



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

Services for Children and
Young People with Disabilities/Special Educational Needs

Advisory Teaching Service

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

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Guidelines

Augmentative and Alternative Communication
with particular reference to
Communication Aids
For Children and Young People
0-25 years

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 What is Communication?

Communication has been described as 'the essence of human life'. International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, (ISAAC). It is the means by which we give and receive information about ourselves, and the world we live in. <https://www.isaac-online.org/english/home/>

A difficulty with communication impinges on all areas of life and can have adverse effects on social, emotional, cognitive and language development and well - being.

People communicate using a range of different methods. Some people may require additional aids to enable them to communicate.

1.2 Aim of the Policy

These guidelines lie within a larger framework encompassing all methods of communication. AAC is part of Total Communication, which aims to ensure that all children and young people (CYP) with communication difficulties have a consistent and coherent approach to meeting their communication needs throughout their lives in school and in the wider community.

Some CYP with severe communication difficulties will need to use other methods to assist them. These methods are known as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC).

2.0 What is Augmentative and Alternative Communication?

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) adds and complements spoken communication. Most AAC users combine **aided** and **unaided** methods.

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is the term used to describe various methods of communication that are used to get around problems with ordinary speech.

AAC includes simple systems such as pictures, gestures and pointing, as well as more complex techniques involving powerful computer technology.

Some kinds of AAC are actually part of everyday communication for everyone. For example, waving goodbye or giving a 'thumbs up' instead of speaking. Or pointing to a picture or gesturing, in a foreign country. However, some people have to rely on AAC most of the time.

www.communicationmatters.org.uk/page/focus-on-leaflets

2.1 Unaided Communication

Requires no additional equipment e.g.: -

- Body language, facial expression, eye pointing
- Sign language (e.g. British Sign language, American Sign Language)
- Signing systems (e.g. Paget-Gorman Signed Speech, finger spelling)
- Signed vocabularies (e.g. Sign Supported English, Makaton vocabulary, Signalong)
- Verbal/gestural strategies (e.g. cued articulation, cued speech)

2.2 Aided Communication

Aided communication is a subset of AAC which refers to those methods of communication which involve using additional equipment, such as picture, symbol, letter or word boards or books and technology-based systems such as voice output communication aids. This may be used alongside speech and unaided communication, (Communication Matters, 2013).

<https://communicationmatters.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/What-is-AAC.pdf>

2.3 Low Tech Communication Aids

Low Tech Communication Aids are a form of aided communication. These communication systems may take many forms and consist of systems such as pen and paper, objects of reference, alphabet charts and books with photographs, pictures or symbols.

2.4 High Tech Communication Aids

High tech communication systems are a form of aided communication. These are devices that require at least a battery to operate. They range from simple single message devices to the sophisticated computer based devices.

A reliable method of access is needed for communication systems. Access methods may be **direct** or **indirect**.

Direct access includes:-

- Finger pointing
- Keyboard
- Infra red or light pointers
- Eye gaze

Indirect access includes: -

- Scanning with an input device e.g. a switch
- Head switch / foot switch
- Listener-mediated scanning communication (partner assists user to make vocabulary selections)

3.0 Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: The Guidelines relate the arrangements for children and young people/ young adults (CYP) up to age 25 who are the commissioning responsibility of Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) and NHS Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Exclusion criteria: CYP up to the age of 25 who are not the commissioning responsibility of GCC or Gloucestershire CCG are **not** covered by these arrangements. This exclusion applies to those CYP placed in Gloucestershire by other Local Authorities.

Also excluded are people over 25.

4.0 Assessment of Need

Initial assessment of need is to be carried out by teachers, parents/carers, Speech and Language Therapist (SLT), AAC Specialist, Advisory Teacher as appropriate, to establish the methods and strategies to be used by or with pupils.

If initial assessment determines that the CYP requires further assessment for a communication aid the Gloucestershire AAC pathway will be followed.

It will not be appropriate for all CYP with communication difficulties to be in receipt of a high tech communication aid.

Assessment will determine whether or not a high technology solution is appropriate to their communication needs.

This policy assumes that the CYP will already have in place a communication system, such as a book or chart or a system of signing, and that every measure has been taken to use these effectively.

There will need to be evidence of the resources that have been introduced, used and reviewed with the CYP. This evidence should include reports of reviews, target setting and outcomes and will form part of the assessment process.

5.0 Commitment of school and/or setting:-

- Value and respect every possible method of communication that a CYP may need to use.
- Ensure that all individual communication strategies are supported, by developing a shared knowledge, skills and attitudes base essential for an effective Total Communication environment.
- Raise awareness and develop a communication inclusive setting.
- Ensure all communication support materials are provided for a CYP in all environments.
- Ensure adequate resources to support CYPs' methods of communication are provided and maintained.
- Offer initial training to staff, parents/carers, peers and other relevant individuals involved with the CYP in collaboration with relevant professionals.

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6.0 Assessment for a communication aid

Recommendation for assessment for a communication aid does not necessarily mean that provision of such an aid will be the outcome of the assessment.

