



Outcomes, outputs and impact

What is the difference?

Language around outcomes can be confusing, with different people using the same words in different ways. This document aims to help local areas to have a shared understanding of different terms.

Why do we need a focus on outcomes?

The Children and Families Act 2014 recognises that an explicit focus on outcomes is needed to ensure that children and young people with SEND live happy, healthy, fulfilling lives. All partners share responsibility for achieving this, and a shared vocabulary around outcomes means that everyone is on the same page as to how this will be achieved.

This resource will cover:

- The difference between outputs and outcomes
- The difference between outcomes and impact
- Strategic outcomes
- Operational outcomes
- Individual outcomes
- The relationship between the levels





What is the difference between outputs and outcomes?

Outputs are about what we (the adults supporting children, young people and families) did or delivered, our actions, activities or interventions.

For example:

- Number of workshops delivered
- Number of assessments completed
- Percentage of EHC plans completed within 20 weeks
- Number of therapy interventions delivered
- Number of immunisations given
- Percentage of clinic appointments attended

Outcomes are about what difference these outputs make to children, young people and their families to improve their quality of life.

For example:

- Children and young people in our area are happier
- Jessica has improved quality of sleep
- Frances goes to her youth club independently
- Nandlal goes on weekend trips away with his family
- CYP accessing a particular therapy have reduced anxiety

All outcomes answer the question 'so what?'
What difference have our actions and interventions (outputs) made in the lives of children, young people and families?

What is the difference between outcomes and impact?

Outcomes are all about the difference made in the lives of children, young people and families. They always answer the question 'so what?'

Impact is broader, it can include the difference outputs make to:

- Policies and strategies
- Service delivery and processes
- Pathways
- Ways of working, communication and relationships
- Workforce development



In other words:

Impact can be thought of as what difference this output (activity or action) has made to professionals or the system, where outcomes are what difference this output (activity or action) has made to children, young people and families.

There is often a chain here: an output or series of outputs make an impact on processes and services, which in turn improve outcomes for children, young people and families.

Strategic outcomes

Strategic outcomes are what we want to see for all children and young people in a local area. This can be for all children and young people (universal) or all children and young people with SEND, but they must be developed in co-production with children, young people, families and professionals. For example:

As they are co-produced, these look different in different areas. However, they are always big, broad and about living a happier, more fulfilling life. Common themes include:

Taking part in
fun activities

Having good
relationships

Becoming
more
independent

Getting ready
for work

Being as
healthy as
possible

These are the 'so what?' of all of our work, and should be a shared language for all partners supporting SEND. They should also be what partners are held accountable to, and should therefore be central to monitoring and evaluation, incorporating the views of children, young people and families.



An outcomes-based commissioning cycle

Understanding our population and how their needs act as barriers to the outcomes

Planning services which meet needs and contribute to achieving the outcomes

Identifying progress made towards the outcomes

Delivering services in a way supports families

Examples of strategic outcomes include:

- [Leeds](#)
- [Stockport](#)
- [Hertfordshire](#)

For more information on developing and implementing a strategic outcomes framework, see:

- [OBC resource](#)
- [Joint commissioning bulletin](#)
- Data bulletin





Operational outcomes

Operational outcomes are what we want to see for all children and young people accessing a particular service.

- Good operational outcomes are about applying the big, broad strategic outcomes in a particular service.
- They shouldn't look any different to the local area's strategic outcomes, but they should be used proactively. For example, in:
 - Service specifications
 - Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - Staff job descriptions and appraisals
 - Feedback and monitoring

For an example of operational outcomes see:

- Camden case study
- RCSLT

We are keen to hear from local areas who are beginning to use their strategic outcomes at the operational level. Please get in touch if you or your colleagues are involved in this.

Individual outcomes

Individual outcomes are what a child or young person realistically wants to achieve in their own life, or what their family want them to achieve based on the child's preferences.

Outcomes sought

- Individual outcomes start life as aspirations. These are a child, young person and/or parent carer's hopes and dreams for the individual's future. They can be anything and everything, and do not have to be realistic.
- Aspirations should be unpicked to identify 'outcomes sought'. These are the realistic stepping stones identified by the child, young person and/or parent carer as progress towards the aspirations, which should be unpicked in a person-centred conversation.



For example,

Aspiration	Outcomes Sought
I want to be a butterfly	Butterflies get to go wherever they want whenever they want. I can't do that, I always have an adult with me. My friends get to go to new places and try new things, and their parents just sit on the bench and watch. I want to be like them.
I want to be in Little Mix. I love their clothes and make up. I want to dance like them.	Going to the disco is like being in Little Mix. I want to do my make-up myself and dance with my friends. I could get a boyfriend!
We want Bea to enjoy her childhood and have the same opportunities as her brother	Bea wants to be able to go to restaurants and cafés with us, especially for her birthday. We want her to have positive, meaningful friendships, and she would really like to have sleepovers with friends like her brother does.

Like strategic outcomes, individual outcomes are big, broad and holistic. They are usually about happiness, inclusion, friendship, independence etc. **They should always be led by the child, young person or parent carer/s.**

To learn more about holistic outcomes in Education, Health and Care plans, including the difference between targets, outcomes sought and SMART outcomes, please make use of [CDC's free e-learning package](#).



