

## NAIT SCERTS™ Implementation Guidance for staff with a leadership role in a local authority, school or early years establishment

### SCERTS

The SCERTS Framework provides a robust, evidence based and multi-disciplinary approach to assessment and planning, relevant to individuals with a range of additional support needs, including autism. It includes a focus on **Social Communication, Emotional Regulation** and **Transactional Supports** at three developmental stages from pre-verbal to conversational level. SCERTS is lifespan model and could be applied across child and adult services.

It has been found to fit the Scottish context well because it is a 'holistic' approach, it focusses on need and not diagnostic label and it supports individualisation of 'intervention' in naturally occurring environments (e.g. home, school and community or work settings).

A number of local authorities, as well as individual establishments and teams are implementing the SCERTS framework in ways that suit their local context in children and young people's services. SCERTS has been found to be particularly relevant for individuals requiring support through the **targeted** and **specialist** levels of the 'staged intervention' model where the team around a child includes professionals from a range of disciplines.

### Training

#### Why?

The SCERTS model can be used without training but those who have attended the 2 and 3 day formal training delivered by a SCERTS author report that it is excellent in building observational skills and knowledge about the framework through video examples.

#### Who?

SCERTS training is suitable for teachers working in specialist settings, peripatetic and advisory teaching staff, Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists, CAMHS and partner agencies working with autistic individuals and their families.

#### What?

Local authorities in Scotland implementing SCERTS have focused local professional learning opportunities on:

- Understanding the stages of language development
- Developing staff skills and practice in carrying out and recording high quality observation
- Familiarisation with the vocabulary/ terminology of SCERTS (e.g. self and mutual regulation, learning supports and interpersonal supports)
- Using SCERTS in Action paperwork in practice
- Evidence based practice

The SCERTS framework includes guidance in the use of 'appreciative enquiry' to support frontline school staff in taking on new ways of working, through positive feedback and reflection (with or without filming). This has been an key area of focus for some teams.

Some local authorities or groups of authorities may wish to consider organising a SCERTS formal training event in their local area. This can be carried out with large groups over 2 or 3 days. Enquiries regarding training from SCERTS authors can be directed to: [office@commxroads.com](mailto:office@commxroads.com)

The SCERTS authors regularly deliver 2 and 3 day training in Kettering and London. Individual places can often be booked. Training opportunities are now also available online.

Scottish Government provided two 2 day SCERTS training events, delivered by Emily Rubin, in Scotland (2018 and 2019).

In addition to formal training, there are some helpful introductory film clips available online:

<https://youtu.be/h7-x3bTGNTg>

<https://youtu.be/srJ2BnR-Qp8>

<https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/6164>

<https://mediahub.unl.edu/media/6165>

The SCERTS authors have developed online training modules that can be purchased individually or as a course. Details of costs and further information can be found at: <https://www.medbridgeeducation.com/a/scerts>

## Resources

Staff attending any of the formal SCERTS courses are usually provided with (electronic access to) planning and assessment paperwork.

Two SCERTS manuals are available to purchase:

Prizant A., Wetherby, A., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. and Rydell, P. 2006. *The SCERTS™ Model: A Comprehensive Educational Approach for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Volume I Assessment*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Prizant A., Wetherby, A., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. and Rydell, P. 2006. *The SCERTS™ Model: A Comprehensive Educational Approach for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Volume II Program Planning and Intervention*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Some local authorities have created their own, locally relevant recording and planning templates.

The NAIT Team are working with Education Scotland to develop a core set of templates that we hope to make freely available to Scottish local authorities.

## Getting started

Once key members of the multi-disciplinary team have been introduced to the SCERTS framework, and have access to appropriate recording and planning templates, it really is a case of just getting going! To support this initial (and sometimes daunting) step, the SCERTS authors have created a 'SCERTS in Action' pack, which provides a 7 step process, looking only at the most frequently used SCERTS targets. For teams working with a number of autistic children and young people, it is recommended that they begin with a child in a more straightforward context.

