Guidelines for

Validated Self-Evaluation:

Support and challenge for Community Learning and Development in driving improvement

September 2017

Contents

Introduction

Education Scotland's mission is 'to provide the best blend of national support and challenge to inspire and secure continuous improvement in experiences and opportunities for all learners in Scotland'. One of the ways we do this is through the use of Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE) processes. VSE is validation rather than inspection, however it is evaluative activity and therefore forms part of a scrutiny approach.

These guidelines and accompanying templates are designed to assist lead officers of community learning and development (CLD) together with CLD partners to plan and prepare for Validated Self-Evaluation (VSE). It will help you to prepare for the VSE and to outline the kinds of activities which will take place. It aims to answer some of the questions you may have regarding VSE.

The VSE model takes place within the context of *The Requirements for Community Learning and Development (Scotland) Regulations 2013*[1] and the *Strategic Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships: Community Learning and Development (2012)*[2]. The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework sets out the strategic objectives for all public services, including those delivering CLD. Within this, the focus of a VSE and partnership between CLD and Education Scotland is on how well the local authority and CLD partners are contributing to:

- improved life chances for people of all ages through learning, personal development and active citizenship;
- stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

All types of CLD evaluative activity, including VSE allow Education Scotland to identify and report on how well these objectives are being met. In providing answers to these questions, HM Inspectors will refer to the quality framework *How good is the learning and development in our community? (Updated September 2016)*[3].

Validated Self-evaluation

Validated self-evaluation (VSE) is a collaborative, evaluative process. It aims to improve the quality of provision and outcomes for learners by providing support and challenge to the work of community learning and development (CLD). It is led by the local authority and CLD partners and involves a partnership with Education Scotland who work alongside staff and volunteers and applies their knowledge of CLD, in addition to expertise in evaluation.

The purpose of the VSE process is to support, extend and challenge CLD's own self-evaluation, to affirm, or otherwise, their evaluation of strengths and areas for improvement. This is turn, will strengthen outcomes for learners, communities and wider stakeholders.

VSE acknowledges that the responsibility for improving services and outcomes lies with the local authority and CLD partners. It recognises that self-evaluation is increasingly well-embedded across the Scottish educational landscape and that high-quality self-evaluation can lead to continuous improvement for learners and the achievement of excellence in practice and provision.

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[1] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2013/175/introduction/made
[2] http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2012/06/2208/0
[3] https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk4hgiocommunitylearning.aspx

At the VSE self-evaluation stage, the role of HM Inspectors (HMI) is to support and challenge the local authority and CLD partners' approaches to self-evaluation and help them progress towards developing an action plan for improvement. High-quality professional dialogue and mentoring are essential skills applied by HMI and team members during the VSE.

HM Inspectors use a best practice set of principles, which supports them to establish and maintain positive relationships during inspections and review. This is called the PRAISE framework and a copy is included in Appendix 1. Throughout the VSE, we shall engage you, staff and partners in professional discussion with the aim of helping you to bring about improvement. This link will take you to Education Scotland's overarching Principles of inspection and review document.

VSE aims and objectives are to:

- build and support the capacity of the local authority and CLD partners to evaluate their services and improve the quality of the services that they provide;
- support self-evaluation and quality systems;
- support, promote and develop good practice and best value in CLD;
- provide information to Scottish Ministers, the national Shared Risk Assessment process and public on the quality of provision in CLD; and
- offer independent evaluation and validation of self-evaluation processes.

VSE is high-quality self-evaluation focused on improvement, which requires:

The *culture* of self-evaluation to -

- be embedded in the culture of the organisation; and
- be a continuous, systematic process as opposed to a single event.

The *design* of self-evaluation to:

- be focused on outcomes for learners;
- support the achievement of organisational or partnership objectives;
- be owned by those carrying out the self-evaluation;
- lead to targeted action, improvement and future planning;
- be built on existing good practice and relevant existing standards;
- be rigorous, comprehensive, systematic and transparent; and
- be based on a wide range of experience.

The *accountability* for self-evaluation should:

- be integrated with, and form part of, the organisational or partnership performance management and public reporting arrangements.

The *process* of self-evaluation should:

- be participative;
- be focused on identifying service and practice strengths and areas for improvement;
- involve a wide range of stakeholders; and
- be recorded and reported.

Overview of the VSE process

The three main stages to a VSE are as follows:

Stage 1: Setting up the VSE
Contact is made by Education Scotland via the Managing Inspector (MI) for an initial discussion about scheduling and the theme or quality indicator for the focus of the VSE. Follow up discussions will be scheduled as necessary.

