

# Validated self-evaluation

**Fife Council  
Educational Psychology Services**

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## 1. What is validated self-evaluation in Educational Psychology Services?

Validated self-evaluation (VSE) is an evaluative activity which supports and challenges the work of Educational Psychology Services (EPS) by working collaboratively. It involves a partnership between the education authority, EPS and HM Inspectors, Education Scotland. In EPS the VSE focuses on two key themes.

- Learning and Teaching.
- Partnership Working.

The themes reflect the Scottish Government's national priorities and relate to the contributions made by EPS to raising attainment, addressing disadvantage and supporting and implementing, *Getting it Right For Every Child*. Both themes also allow EPS to evidence the impact and outcomes of early intervention and prevention across the full range of their service delivery.

In addition to the core themes, services can choose an additional one to reflect their own context. An additional area may relate to the core themes or reflect other quality indicators which impact on the service's ability to improve outcomes for its stakeholders. For example, leadership, or the delivery of the five Currie (2002)<sup>1</sup> functions of consultation and advice, assessment, intervention, professional development and research and development.

## 2. What was validated self-evaluation in Fife Council's Educational Psychology Service?

The VSE process was welcomed by Educational and Children's Services (ECS), and Fife Council Educational Psychology Services (FCEPS). It was felt to be timely scrutiny coming at the end of the three year strategic and service planning process. FCEPS used the VSE process to build on their recent detailed self-evaluation which looked closely at service priorities and where the service made the biggest difference. They identified a number of important strengths where the service contributed significantly to the ECS's vision 'Improving Life Chances for All'. These included substantial developments in areas such as relationships and behaviour, literacy, early learning and childcare and child protection. Using their self-evaluation data FCEPS chose two high level questions which they wanted to explore with their partners and stakeholders across the themed areas of teaching and learning and partnership working. These were:

- How can FCEPS apply the principles of implementation science to support effective learning and teaching interventions?
- In the context of Early Learning, how can FCEPS support the implementation of the Family Nurture approach?

FCEPS has a strong tradition of developing and delivering a wide range of high quality evidence based interventions, including developments which support restorative approaches, cyber-safety, nurture and attachment, play-based learning, literacy and

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<sup>1</sup> Currie (2002), Review of Provision of Educational Psychology Services in Scotland. Scottish Executive.

numeracy. Over the last decade, FCEPS programmes and interventions have been very successfully used across the authority in classrooms and schools, and more widely across Scotland. For the Teaching and Learning theme, the service chose to look at a number of key interventions which had been developed and led by the FCEPS. Specifically, they focused on:

- the implementation of the Mistakes, Praise and Feedback programme;
- de-escalating behaviour management and relationships intervention; and
- metacognitive approaches in numeracy as being used in the Education Psychology National Action Enquiry programme.

The service understands that in order to maintain high standards of service delivery with diminishing resources they need to ensure they combine the very best evidence-based practice with effective planning and evaluation. As part of their planning FCEPS chose to utilise the implementation science framework to evaluate the effectiveness and promote the sustainability of its strong interventions focusing on two outcomes:

- the development of a practical and accessible implementation framework to use with partners and stakeholders, and
- tools to support the implementation framework to ensure the use of evaluative measures.

FCEPS partnership theme focused on the implementation of the family nurture approach. They used their learning from other successful early learning and childcare initiatives to refine their approach. These included, parenting programmes focused on containment, reciprocity and behaviour management and early language interventions. Key questions explored through the VSE week included:

- How we can best support implementation and evaluation of the authority Parenting and Family Support Strategy?
- How can link educational psychologists (EPs) most effectively support the family nurture centres?
- How do our ideas fit with, and support a shared vision with partners?

There is a history of strong early learning and childcare practice across FCEPS and the self-evaluation process built well on these strengths. A number of EPs demonstrated a passion and commitment to early learning and childcare practice. There was clear evidence of the use of evaluative information to inform decision-making strategically and woven through the Children's Services and EPS early learning and childcare plans. FCEPS conducted the evaluation of the authority family nurture project which was a three year process of transformation and change within the early learning and childcare sector. Through the family nurture evaluation, as well as a systematic analysis of the self-evaluation reports of the various funded streams of work, FCEPS has supported the dissemination of lessons learnt across the authority. This has influenced the direction of travel in sustaining and developing the key themes of family nurture work. The service recognised that this was an area where early and full partnership engagement was key to the sustainability and importantly the local ownership of early learning and childcare initiatives and interventions.