Undoubtedly questions will arise but it is only when people have the confidence to 'give it a go' that these can be identified and addressed. Drawing from the experience of practitioners, we have provided some **Frequently asked questions** together with possible answers at the end of this document.

## Learning from practice

Working with a large staff team, to 'walk through' a (fictional) case study has proven to be helpful in the context of both a school staff team and across an outreach teaching service. Both groups were provided with 'observations' written from the perspectives of Speech and Language Therapist, Occupational Therapist and Class Teacher and were supported to work through each stage of the Scerts in Action process.

- Involving the multi-disciplinary team in professional learning and collegiate activities has supported engagement in joint planning.
- As would be expected when introducing any new way of working, it is likely that individual team members will progress at different speeds and with different levels of confidence. Identifying those who are beginning to be more competent and confident and providing opportunities for them to support peers through the process has proven to be helpful in a number of contexts.
- Creating and sharing fictional examples of completed assessments and plans has facilitated reflective conversations.
- It is generally acknowledged that carrying out a first SCERTS assessment is a time consuming process but, as staff become familiar with the language, principles and processes, it can be completed much more easily.
- It can take a significant period of time for an entire team to move away from familiar practice and to adopt new ways of working. Referring to SCERTS during collegiate sessions and professional learning events and team leads modelling the principles and vocabulary can help to move the team towards a more consistent approach.

## Staged intervention

How does SCERTS fit with CIRCLE?

CIRCLE and SCERTS support the team around the child to recognise the need for an individualised and structured approach and share a common focus on identifying adjustments that can be made to the environment, by the people around them and opportunities for engagement and participation in the naturally occurring environments of home, school and the community. Both are relevant to children with a range of additional support needs.

Whilst CIRCLE could be considered 'universal' level good inclusive practice, with or without the involvement of the multi-disciplinary team, the SCERTS approach is a 'targeted' or 'specialist' level resource, which can provide staff with a more in-depth assessment focus than would happen in most classrooms.

<https://www.thirdspace.scot/circle/>

## What approaches should we use?

Following observation, assessment, and multi-disciplinary planning, and once developmentally appropriate targets have been agreed for an individual, the team around the child need to consider how they will meet these targets.

The NAIT Team have developed an [Autism Evidence Based Practice Toolkit](#) for use with the SCERTS Assessment and planning Framework. This guidance was developed through evidence based review and in consultation with experienced multi-disciplinary partners and is free to download on the NAIT website: [www.thirdspace.scot/nait](http://www.thirdspace.scot/nait)

## NAIT SCERTS related resources

- NAIT Autism Evidence Based Toolkit <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/NAIT-Evidence-Based-Toolkit-V-1.1-2019.pdf>
- NAIT Risk Assessment <https://www.thirdspace.scot/nait/education-resources/>
- NAIT Safe Space Guidance for Social Partners <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NAIT-Safe-Space-Guidance-for-Social-Partners-Final.pdf>
- NAIT Visual Support Guides for social, language and conversation partners <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Guides-to-Using-Home-Visual-Supports-The-Collection-for-all-Stages-March-2020.pdf>
- Strategies to Support Language Partners to Initiate and Engage in Social Communication <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NAIT-Strategies-to-Support-Language-Partners-to-Initiate-and-Engage-in-Social-Communication.pdf>
- NAIT Key Messages for Staying at Home Language and Conversational Partner Guidance <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NAIT-Key-Messages-for-Staying-at-Home-Language-and-Conversation-Partners.pdf>
- NAIT Key Messages for Staying at Home Social Partner Guidance <https://www.thirdspace.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NAIT-Key-Messages-for-Staying-at-Home-Social-Partners.pdf>

## SCERTS in specialist provisions

SCERTS has a clear fit with targetted and specialist approaches applied in specialist provisions.