Stage 2: VSE Week
The composition of the Education Scotland team will depend on the size of the area of focus. Generally the team will consist of a HMI and Associate Assessors (AAs) who will work alongside you. The VSE will last up to a maximum of one week.

It is expected that you will have established working groups to focus on the identified themes/ quality indicators and that these working groups will meet in advance of, and during, the VSE week.

Stage 3: Reporting
The local authority and its CLD partners will publish a report within six weeks of the VSE taking place. In addition, Education Scotland will supplement this report, which will focus on improvement and validation of your self-evaluation.

What happens if the self-evaluation cannot be validated?
The process of VSE is built on the premise that the local authority and CLD partners will be open and honest about their work. In turn, Education Scotland will provide support and a significant degree of challenge to ensure that the self-evaluation is as rigorous and robust as possible. There may be occasions where the self-evaluation is not sufficiently strong or robust, or where staff are not fully ready to engage in the required degree of reflection. In such cases, Education Scotland may decide to withdraw from a VSE to allow you the opportunity to focus on strengthening approaches to self-evaluation. Education Scotland may be able to provide additional support to ensure the service can fully engage in a future VSE. If this is not possible alternative arrangements may be required.

More detailed advice

Stage 1: Setting up the VSE

This will take place approximately eight weeks before Stage 2: VSE Inspection Week

The local authority/ CLD lead officer receives an official notification from Education Scotland of the intended VSE engagement.

Key aspects of this part for the local authority are:

- identifying a nominated lead officer for engaging with the MI for the VSE;
- briefing by the local authority and CLD partners to wider stakeholders about the VSE;
- agreeing how the self-evaluation will be taken forward: and
- collation and gathering of existing self-evaluation evidence.

Self-evaluation is not an event or a performance. Rather, it is a continuous process of improvement in which organisations are expected to know their strengths and areas for development. **Appendix 2** provides a pro-forma, which the CLD partnership may use to help structure their self-evaluation. Ideally, a summary of the key strengths and areas for improvement against each of the themes will be outlined in a draft self-evaluation.

Relevant evidence to support self-evaluation may include:

- existing evidence on the quality and impact of your own self-evaluation processes;
- data collected to monitor performance against national priorities and performance indicators, supplemented by local targets and priorities as set out in local CLD plans (CLD Regulations);
- Council's Single Outcome Agreement;
- Children's Services Plan;
- Education Service Improvement Plan;
- Shared Risk Assessment; and
- a range of management information that demonstrates how effectively learning and development partners utilise performance data. For example, your overall performance and how you gather and use data to analyse need, set targets and plan provision to improve services.

VSE pre meeting

This meeting will take place approximately four weeks before Stage 2: VSE Week. The MI will contact the nominated lead officer and agree a time to visit to discuss in detail the identified areas for the focus of the VSE. It is expected that the following will be made available at this meeting:

- a draft self-evaluation of the CLD Partnership;
- a draft timetable of possible activities for the VSE week; and
- membership and focus of each working group.

The CLD Partnership should have a very clear idea, from its self-evaluation report, what it needs to explore in more detail during the VSE. This will form the basis of the discussion

with the MI. This meeting will last up to half a day. In line with the support and challenge approach additional themes/ quality indicators may be identified by Education Scotland prior to or during this stage,

The purpose of the working groups will be to conduct a self-evaluation of the areas of focus that you have chosen. Involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in the work of these groups is important. This helps ensure that self-evaluation incorporates evidence from as wide a range of sources as possible. Working groups are likely to start meeting early on in the VSE process. They would be expected to have undertaken some preparatory work before the VSE Week. Stakeholders represented on the groups could include:

- local authority CLD staff and wider authority staff
- CLD partner staff and volunteers;
- quality improvement staff (e.g. Quality Improvement Officers); and
- young people/ adult learners/ community representatives.

Stage 2: VSE Week

This should take place approximately eight weeks after notification.

The purpose of this stage is for the Education Scotland team to work collaboratively with you for up to a week to improve and develop your understanding of self-evaluation and add to the quality of the process. Your role is to lead the process, Education Scotland's role is to provide both support and challenge. Through negotiated professional engagement, Education Scotland will share its knowledge and expertise in self-evaluation and quality improvement.

