

Strengths-Needs Analyses, Communication Profiles and Communication Passports

An invaluable tool for deciding on priorities for teaching and learning for a pupil is a '*strengths-needs analysis*'. There are several steps involved in this process: first, gathering as much information as possible about the pupil's condition, learning style and difficulties through observation, other assessments and talking to people who know the pupils well; second, again working with people who know the pupil well, writing down strengths and needs; and finally, deciding the priorities for learning and teaching.

This module is all about assessment. The assessment tools that are recommended can provide a huge amount of information that needs to be summarised. It is essential to talk to colleagues, family members and carers who know the pupil well. The strengths-needs analysis should provide a positive picture of the pupil - every pupil has some strengths. The needs list should not be a mere list of negatives in terms of learning difficulties or lack of progress or challenging behaviours. The needs list should clearly indicate what the pupil has to learn and what strategies adults need to use to facilitate the pupil's development.

At this stage a decision has to be made about priorities for teaching and learning. What are the most important skills and knowledge that the pupil has to acquire next? What are the best teaching strategies for facilitating learning? Who needs to be involved in teaching? What resources will be required? And so on.

A '*communication profile*' is a document that gives a summary of an individual's communication skills. This includes the pupil's levels of comprehension and expressive skills and shows appropriate visual supports and strategies that are required to support effective communication, for example visual timetables, picture exchange systems, and associated skills including ICT capability and literacy. The profile can only give an overview and may need to be supported by additional information.

The communication profile aims to ensure that professionals and adults, necessarily including parents and carers, in all environments have an awareness and understanding of an individual's language and communication skills and needs. The profile should be available or visible at all times. The profile is a description of what the individual is able to do, not what is the current focus for learning. As such, it should not be used to set targets but it does bear comparison to a strengths-needs analysis.

The communication profile can stand alone as a document but can also be supported by other resources and documents such as a communication folder. The communication profile should be concise and factual, and written in a jargon free manner. The profile should be dated to ensure that the most recent version is in use. Any adults supporting the pupil should have access to information and training or guidance to ensure that they understand the content of the profile.

Who should take responsibility for completing and producing a communication profile? In many cases this is likely to be a speech and language therapist but does not have to be. Whoever initially completes the profile will need to work closely with a range of adults who work with the pupil. The profile will need to be updated to reflect changes and development of skills. This could be done at the time of the annual review of the pupil's statement of SEN.

The term 'communication passport' is often used interchangeably with 'communication profile'. Communication passports have been successfully used to draw together complex information about the pupil's language and communication abilities and present a summary of the information in a clear and accessible format. They help staff to interact with and respond in a consistent way and give the pupil a good chance of understanding and communicating with others.

A passport must present information about the pupil in an accessible way that assumes no prior knowledge of the reader and contains the right amount of detail. Passports do not need to give all the information about a pupil. They should provide a summary of the essential information. They may be supplemented with photos of resources and the pupil using them but they are not a photo album. They serve a different purpose than a strengths-needs analysis but they should include details of, say, how to use a pupil's communication system.

More information about communication passports (including templates) can be found on www.callcentrescotland.org.uk