A brief description of how three specialist establishments in an authority implemented the SCERTS Framework can be found below:

### Examples from practice:

**School 1** is a primary special school for children with Intellectual Disability (ID). All teaching and support staff attended formal SCERTS training.

The staff team have implemented the SCERTS approach by:

- Focussing on creating a predictable environment and on making people and activities desirable for each child
- Creating a School Improvement Plan focused on implementing SCERTS assessment and planning
- Adopting an Appreciative Enquiry approach to professional dialogue (including peer support) and quality improvement

- Creating relevant recording and planning templates
- Working with the multi-disciplinary team to create a developmentally appropriate SCERTS plan for every child
- Holding a parents SCERTS information session
- Working with parents to create an information sheet that will communicate key information about the new focus for their child's targets

**School 2** is a secondary special school for children with Intellectual Disability (ID). All teaching and support staff have attended formal SCERTS training.

The staff team have implemented the SCERTS approach by:

- Focussing on creating a predictable environment and on making people and activities desirable for each child
- Working with the multi-disciplinary team to create SCERTS based IEP targets for literacy and health and well-being. This has placed communication at the heart of planning for all pupils.
- Providing parents with a flier sharing information about the school's approach to assessment and planning

**School 3** is an all through special school for children with autism and related needs. All primary teaching and support staff have attended formal SCERTS training as well as a whole staff 'walk through' of a fictional case study. In secondary, two SCERTS Champions were identified and supported to 'walk through' the assessment and planning process for a learner by SCERTS experienced colleagues from health and education. Following reflective conversations they were, in turn, able to support their peers.

The staff team have implemented the SCERTS approach by:

- Focussing on creating a predictable environment and on making people and activities desirable for each child

### SCERTS in early years

New Zealand has adopted the SCERTS model as core practice across early years.

<http://seonline.tki.org.nz/ASD/Learning/SCERTS-in-practice>

Some authorities in Scotland have started implementing SCERTS in early years settings.

### Example from practice:

#### Early Years ASN Outreach Service

- All teaching and support staff attended formal SCERTS training
- The team created relevant recording and planning templates
- Each teacher liaised with the wider multi-disciplinary team to identify a child to assess
- Each professional involved in supporting the child carried out an observation (at least 30 minutes). The child was observed in a range of contexts.
- Using the information garnered from the observations, the team met together to go through the 'SCERTS in Action' assessment process
- The team selected four relevant targets, one from each domain
- Together they created an action plan, stating what everyone around the child would do, and what each member of the team would do to support the child to achieve the targets
- Conversations with parents/carers informed the process and the child's targets were shared with parents/ carers
- Following an agreed period of implementation, the plan was reviewed and updated by the multi-disciplinary team
- When beginning to support new learners and their families, the team start by considering SCERTS assessment and planning with the team around the child
- New staff joining the team have accessed Medbridge online SCERTS Modules and have been supported by the multi-disciplinary colleagues familiar with the framework
- The team engaged in a professional learning event around Appreciative Enquiry and use this approach in supporting staff in early learning and childcare settings

### SCERTS in mainstream settings

For children in mainstream settings requiring individualised and/or specialist support through the staged intervention model, it may be appropriate for one or more of the specialist team around the child (e.g. outreach teacher, Psychologist, Speech and Language Therapist or Occupational Therapist) to lead the team in carrying out SCERTS assessment and planning.

It would not usually be expected that mainstream teaching staff would be trained in, or expected to use the SCERTS Framework, however they will have valuable contributions to make to a multi-disciplinary planning team.