Self-evaluation discussion
The week will begin with a discussion of your self-evaluation. This provides an important opportunity at the start of the VSE for you to demonstrate how well you, your staff and partners know your collective impact. It also enables us to work alongside you to begin our professional dialogue about continuous improvement. You should approach the self-evaluation discussion in a way which best suits your own circumstances. Clearly, there will be a number of different ways to structure the discussion. There are, however, some basic points to follow which colleagues who have been inspected have found work well. You may wish to also apply these to the VSE. Appendix 3 provides more detailed information on preparing for the VSE self-evaluation discussion.

The working groups may use some of the following approaches and activities as sources of evaluation:

- case studies;
- learner journeys;
- analysis of data;
- focus groups of learners, community groups, staff, wider stakeholders;
- user surveys;
- project/research outcomes;
- observation of practice;
- consultations by CLD services and Education Authority;
- self-evaluation and inspection reports: and
- disseminating good practice.

Please ensure there are sufficient opportunities throughout the programme to support the triangulation of evidence during the week. For example, through observation or direct dialogue with learners and written evidence. Appendix 4 and 5 provide further information on developing activity briefing sheets to support timetabled activities and preparation of evidence files. These will help to ensure that you are clear as to the purpose of including a particular activity on the timetable.

The nature and approach of VSE means that Education Scotland will engage with the local authority and CLD partnership' staff on an on-going basis in the course of the week. The team will provide feedback, direct suggestions for improvement and ask questions during and after evaluative activities.

At the end of the VSE week, a meeting will be held involving senior staff from the local authority, CLD partners and representatives of the Education Scotland team. The purpose of this meeting is to share summary finding and evaluate the VSE activity and to focus on identified strengths and areas for improvement. The key question is whether or not your self-evaluation is leading to improvement in the delivery of a high-quality CLD provision.

Stage 3: Reporting

The local authority and CLD partners are expected to produce a report within six weeks based on the outcomes of the VSE process.

Education Scotland will also prepare a short report which will refer to the local authority and CLD partners' report. This report focuses on the scope of the VSE, the degree of rigour and challenge required, agreed strengths and areas for continued improvement.

The following principles of publication will be adhered to by Education Scotland:

- the document and the process it embodies is open and transparent;
- the document can act as a plan for action and improvement agreed by Education Scotland, the local authority and its CLD partners; and
- the report will be a web-based publication.

The report will be structured as follows:

- Introduction
- What has VSE achieved?
- Next steps
- Capacity for continuous improvement

Guidance on timetabling

A VSE is a **proportionate** model. Timetables should seek to clearly illustrate the areas you have identified in your self-evaluation. **For this reason, they should be a representative sample of visits, individual interviews and focus groups and not an attempt to fit in everything**. If you require further advice, please discuss with the MI.

Programming

- In drawing up the timetable, assume working group team members are working a normal working week. Evening meetings should be kept to a minimum and where theme group members are working in the evening please allow some space during the day. Please do not fill every session.
- Please ensure you allow for travel time between appointments and breaks for lunch and dinner.
- Don't forget to leave enough time for team meetings as suggested in the templates.
- VSE activity also includes time for reading and writing.
- Sessions should be set up in advance of the VSE week and focus groups, interviews and timetables agreed and finalised at the VSE pre inspection meeting. For every visit scheduled on the VSE timetable, a short illustration of purpose of visit would be beneficial. This should be shared will all those involved in the VSE working groups.
- Please create **one timetable** to cover all VSE team members and clearly outline how each activity links to a QI or theme.

Some practical considerations

- Please provide a suitable base for the VSE team to work in. It is helpful if this is lockable so valuables such as laptops and confidential paperwork can be kept secure.
- The VSE team will need access to power sockets for laptops.
- Access to secure Wi-Fi is helpful but not essential.
- Access to tea and coffee making facilities.
- Somewhere nearby to purchase lunches is helpful but again not essential.
- Use of a projector and screen in the team base on the Thursday and Friday of the VSE week from 12.00 noon. This is helpful for collating summary findings.

The following timetable is indicative and can be altered to suit the context.

Template: example timetable – validated self-evaluation
<Insert name of local authority>

Please complete and share this with working groups and Education Scotland Managing Inspector prior to the VSE inspection week.