SMART Outcomes

The **outcomes sought** by children, young people and families are then often formalised into SMART outcomes by professionals. This is what should happen in an EHC plan, but it's not the only place they might exist. For example:

Outcomes Sought	SMART Outcomes
Bea wants to be able to go to restaurants and cafés with us, especially for her birthday. We want her to have positive, meaningful friendships, and she would really like to have sleepovers with friends like her brother does.	By the time she is 14, Bea will enjoy a meal in a café or restaurant with her family once every two months.
	By the time she is 14, Bea will spend one night per month away from home without her parents with a friend or family member.

Targets

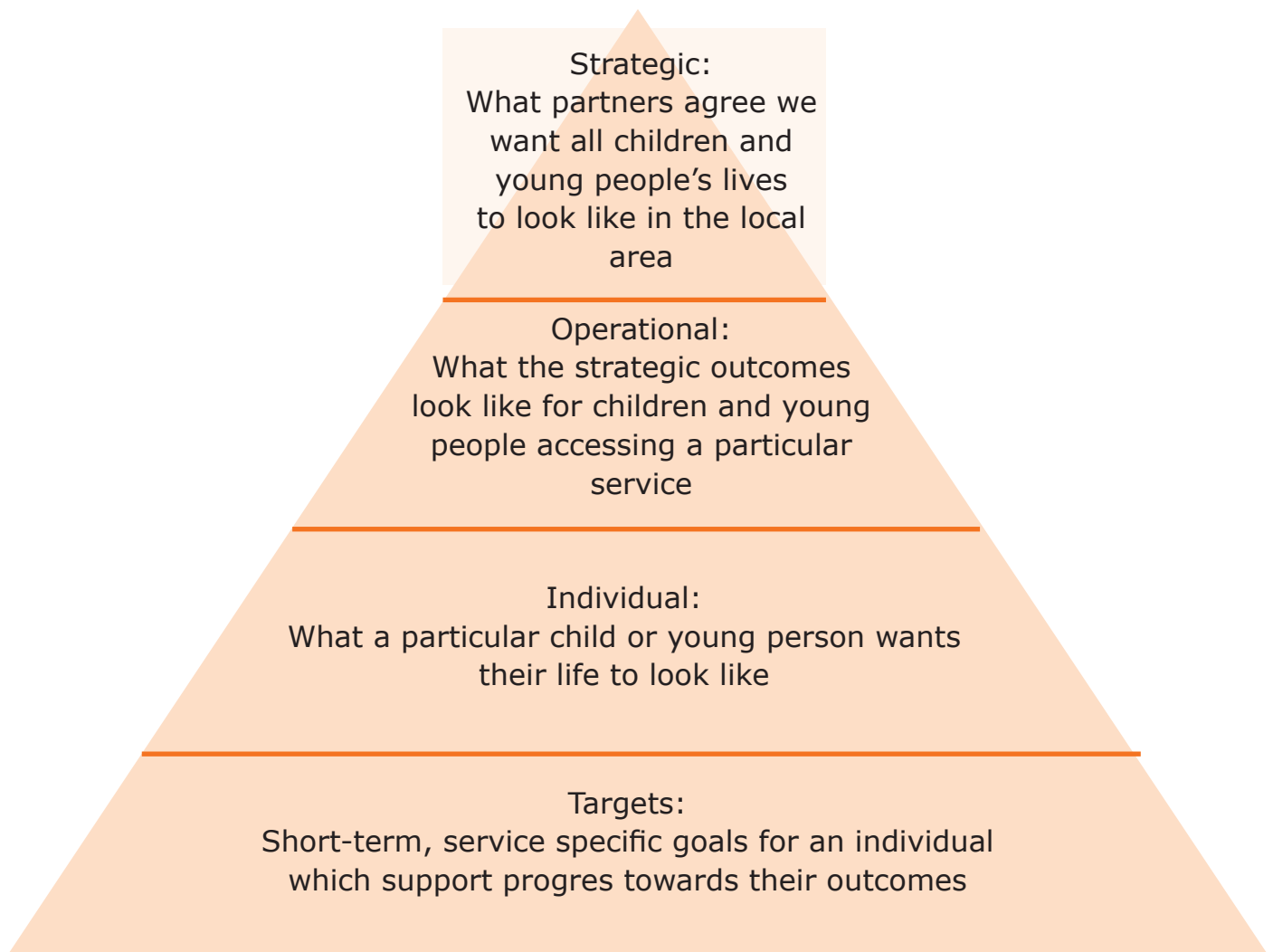
- **Targets** are smaller goals which sit underneath the holistic outcomes, from the perspective of a particular service.
- There must be a direct relationship between outcomes and targets
- Achieving these targets indicates that the child or young person is getting closer to their outcomes.
- These are often also called outcomes, but we call them targets to avoid confusion.

SMART outcome	Targets
By the time she is 14, Bea will enjoy a meal in a café or restaurant with her family once every two months.	In 6 months, Bea will use her PECS book to choose her lunch at school and at home, every day.
	In 12 months, the number of Bea's epileptic seizures will have reduced by 50%



There should be a strong thread running through all levels of outcomes, with colleagues working at each level clear on how their role is part of the bigger picture.

Strategic outcomes can act as a litmus test for individual outcomes: are the big, holistic themes reflected in an individual's outcomes, or do they look more like service specific targets?



For more information about outcomes, please see the following resources:

- Strategic level
- Operational level
- Individual level

If you feel that your local area could benefit from further support on understanding outcomes at particular level, or on strengthening the relationships between the levels, please contact Philippa Watts (pwatts@ncb.org.uk) to discuss.