### SCERTS across an authority

Across an authority, SCERTS focussed planning can impact on:

- Mindset - looking at and talking about things we see and do in a different way
- SCERTS developmental stages and terminology is referred to and used in professional learning about Additional Support Needs and in communication with the team around the child and between professionals
- Changing the way behaviour is described
- Risk assessment – looking at behaviour presenting through a SCERTS lens changes how we talk about, anticipate and support distress
- A focus on supporting children to be well regulated
- The right support at the right level and a better shared understanding of all developmental stages, even where the discrepancy between age and stage is big
- Professional Learning to be described as relevant to particular SCERTS developmental levels
- When using the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) – staff now include a focus on people's names and verbs at an early stage, rather than a focus on nouns
- When using Signalong – focus on people's names and verbs/ actions to support social communication
- Parent leaflets and information sessions can introduce families to the vocabulary and how to use SCERTS lens in supporting their child at home
- Paperwork across the authority beginning to reflect the SCERTS levels and focus on understanding signs of dysregulation
- Predictability and desirability at the heart of support for Additional Support Needs

### Maintaining the model

Once a group of professionals have got started, they often have a passion and motivation to continue to use SCERTS. Ongoing planning is helpful and some key issues to think about are:

- Leadership happens at a range of levels. Sometimes the real leaders in implementing SCERTS locally do not have influence over local policy, strategy and budgets. Good relationships between practitioners with expertise and managers within different services are essential.
- Cross authority networks
- Staff changes are inevitable and introducing new staff to SCERTS can happen through
  - Induction to include orientation to SCERTS
  - Peer support to learn with and from others with expertise
  - Professional learning audit to identify training needs within different professional groups
  - Cross professional training
  - Support to follow a culture which values evidence based practice

### Frequently asked questions

#### How do we find out more about SCERTS?

See Training section above

#### How do we change mindsets?

Culture, mindsets and ethos do not change overnight. There are a wide range of factors affecting mindsets. The key thing is to have a clear plan, developed and shared with the right people. Inclusive language and attitudes can be gradually embedded in everything we do across professional dialogue, in schools, with parents, in training, within documents.

SCERTS is just one way that we will do that. SCERTS can help to change mindsets by understanding and seeing behaviour differently. SCERTS helps us to think about differences rather than deficits in children and young people.

**Is SCERTS just for autistic learners?**

The SCERTS approach is not just applicable for autistic learners and can be used for a wide range of individuals, across the life span where social communication and emotional regulation affect participation.

**What should we do first?**

The first thing is to become informed about the approach and then just get started! It is usually best to start with more straightforward situations and contexts. Find a partner to get started with and support each other. The best way to get used to the paperwork is just to use it.

**Who is in the multi-disciplinary team?**

- Speech and Language Therapists (SLT)
- Occupational Therapists (OT)
- CAMHS staff
- Teachers
- Educational Psychologists
- And other professionals

Using SCERTS collaboratively we learn from each other. SCERTS is an opportunity for professionals to undertake a single shared approach to planning, e.g. a teacher and an SLT carry out the same role in a SCERTS assessment but bring their own expertise.

**What if there are no health professionals involved?**

In some contexts it might not be possible to involve a health professional in a timely manner. This does not prevent the team around the child from using SCERTS.

**Does everyone involved in the plan need to have had SCERTS training?**

It is helpful if one or more of the professionals involved have undertaken the formal SCERTS training however it is not essential. There is no licencing associated with using the approach and while training is helpful and recommended it is not essential.

**Should we involve the parents/ family members?**

Parents/ carers should be equal partners in all Getting it right child planning. Professionals need to use judgement about language and jargon used. For example, instead of saying “we are going to do a SCERTS assessment”, we would say “we are going to carry out some observations in everyday classroom and play situations. We’ll then talk together about your priorities”.

It is really important to take account of the 24 hour life of the child and to listen to the parent’s perspective and priorities.

**Should the autistic individual be part of the process?**

In all Getting it right child planning, a developmentally appropriate approach to listening to and understanding the child or young person’s views should be taken. It is unlikely that we would use SCERTS documentation or language directly with individuals.