Day	Morning			Afternoon				Evening
Monday	**Travel** Usual arrival time by 12.00			Initial discussion with the CLD Service/ Partnership VSE key leads and Education Scotland team.	Possible break out into QI/ themed working groups to agree approach		VSE activities	VSE activities
Tuesday	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	**Team meeting** of representatives from all working groups (one hour)	VSE activities	VSE activities
Wednesday	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	VSE activities	**Team meeting** of representatives from all working groups (one hour)	VSE activities	Writing
Thursday	VSE activities	VSE activities	Writing	**Team meeting** of representatives from all working groups and preparation of summary findings.				
Friday	Consolidate summary findings and preparation for sharing strengths/areas for improvement for each QI/ theme			Sharing of findings, discussion and next steps. Approx. 11am	Travel			

Appendix 1: The PRAISE Framework
Best practice framework for HM inspections and reviews

The Framework is based on data gathered from: representative samples of experienced inspectors from HMI and heads of organisations that have been inspected; and feedback from post inspection questionnaires.

The following principles were identified as underpinning best practice:

Purpose – being clear about the overall purpose of the inspection and retaining this throughout. Creating a shared agenda with staff in the organisation and amongst members of the inspection/review team.

Relationships – building and maintaining constructive relationships throughout the process as the basis of a high quality inspection/review.

Awareness – maintaining a high level of awareness of the context in which staff are operating, of their feelings and reactions to the process and of the inspector's own approach and its impact.

Information gathering – careful inquiry to gather and analyse evidence. Retaining an objective stance, testing assumptions and assimilating data before evaluating.

Sharing information – communicating thoroughly throughout the process to prepare and inform staff. Encouraging staff to be open in providing their perspective and providing appropriate feedback as the inspection/review progresses.

Enabling – treating people with respect, engaging them in professional dialogue, recognising their efforts and providing feedback in a constructive way to encourage ownership and learning to take place.

Appendix 2: Self-evaluation pro forma

As part of the VSE, you are asked to complete, in consultation with key stakeholders, a brief self-evaluation. This should outline your key strengths, areas for improvement and next steps. There is no prescribed approach to undertaking the self-evaluation and the local authority and CLD partners are encouraged to build on their current practice.

The self-evaluation document will provide important information about your CLD service's/ partnership's performance and areas for improvement. This will help guide the VSE process and open up dialogue between those involved in the VSE process and the Education Scotland team. The self-evaluation should provide the Education Scotland team with a clear sense of your journey – where you have come from, where you are now and where you want to get to. Importantly, it should highlight work underway to:

- 'Improve life chances for people of all ages, through learning, personal development and active citizenship' and
- 'working together to build 'stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities'.

The local authority and CLD partners may wish to consider producing a summary of key strengths and areas for further investigation against each of the chosen themes/ quality indicators, which will form the basis of the evaluative activity during the VSE week.

To support this process, a pro-forma with examples of relevant sub-headings for a typical self-evaluation are included on the next page. This can be adapted as necessary to align with your theme/ quality indicator area focus.

<Insert name of local authority>

Context of the local community and key partnerships
(eg aims, and distinctive features, population, CLD needs analysis, area profile, formal partnership structures and management arrangements, rationale for priority areas of work)
What key outcomes have we achieved?
Overarching strengths?
Key challenges?
Areas of good practice?

How well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders?
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
Where are our challenges?
What are our next steps for improvement?

How good is our leadership?
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
What are our challenges?
What are our next steps for improvement?

How good is our capacity for improvement?
Where are we now?
How do we know?
What are our strengths?
What are our challenges?
What are our next steps for improvement?

Appendix 3: Preparing for the VSE self-evaluation discussion

The self-evaluation discussion can be organised around key questions that underpin the focus of the VSE. These could be around a theme, quality indicator or challenge questions from *How Good is the Learning and Development in our Community?*

We will be interested in:

- high level information that is evaluative;
- how well you, as a partnership, know the answers to the key questions we will be answering as part of the VSE and in the public report;
- where you, as a partnership, see your strengths, including features of good practice, and aspects for development; and
- what key pieces of evidence you have which underpin your knowledge of your area and the selected area for focus.

Considering the two key questions

All of our CLD inspection and review activity is framed by the Scottish Government's focus for CLD:

- improved life chances for people of all ages through learning, personal development and active citizenship;
- stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities.

When considering the key questions asked as part of this VSE, think carefully about your evidence and the Quality Indicator which underpin each question. We do need to understand where you have drawn your evidence from and how it helps answer each question?

Appendix 4: Guidance on preparing activity briefing notes

This guidance is designed to assist local authority and CLD partners to develop a briefing note for each activity on your VSE timetable. Please note while it is very helpful for a briefing note to be prepared, this is not a requirement of the VSE.