Assessment and provision of a communication aid should be a natural development from the provision already in place. For example, it will become clear that current communication system is not meeting the CYP's needs and the possibility of assessment should be agreed by the CYP's parents, and professionals involved.

7.0 Multi-Agency Commitment

There is a firm commitment to involve the CYP and their parents/carers and families at all levels of the process. The Specialist Lead in AAC has a key role in co-ordinating AAC referrals.

The various disciplines and agencies, which will become involved with these CYP and their families, are likely to include many of the following: -

- Teachers
- Teaching Assistants
- Speech and language therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Occupational therapists
- Clinical/Educational Psychologists
- Specialists in hearing and vision
- Advisory teachers
- Paediatricians
- Social services
- Early Years Professionals

8.0 Identification of need and the referral process for High-Tech aids

8.1 Evidence of a desire to communicate e.g.

- a) body language
 - b) gesture/facial expression
 - c) eye-pointing
 - d) hand pointing
 - e) vocalisation (possibly including some speech)
 - f) objects of reference
 - g) communication boards/books/pictures/symbols
 - h) signing
 - i) able to use an eye transfer (e'tran) frame
- Ability to understand cause and effect
 - Evidence of turn-taking skills
 - Some form of reliable intentional movement, e.g. yes/no
 - Commitment from parents to use the systems at home/with extended family/ socially
 - Commitment from school to support communication systems by offering an inclusive curriculum

8.2 Referral Process

All referrals requesting AAC intervention are considered by the local AAC team. The school/setting must send the referral request to the Specialist Lead in AAC.

The Specialist Lead in AAC will:-

- Check to ensure all evidence is present.
- Discuss with Local AAC Team; this includes Lead Advisory Teacher, Speech and Language Therapist.
- Ensure all criteria for referral have been met.

The assessment may be undertaken by the regional Specialised AAC Services also known as the HUB, or the Local AAC Team.

The Hub

This relates to the official document, Guidance for Commissioning AAC Services and Equipment, NHS-England, (March 2016).

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2016/03/guid-comms-aac.pdf>

Gloucestershire Local AAC services work closely with the NHS, AAC West of England Specialist Team (AAC WEST) based in Bristol.

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An individual accessing a Specialist AAC service would have the following:

- a severe or complex communication difficulty associated with a range of physical, cognitive, learning or sensory deficits;
- a clear discrepancy between their level of understanding and ability to speak.

In addition, the CYP *must*:

- be able to understand the purpose of a communication aid
- have developed beyond cause and effect understanding,

and may:

- have experience of using low tech AAC which is insufficient to enable them to realise their communication potential.

Local AAC Team (also known as the Spoke)

A graduated assessment may also be undertaken by the Local AAC Team in consultation with parents/ carers, and staff working in the school/setting including professionals involved with the CYP.

The protocol for requesting a communication aid is given in [Appendix 1](#). [Appendix 2](#) contains the referral form to be completed by the school/setting. [Appendix 3](#) gives the CYP Information Form to be completed for the local team assessment. [Appendix 4](#) gives the specific request form to be completed after assessment and consultation.

9.0 Transitions

If a CYP moves to a non-maintained setting, with a communication aid, owned by the LA the LA will continue to loan existing equipment for a period of two terms. The receiving setting will need to re-assess the CYP's needs.

Post 16 transitions

The Local Team will support the transition if the communication aid has been commissioned through the Hub/NHS England.

10.0 Purchase, insurance and maintenance of aids

10.1 Purchase (Local AAC team)

Where there is evidence to support the recommendation for a communication aid the LA will loan the equipment. Schools will have a commitment to provide the first £300 of the cost of the equipment. All schools will have a commitment to purchase and update software as required.

10.1b Purchase (The Hub)

For those that meet the Hub criteria:

AAC systems will be provided by the Hub following the assessment period if identified as appropriate. The Hub will issue, monitor, maintain, recall and refurbish equipment as required.

10.2 Insurance, (Local AAC Team)

AAC systems are **no longer** covered by Gloucestershire County Council 'All Risks' Policy. Schools, setting and families should take care of the property and take reasonable steps to prevent loss and damage.

Any loss or damage to the equipment should be documented and reported to the Specialist Lead for AAC. Any repairs and replacement will be considered on an individual basis.

All claims involving theft must be notified to the Police immediately.

10.2a Insurance, (The Hub)

The Hub will **not** insure AAC systems. Insurance will be the responsibility of the school / setting and family/ carers.

10.3 Maintenance

10.3a Local AAC Team

Great care should be taken of equipment by all concerned parties. At the time of purchase a warranty will be taken out on the equipment to cover for at least the first year. Such warranties do not cover inappropriate use or management of the equipment.

10.3b The Hub

The Hub will maintain equipment that is purchased by them.

11.0 Monitoring and Evaluation of this Policy.

The document will be reviewed and agreed by the Local AAC Team in consultation with Gloucestershire CCG's