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ADCS response to the Review of Education, Health and Care plans: proposed timescales

1. The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd. (ADCS) is the national leadership organisation in England for directors of children's services (DCSs) under the provisions of the *Children Act (2004)*. The DCS acts as a single point of leadership and accountability for services for children and young people in a local area, including children's social care and education.
2. ADCS welcomes the greater clarity provided by the proposed introduction of a clear deadline for local authorities (LAs) to submit proposed draft amendments to a plan after a review meeting. An additional four weeks following the review meeting provides more time for any relevant evidence to be submitted and considered, and for high quality decisions to be made about whether a plan should be amended and, if so, how best to meet the needs of that child or young person.
3. The extended deadline for issuing proposals for the amendments and any supporting evidence via the introduction of a two-step process where parents/carers are notified of the intent to amend the plan and given an explanation and timescale for the procedure that follows, will provide a timely indication for the child or young person and their family that there will be a change to their plan.
4. The addition of an extra week to circulate the advice and information gathered before the review meeting will provide more time for the LA, the child or young person and their parent/carer plus other relevant professionals to absorb the information. However, using this time to submit anything else that they feel might be relevant, as was suggested in the consultation paper, might not leave sufficient time for all parties to review any late submissions. This extension risks additional pressures on educational settings when organising EHCP reviews, including requesting, collating and distributing information earlier which should be borne in mind.
5. While ADCS members are in favour of these proposals, there is concern over the capacity of the workforce to meet these timescales, despite the extensions. The SEND reforms, although rightly ambitious, were not accompanied by a national drive to recruit and train the required workforce to underpin the Reforms, e.g. occupational therapy staff, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists, with demand now outstripping supply. While there have been some attempts to address this, e.g. the DfE announced an expansion of funding to train more educational psychologists from September 2020, children and young people are yet to feel the benefit of this investment as the first cohort is yet to qualify. Once they do, the issues with recruitment will still apply due to competition from private practice, the NHS and academy trusts who often can afford to offer higher salaries ([DfE, 2019](#)). ADCS members have found that arranging reports from therapists and

educational psychologists has become increasingly complex due to limited capacity of professionals, making it difficult to ensure that assessments are timely and representative of current needs and within review deadlines. This is further complicated by a small but significant cohort of children and young people with specific needs where information is needed from specialist centres for specific medical conditions.

6. The role of SEN case officer is critical to ensuring that EHCP reviews are completed on time by bringing together a range of professionals and a wealth of information, yet it is the single role within the system that does not have a professional footing. Along with many other roles in the workforce, ADCS members report significant issues with recruitment for these posts. Currently, there is no national investment in the training and support of case officers. Investing in professional development of the role will increase high quality case management of EHCP reviews. ADCS has called for further focus on this cohort of the workforce as part of the response to the SEND and AP Green Paper.

If you would like to discuss any of the points raised in this consultation further, please contact sarah.wilson@adcs.org.uk in the first instance.