For every visit scheduled on the timetable, please provide a short briefing note for the team. A suggested template can be found on the next page. These briefing notes should be left in the team base. Where a folder of evidence has been created about this particular activity then this briefing note might helpfully form the first page of the folder. The note could include:

Information about the activity:

- what type of activity it is, for example, an observation of a learning activity, a focus group, a telephone interview, a partnership meeting, etc.; and
- who the working group team member will meet.

With focus groups and meetings in particular it is helpful to include a short list of those who are likely to be present and which learning opportunities they participate in or organisations they represent.

Information about why this activity is on the timetable (summary information):

- a short explanation of why the activity is being programmed;
- how it relates to the self-evaluation summary or theme/ QI; and
- a very brief indication of the strengths and/or areas for development it may demonstrate represents.

Contact information:

- the name and mobile telephone number (if possible) of the main contact for the group (who can provide further information or be advised of any delays or programme changes).

Practical information so the inspection team member can easily find the venue:

- the address and postcode of the venue, including nearest local parking;
- which room the activity is in; and
- where relevant, a map.

If you are providing a folder of evidence, it would be helpful to include an index of the evidence the folder contains.

You may wish to consider coding each activity on the timetable to correlate to the briefing note and or evidence folder.

Template: activity briefing note

Please complete and leave these short briefing notes in the team base for the VSE team to look at on arrival.

The name of the activity	
Main contact for the group	
Type of activity	
Time	
Venue (including room)	
Address	
Postcode	
Parking	
(Mobile) number for main contact	
Other telephone number for the group	

Map (if appropriate)

Summary information

List of likely participants (*when activity is a meeting or focus group)

Name	Learning opportunity they participate in Or organisation they represent
Add more boxes as required	

Index of other evidence (where relevant)

Appendix 5: Advice for the preparation of evidence files

The following advice was drawn together by the Community Learning and Development Managers Scotland (CLDMS) Quality Improvement subgroup members, who have been involved in preparing evidence for the previous full inspection model used within their own area or as associate assessors on inspection. However, you may find that these suggestions remain helpful for the VSE team to find relevant information quickly.

1. Annotation

Do not assume that the value or purpose of a particular piece of evidence will be apparent to someone who is not immersed in that particular piece of work. Labeling of evidence can be helpful to ensure that significant pieces of evidence are clearly understood. This is particularly useful for figures outlining trend information and its significance.

2. Structure and coherence

It may be useful to group evidence in some way which is helpful to the reader. This structure should be coherent throughout. For example, this could mean using themes identified from self-evaluation or themes from relevant QIs.

Regardless of organisational categories used, it is helpful to provide some guidance as to how evidence files have been structured in order for team members to be able to find information quickly and easily. This prevents reliance on colleagues having to provide constant direction to sources of evidence.

3. Relevance

Often the greatest constraint during an inspection is time. Inspection teams must use their time effectively to make sure they have a solid evaluation base to make team judgements. All evidence submitted should be relevant.

If a large amount of evidence is submitted which is not helpful to validating evaluations, the inspection team's time is taken up sifting out what is and is not necessary. This is often frustrating for staff as the inspection team may have to ask to be directed to particular pieces of evidence as it has become 'lost' in the volume of unnecessary information presented.

4. Repetition

'Say it once, say it well.' There is no need to present multiple versions of evidence. Be clear about why you are including a piece of evidence. It should reinforce your self-evaluation. Be confident that you have additional evidence to back up evaluations but do not present every example available.

5. Sampling

Remember that the inspection team expect you to be using the evidence you submit as part of your day-to-day work to drive improvement. They do not expect to see every piece of evidence you have. Sampling should be used to reflect how you use information. The way information is used is as important as the information itself.

An example of this would be gathering feedback from stakeholders. It is important that the team can see how impacts are being identified by participants (and what these impacts are) but it is also important to see how this information is being used to make improvements. In this example, the team would not expect to see every evaluation form but may well be interested in any analysis of this feedback which summarises its outcomes, impact, areas for improvement and any resulting actions.

6. Guidance from managing inspector

If in any doubt about preparing evidence, take guidance from your MI. It would be advisable to ensure that you are presenting information in a way that the team who are conducting the VSE finds most helpful.

Appendix 6: Abbreviations

AA	Associate Assessor
ADES	Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
ALO	Area Lead Officer
CLD	Community Learning and Development
DMI	Deputy Managing Inspector
EA	Education Authority
HMI	HM Inspector
IA	Inspection Administrator
LO	Lead Officer
MI	Managing Inspector
QI	Quality Indicator
QIO	Quality Improvement Officer
TMs	Team members
VSE	Validated Self-Evaluation

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