be obliged to keep confidential, and not share, information received from a parent, carer or child. There can also be exceptional circumstances where it may be necessary for an EP to breach the client's confidentiality, with or without their immediate knowledge or consent, where there are significant risks to their psychological wellbeing. The focus must be on promoting a proportionate, measured approach to balancing the risk of harm with respecting the client's capacity to consent, their choices and preferred outcome for their own life circumstances.

Further information on conflicts of interest

As a commissioner, it is important to make yourself aware of possible conflicts of interest in service delivery and discuss this with potential service providers.

A commissioner should clarify the details of what areas of work an EP does (such as when commencing work as the EP for their school) and ask for details of what services they deliver in this area (e.g. the assessment of students with specific learning difficulties or interventions that they may offer for those experiencing mental health difficulties). The commissioner needs to make explicit the breadth of the work that they are funding and any limits to this.

EPs have a duty to promote and protect the interests of service users and carers. On occasion this duty may be in conflict with the expectations and requirements or views of the commissioner. The best interest of the child or young person will always be the most important consideration. EPs will respect the process of those commissioning the service but remain mindful of their professional responsibilities.

Commissioning other psychologists

This is a guide for commissioners when they are specifically looking to engage an educational psychologist. However there are other psychologists, such as clinical and counseling psychologists who work with children and young people and sometimes in schools. Before engaging any psychologist the commissioner should clarify the details of the area of work that a psychologist can deliver, make explicit the outcomes they are expecting and determine whether the psychologist has the required knowledge of the relevant evidence base. All qualified clinical and counseling psychologists, like educational psychologists, must be registered with the HCPC in order to practice using their respective protected titles.

Summary

The outcomes for children and their families are likely to be better if EPs and commissioners have a good relationship and make sure they communicate clearly and regularly. Commissioners should have a clear idea of what they would like the outcome of the EP work to be before purchasing and be mindful that the route to that outcome may change following discussion with the EP. Commissioners should ensure that the EP they engage is registered with the HCPC and, if the work is more specialist, that the EP is competent to carry it out.

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