

Validated self-evaluation

**North Ayrshire 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)¹ functions of consultation and advice, assessment, intervention, professional development and research and development.

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

North Ayrshire Educational Psychology Service (NAEPS), working closely with the education authority to deliver their vision, *Focus, Passion and Inspiration*, used the VSE process to extend and develop their knowledge of their strengths and areas for development across a focused range of service functions. Using the findings from their self-evaluation, they identified two main themes they wanted to consider in more depth.

- How does the work of the EPS with our partners influence our future service delivery?
- How effective is the EPS in embedding 'health and wellbeing across learning' as the responsibility for all?

NAEPS has gone through a period of rapid change at service and education authority levels, and was keen to use the VSE to take stock of their practice and service delivery identifying areas where they were making the most impact and should prioritise in the future. For the VSE process, NAEPS selected two areas of work at different stages in the self-evaluation cycle. For the Learning and Teaching theme, they wanted to consider the range of work they delivered to support and embed the health and wellbeing (HWB) agenda. This was a well-established area of service practice, and psychologists had routinely undertaken evaluation and review activity of specific

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

projects and interventions. They chose to focus on a wide range of evidence-based interventions, including nurturing and restorative approaches, Change and Loss and Scottish Mental Health First Aid. The service wanted to scrutinise their work across the wide HWB agenda, particularly in relation to promoting the 'responsibilities of all' priority within Curriculum for Excellence, and to look more closely at the impact and outcomes which had been achieved as a result of their interventions.

NAEPS partnership theme, was at an earlier stage of development and focused on reviewing their multiagency models of practice within early years settings, and primary and secondary school contexts. The service was keen to explore different models of capacity building and sustainability to guide the development of future service initiatives, recognising, as stated by the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP), that in North Ayrshire maintaining the 'status quo is not an option' in relation to service delivery.

A good range of partners and stakeholders had been brought together to support the services' self-evaluation. For example, senior education officers, early years staff, primary, secondary and special provision headteachers, health practitioners, children and families representatives and colleagues from other educational psychology services. The service recognised that increasing the range of stakeholder views, and in particular that of parents, children and young people, would have further strengthened and enhanced their self-evaluation. Each themed activity was supported by three members of NAEPS, a chair, co-chair and scribe allowing all service staff to play an active part in the VSE process. Prior to Education Scotland joining the themed groups, the service had developed activity briefings which were used to focus discussion during the VSE week. NAEPS put in place a helpful programme of activities to support the VSE process. Activities included focus groups, themed workshops and meetings with learners. The theme leaders effectively used a range of solution-focused and graphic communication approaches to gather the views of the groups. After each activity, the theme groups met to reflect on what they had learnt, and to begin to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The service brought together the core theme group members on a regular basis across the VSE process to share their findings related to both themes. In this way, themed group members were able to see emerging strengths and areas for further development across and within each theme. This enhanced the service wide self-evaluation process. Through such joint evaluative activity, Education Scotland staff were able to assess the rigour of the NAEPS's self-evaluation processes and the robustness of the evidence used to evaluate performance and service delivery.

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

NAEPS has built effectively on their positive inspection of 2009. The service is working very well to add value to the education authority's work in capacity building and partnership working. There is a strong commitment to self-evaluation for improvement across the service, staff are thoughtful and reflective. As the VSE process progressed, the service engaged in honest and challenging dialogue with their stakeholders and partners, and with the Education Scotland team. The overall self-evaluation, thematic reports and activities chosen for further exploration were well defined demonstrating high quality thinking. The VSE activities helped the service to validate its self-evaluation and identify higher order strengths and areas

for improvement. There was a developing appreciation during the VSE week of the value that robust evaluative data can make to improving outcomes. Both themed groups identified the need to continue to strengthen their data gathering and analysis. In particular, the professional discussion at the end of each activity highlighted that the service could make a greater contribution to the measurement of impact using their knowledge of psychology to better inform the choice of measurement tools. For example, rolling out their early work on adapting Kirkpatrick's Four Level Training Evaluation Model² more widely to evaluate service capacity by building professional learning. By applying their knowledge of psychology the service will be able to formulate clearer predictions and measures of expected outcomes than are currently obtained from self-reports, questionnaires and other more subjective data. HM Inspectors agreed that the self-evaluation approach applied by the service during VSE provided a robust methodology for focused self-evaluation in the future.

The Educational Psychologists (EPs) created a supportive ethos for stakeholders and partners to open up and explore areas for improvement. Theme leads and EPs asked insightful questions, listened and responded respectfully to the contributions of stakeholders and partners. Stakeholders and partners clearly valued the service provided by NAEPS, and demonstrated strong and positive relationships with the team. While an ethos of mutual support was clear, some partners were less open to challenge than others, but the EPs managed this well, and a few found it easier to challenge in the formal focus group than they did in day-to-day partnership working contexts. The involvement of EPs from other services was effective in providing NAEPS with possible solutions to issues arising from stakeholders questioning. It also provided the potential to build capacity and create sustainable networks to support future service improvement.

NAEPS valued the ongoing feedback provided by Education Scotland as part of the VSE process. For example, NAEPS recognise that in going forward it is important they develop models of service delivery which reduce over reliance and dependency, and instead, enable practice to be more fully embedded and owned by the wider education community.

Overall, the VSE was successful in helping NAEPS to identify next steps for each of the themes and to think more widely about models of service delivery going forward.

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

NAEPS identified a number of key strengths and areas for development both in relation to the themes and their overall quality improvement process. These can be seen in detail in the service's report <http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/resident/education-and-learning/additional-learning-support-services/educational-psychology-services.aspx>.

² Kirkpatrick Donald Four Level Training Evaluation Model (1994).

Education Scotland identified a number of areas which will make a substantial difference to the value added by the service.

- Be clear and focused about what the service does well and use these strengths to build capacity in others, thereby releasing time to innovate and create. NAEPS are open to making changes to reduce the dependency of others on specific services and interventions by strengthening the capacity of stakeholders and partners to more directly improve outcomes for children and families.
- Extend their existing sources of data at school, education authority and council levels to help them improve their outcome evidence base, for example, the use of Insight, information from inspections and importantly, the National Improvement Framework.
- Utilise the psychological knowledge and expertise of the service to make a strong strategic contribution to national policy initiatives, including Scotland's Attainment Challenge, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing.

5. What is North Ayrshire Council's Educational Psychology Service's capacity for improvement?

Education Scotland validated NAEPS self-evaluation, we are confident that NAEPS has a strong capacity for service improvement. There is strengthening synergy between the service's work and the educational priorities of the council. The service receives strong support and challenge from the Executive Director of Education and Youth Employment, and his senior leadership team. In turn, the leadership of the new PEP and his senior leadership team is impacting positively on the quality of the service delivered to children, young people and their families. NAEPS clearly recognises its strengths and areas for improvement, and has strong service commitment and authority support to make the agreed improvements.

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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 <http://www.north-ayrshire.gov.uk/resident/education-and-learning/additional-learning-support-services/educational-psychology-services.aspx>.

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