**How should I share information?**

From SCERTS in Action paperwork, an individual plan with 4 targets and strategies is written. Often the Outcomes and Supports pages are the main documents shared with parents, however some will wish to receive more detail and this should be provided. Information should be shared according to preference. Additional information relevant to particular supports and strategies may be helpful (See NAIT website resources)

**What if we can’t decide which stage a child is at?**

Usually this can be decided through collaborative discussion. Some children may straddle two stages. It is okay to draw from both stages when forming targets and a plan.

### What about IEPs – should we have both an IEP and a SCERTS plan?

Each authority will have guidance and expectations around planning. It is important to follow local protocols and discuss changes to this with your leadership teachers. It is an aspiration across Scotland that we work towards having a single child's plan across services. SCERTS supports this goal.

### How do we create opportunities for initiating with language partners?

See NAIT Guidance above

### How do we support communication with social partners?

See NAIT Guidance above

### What changes can we expect to see?

There is some good research evidence (in Randomised Controlled Trials) that SCERTS improves adaptive communication, social skills and executive functioning, impacting upon participation and learning. RCTs took place within classroom settings. The references are below.

In Scotland the NAIT team have undertaken consultation with practitioners who have started using SCERTS over the past 2-3 years. Everyone consulted has had a different experience, has implemented SCERTS in different ways and in a different order and has had a different range of outcomes.

We asked everyone that we consulted to describe the impact of SCERTS implementation on their practice/ children/ class/ school/ establishment/ team/ local area. Here are some of the answers we received.

- Strengthened multi-disciplinary working
- Increased inclusion
- Reduced incidents and exclusions
- A shared language
- A shared goal
- A single child's plan
- Inclusive mindsets
- Developmentally appropriate targets
- Children and young people 'ready to learn'

The thing we heard most frequently thing was that staff described and understood behaviour differently, therefore responded to it differently. Some described this as changing mindsets. As SCERTS author Amy Laurent tells us in her TED talk, ["Compliance is not the goal"](#).

More information can be found at:

<http://scerts.com>

<http://seonline.tki.org.nz/ASD/Learning/SCERTS-in-practice>

[Add NAIT SCERTS list of evidence link](#)

### Reading

Laurent, A. C., Prizant, B. M., & Gorman, K. S. (2018). Supporting Parents to Promote Emotion Regulation Abilities in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A SCERTS Model Perspective. In *Handbook of Parent-Implemented Interventions for Very Young Children with Autism* (pp. 301-320). Springer, Cham.

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O'Neill, J., Bergstrand, L., Bowman, K., Elliott, K., Mavin, L., Stephenson, S., & Wayman, C. (2010). The SCERTS model: Implementation and evaluation in a primary special school. *Good Autism Practice (GAP)*, 11(1), 7-15.

Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., & Laurent, A. C. (2003). The SCERTS model: A transactional, family-centered approach to enhancing communication and socioemotional abilities of children with autism spectrum disorder. *Infants & Young Children*, 16(4), 296-316.

Prizant, B. M., Wetherby, A. M., Rubin, E., Laurent, A. C., & Rydell, P. J. (2005). *The SCERTS [TM] Model: A Comprehensive Educational Approach for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.

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Walworth, D. D., Register, D., & Engel, J. N. (2009). Using the SCERTS model assessment tool to identify music therapy goals for clients with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 46(3), 204-216.

Wetherby, A. M., Guthrie, W., Woods, J., Schatschneider, C., Holland, R. D., Morgan, L., & Lord, C. (2014). Parent-implemented social intervention for toddlers with autism: an RCT. *Pediatrics*, peds-2014.

Yu, L., & Zhu, X. (2018). Effectiveness of a SCERTS Model-Based Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Hong Kong: A Pilot Study. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 1-14.

#### **Links to recent studies**

SCERTS CSI study: [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29939056](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29939056)

SCERTS Hong Kong Study: [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-018-3649-z](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-018-3649-z)

SCERTS/ESI study: : <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/134/6/1084>