

What are Multi-Agency Audits (MAAs)?





The Professional Standards & Audit Service (PSAS) within Essex County Council facilitate Multi-Agency Audits (MAAs) on behalf of the Essex Safeguarding Children Board (ESCB). These can take the form of either a Multi-Agency Case Audit (MACA) or a Multi-Agency Thematic Audit (MATA). All Multi-Agency Audit Activity that is undertaken, is reviewed by a subcommittee of the executive board.. All key agencies across Essex provide dedicated 'Audit Co-ordinators' to support in the delivery of the MACA & MATA programme.

Multi-Agency Case Audits (MACAs) involve a range of key agencies taking a forensic look at the effectiveness of multi-agency working in relation to a single case using bespoke audit tools/approaches to support this practice evaluation activity. Once audit activity is completed, involved professionals/agencies come together at a MACA meeting to share observations drawn from their related audit activity and to hear the reflections of their partner agencies.

Multi-Agency Thematic Audits (MATAs) can involve a range of quality assurance activities such as focus groups, policy & procedural reviews, related aggregated learning and bespoke audits to form a view about the effectiveness of multi-agency working where there is common practice feature, for example Parental Mental Health or Neglect. Typically, MATAs will involve evaluating multiple case examples, to draw out cross cutting practice themes which agencies can learn from.


Steps involved in a Multi-Agency Audit:

 **Nominating Cases for MAA:** Any professional or agency can nominate a case for a MACA or a MATA. All nominated cases will be considered by PSAS and suitable cases selected. Not all nominated cases are considered suitable.


 **MAA Phase 1 - Preparation:** Once cases have been selected, the MATA and MACA audits are scheduled/timetabled. 'Audit co-ordinators' take the lead in identifying key (case related) professionals to participate in the audit and to attend the MACA/MATA findings meetings. Key professionals will include practitioners who have worked directly with the child & family; those managing frontline practitioners, subject matter experts and strategic leads within agencies who can influence practice development and design going forwards.




PSAS provide a guidance document which includes details of how the audit will be delivered and a bespoke 'audit tool kit' that will support audit co-ordinators and their colleagues to deliver the audit.

 **Phase 2 - Audit Completion:** Agencies complete audit activities (often a combination of focus groups, practitioner reflections, case file audits & learning from wider practice evaluation work). For MATAs agency co-ordinators draw together key learning headlines which inform an 'Agency Overview of Findings' Report. Typically, the audit completion phase takes place over an 8-week period.




 **Phase 3 – MACA/MATA Findings Meetings:** PSAS co-ordinate and facilitate MACA/MATA meetings at which 'Audit Co-ordinators' and relevant parties come together to reflect upon multi-agency learning. Through these facilitated discussions, cross-cutting practice themes are identified by the group which then informs a strategic plan of service development aspirations. This plan provides the platform for extended discussions within and across agencies to develop/strengthen existing practice approaches.

PSAS co-ordinate and chair the MACA/MATA event and ensure that all agencies are fully included and supported to participate in a discussion about their involvement, what has worked well, what has worked less well and why. PSAS produce a final overview report of agreed learning from the MATA/MACA meetings which is shared with all in attendance.

 **Phase 4 - Sharing the learning and progressing the plan:** 'Audit co-ordinators' and participants take responsibility for sharing the learning from MACA/MATA activity within their own agencies, identifying, overseeing and progressing any agreed areas of work.



 **Phase 5 - Showing impact on Service Development/Practice Improvement:** Following on from the MACA/MATA findings meeting and after an agreed period (usually between 6-12 months), the Audit Co-ordinators and PSAS will produce a MACA/MATA update report that reflects the progression of agreed work.



Feedback from professionals about their experience of attending MAAs?



“The MACA is a gold standard process of examining multi-agency working in a positive, non-blame environment” (Named Nurse Safeguarding Children, Colchester Hospital).

“How helpful it can be to share information and views on the family from different agencies that have different roles and a different perspective” (Social Worker, Family Group Conference).

“The MACA has given me more understanding of the challenges faced by different agencies, financial restraints, lack of resources in some areas. Good relationship building, learning for myself, my team and other agencies.” (Team Manager, Leaving & Aftercare, Children & Families).

The Benefits of Multi Agency Audits (MAAs)

Reflect on your own Practice

- Opportunity to **reflect and learn from your practice** and that of others.
- Increase understanding of other agencies' roles**, systems and practice approaches which will aid how you work together in the future.
- To **enable curiosity** about how agencies have worked together and **ask questions that will benefit improved multi-agency working** without blame.

Learn from others Experience

- Hear from a range of professionals about the **common and different practice challenges and strengths** of delivering services to children and families.
- Chance to recognise and **learn from the good practice** of your peers, as well as from areas of practice that have been less impactful.
- Encourages **transparent and confident discussion across agencies** which in turn increases individual and agency understanding of different perspectives, approaches and priorities.



Informs Multi-Agency Practice Development

- Learning informs and influences practice/service development** across the multi-agency group.
- Shares the experience of frontline practitioners with senior agency representatives**, who can then use it to support and influence future practice development.

Strengthens Multi-Agency Networks

- Creates **opportunities for learning and strengthening practice arrangements** beyond the MACA.
- Offers a **networking opportunity** for you to meet colleagues from partner agencies across Essex.



Frequently Asked Questions



Will my practice be scrutinised?

PSAS facilitate MAAs in a way that promotes a safe learning environment for all those who attend. The discussion is built upon shared professional/agency curiosity that seeks to understand how and when practice has worked well or less well, and to identify the key learning themes from different agency perspectives.

Do I need consent/permission from the child & family to nominate?

No, you do not. Whilst it is vital to consider the implications for a child & family of holding a MAA. Permission from the family is not explicitly required. This is due to the primary focus being about the effectiveness of multi-agency working. It is not about case management and planning work with children and families which of course should always be undertaken with the permission and participation of families. Under GDPR arrangements, MAA activity is supported as part of service development.

Will it be lots of work?

Invited professionals are usually asked to complete an audit tool which comprises 6-8 practice questions. The completion of this tool ensures you are well prepared to contribute to the MACA/MATA discussion from your agencies perspective. Work for MATAs vary as these are bespoke pieces of work. However, your agency Audit Co-ordinator will let you know what is expected/involved & support you through the process. PSAS takes care of organising & facilitating the day & developing the lines of enquiry/supporting materials used during the event.

What do I need to consider when nominating a MAA case?

Am I nominating for the right reason?

This is not a forum to influence case management decision-making or for resolving professional conflict.

Is this the right time? Has enough time passed to allow for reflection, or would a multi-agency reflective discussion compromise any ongoing activity or review?

Is this the right case? MAAs primarily focus on children (i.e. under 18) who have been open to Childrens Social Care at some point during this time (exceptions can be made). However, the family as a whole and adult involvement is typically considered in relation to the child as part of the MAA.

Am I clear about what I would like us to achieve as a multi-agency group? What might the focus of discussion be? Is there a frame for learning?

For more information about MAA events and nominating, please contact Chelsie Smith PSAS Specialist Project Officer within Children and Families, Essex County Council:

Chelsie.Smith@essex.gov.uk or MultiAgency.Audits@essex.gov.uk