FCEPS demonstrated their strong embedded knowledge of self-evaluation by giving careful consideration to the theme based activities for VSE and involving all staff fully in the organisation and support for the focus groups. The activities were carefully selected providing pertinent soundboards for exploring improvement. There was a strong and very positive service commitment to the VSE process with EPs taking responsibility for note taking, facilitating and chairing the group sessions. Promoted members of staff also engaged in the process thereby giving them a high level overview of the VSE process and the issues emerging within and across themes. High-quality evidence was provided to partners and stakeholders for each activity to help them work with the service to strengthen the evaluation process. Questions were appropriately probing with theme leads creating a sensitive and supportive ethos for partners. Those involved in the focus groups included Heads of Service, Education Officers, Family Support Workers, Education Home Visitors, Primary Pupil Support Officers, Community Learning and Development Practitioners, school leaders and class teachers. FCEPS, as part of their own self-evaluation process have already planned to extend the range of stakeholders involved in the review and development of the service to include parents, young people and representatives from health and Children's Services. The service effectively brought together core group members regularly throughout the VSE process to share their learning and explore their findings across both themes. Through the robust evaluative activity, the Education Scotland team was able to confirm the rigour of FCEPS self-evaluation processes used to evaluate performance and service delivery.

### **3. What did HM Inspectors learn about the quality of self-evaluation in Fife Council's Educational Psychology Service?**

FCEPS provided Education Scotland with a robust self-evaluation summary prior to the VSE. The report accurately identified their strengths and areas for improvement across a wide range of service delivery functions and with an appropriate focus on impact and outcomes. There is a strong history of rigorous self-evaluation across FCEPS highlighted in their inspection report, which continues to be very effectively promoted by the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) and her senior leadership team. The whole service, led by the Service Evaluation Network, has been actively engaged in modernising and revising FCEPS self-evaluation approaches. Unique to this service is the innovative use of improvement science methodologies in relation to their own self-evaluation. They have actively made changes to the way in which they negotiate and prioritise their work with schools, driven by the evidence gained through their revised approach to self-evaluation, including their Shared Working Framework. FCEPS exhibit the key features of an effective learning organisation, service staff are thoughtful, reflective and open to new learning to further improve outcomes for children and families.

During the VSE process EPs engaged in effective reflection and hypotheses testing helping them and the senior team dig deeper into the self-evaluation process. EPs effectively articulated their learning from the activities adapting their questions and reflections based on the new information they received. There were very good examples in both groups of revision based on evidence from the VSE process, with EPs reflecting on their strengths, areas for development and outlining their next steps, there was particularly strong practice demonstrated in the reflection sessions at the end of each day. FCEPS responded positively to the challenge from Education Scotland, with

staff exploring the possibility of 'stepping back' from some activities which were well embedded in practice.

Partners and stakeholder groups were affirming and supportive of FCEPS work, this was a positive reflection of the high esteem, trust and respect in which the service was held. They particularly valued the wide range of capacity building opportunities provided by the service founded on strong psychological theory. The power of the psychology was an important strength of this VSE.

#### **4. What does the Educational Psychology Service plan to do next?**

Education Scotland validated FCEPS's self-evaluation and agreed on the following areas for improvement:

- to continue to improve their processes and access to additional data sources to refine and focus the work of the service. Including, better targeting and prioritising service delivery, this would include developing sustainability, 'stepping back' from activities and interventions, and
- ensure congruence of approaches across heads of service areas within ECS to achieve depth and consistency in the implementation of strategic development and service delivery including in learning and teaching.

FCEPS accurate self-knowledge will be of value in developing their new service improvement plan. The focus of the self-evaluation as part of the VSE process went on appropriately beyond the FCEPS and looked at the strategic and authority approaches to improvement. Both the service and ECS Directorate staff agreed to continue to use the VSE approach to further strengthen integration and involvement of the service in strategic planning at authority and council levels.

#### **5. What is Fife Council's Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?**

Education Scotland is confident that FCEPS has a very strong capacity for continuous improvement, founded on the delivery of high quality applied psychology. The PEP and her senior team have ably developed a mature and effective culture of sector-leading evaluative practice built on strong distributive leadership well evidenced across the VSE process. This has impacted positively on the range and quality of evidenced-based interventions delivered to children, young people and their families across the council. There is close synergy between the service's work and the educational priorities of the council, founded on the principles of improvement, well supported by the ECS senior team FCEPS is very well placed to further support and strengthen through capacity building the delivery of the ECS vision 'Improving Life Chances for All'.

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**HM Inspector**  
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Further information about the EPS VSE reports and self-evaluation can be found on the service's website [www.fifedirect.co.uk/psychologicalservice](http://www.fifedirect.co.uk/psychologicalservice)

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